



**MONASH** University

**The interplay of parental and career counsellors' influences in  
shaping immigrant children's subject choices and career pathway  
decisions in Australia**

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**DipEd, MEd (Organisation in Leadership by minor thesis)**

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## **Abstract**

There is general agreement that parents and school career practitioners are key influencers of students' post-secondary study and career development decisions. Nevertheless, to align immigrant students' subject choices with their capabilities, values and interests, the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (2010) problematised issues around understanding what school career practitioners and immigrant parents need to be able to provide support for their children.

This research has three aims. The first aim is to explore how the sociocultural role of immigrant parents, in particular, parental beliefs, values and expectations can influence their children's subject choices in a senior secondary schooling context in Australia. The second aim is to investigate the role of the familial acculturation process in shaping immigrant children's subject choice thinking and eventual career pathway decisions. Thirdly, this study examines school Career and Pathway Transition (CPT) leaders' perceptions of the role of parental influence on children's subject choices.

Using a case study method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 parents and their 11 children (Years 10–12) from three low socioeconomic status public secondary schools located in the Western Metropolitan Region (WMR) of Melbourne, Victoria. The parent–child participants were predominantly immigrants of Asian and Mediterranean origin. With a view to triangulating the patterns of relationships between the parent and student interview data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three secondary public school CPT leaders in the WMR of Melbourne.

This study draws upon Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of mediation and internalisation constructs, which forms the basis of how parents are viewed as mediators within students' sociocultural context. The parental mediatory model proposes that cultural tools framed by parental beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation processes, when internalised, can influence children's perceptions of and decisions about subject choices and career pathways.

A thematic data analysis was used to analyse the interview data as guided by this study's conceptual parental mediatory model. Findings from the parent–student dyad perceptions revealed that parental beliefs, values for education and parents' own failed educational and career aspirations played a major role in mediating their children's thinking about subject choices. The immigrant parents' familial acculturation process and their adaptation to the Australian norms and educational system brought some significant changes to their core parental expectations and beliefs. This, in turn, had some strong influences on their child's thinking about subject choices and decisions on career pathways. Additionally, students positioned their teachers to be supportive and inspirational in guiding them to work towards their capabilities and select subjects accordingly.

Findings from the CPT leaders suggested dominant factors such as parental sociocultural background, values, beliefs and expectations (particularly for mathematics-based subjects) as important issues and markers that influence children's subject choice and career pathway decisions. The CPT leaders highlighted their concerns about situations when parents forced children to choose a particular subject. This had implications for placing students at risk of not meeting the entry scores required for the chosen university pathway. CPT leaders also mentioned that often immigrant parents undergoing an acculturation process, struggle to establish fluid communication and interaction with schools due to language barriers and lack of awareness of the new education system. This hinders parental capacity to provide guidance to their child on subject choices.

The current study contributes to the literature about the critical mediatory role involving not only parents, but also career counsellors and teachers as moderators in implicitly influencing children's subject choice thinking. Career counsellors and teachers, in their capacity as the more knowledgeable other and in their interactions with parents and students, can moderate the mediated effects of parental influence on student subject choices. As such, while policy work is crucial in developing educational initiatives for young children seeking to receive subject choice and career pathway guidance and advice, it is equally important to consider how these initiatives can tacitly position schools to educate parents. Reciprocally, how parents can become concomitant with these initiatives to service the common goal of achieving viable future educational outcomes for students cannot be emphasised strongly enough. Further

research can be undertaken to identify actions that need to be taken to establish parent–school partnerships in schools that have a high proportion of immigrant parents, and where parents can be ambivalent about their children’s academic choices.

**Keywords:** mediation; student subject choice; career pathways; parental beliefs and expectations; acculturation

## **Declaration**

This thesis, except with the Graduate Research Committee's Approval, contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due references is made in the text of the thesis.

Mrs Sarika Kewalramani

Signature:



Date: 22/09/17

The research project was granted approval by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC). Project Number: CF14/2927 2014001620. Date of Approval: 6/10/2014

## **Publications during Enrolment**

### **AARE Conference Paper - Peer Reviewed**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AMES	Adult Multicultural Education Services, Australia
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CALD	Culturally and Linguistic Diverse
CPT	Career and Pathway Transition
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Employment, Education Training and Youth Affairs
NCDS	National Career Development Strategy
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PA	Parental Acculturation
PB	Parental Belief
PE	Parental Expectations
PI	Parental Involvement
SCT	Subject Choice Thinking
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCCF	Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Victorian Education and Training

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## **Preamble**

This research study was not undertaken because I woke up one fine day and thought, “I’ll do a research project!” It was undertaken because I have been asking myself a question repeatedly for five years: “What is the role of parents, and in particular what are their beliefs and expectations for their child’s future education? What might their experiences be after moving countries that could perhaps influence their children’s thinking when making a particular subject choice; for example, why choose chemistry over music, or why choose to be become a doctor over being a soccer coach?”

Coming from India, my own educational experiences were very different to those I encountered in the Australian education system. In my home country, during my schooling days, subject selection and career counselling options were not available. There were only mandatory subjects and no electives were offered until tertiary studies. As high school students, for subject and related course advice, I was compelled to rely solely on support from parents, siblings and extended family. Now living in Australia and working as a secondary school teacher since 2006, it has been overwhelming to see such a variety of subject choices. Even a subject like maths has different options, with, for example, Foundation Maths, Specialist Maths and Further Maths.

In my conversations with parents during the students’ subject choice and career counselling process, I used to come across dialogues such as, “Is this the right maths for him to become this or do that. What maths does this mean that they’re going to end up doing?”; “I clearly do not want him to be doing a TAFE program of some kind, because our family does not see it as prestigious enough. He has to go university”. Did these parents at my school understand such subject choices and what career pathways they may lead to for their children?

Such challenging debates with parents is something I have grappled with through the years in my teaching career and as a science faculty leader, and I was also dealing with the dilemma of how to support such parents who bring to the table their own beliefs and

expectations for their children's future career choice. A particular concern was how prepared my senior secondary students were for making pertinent subject choices and career pathway decisions.

I sometimes felt like *Alice in Wonderland*. "Where do I begin?" "Begin at the beginning," the King said gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop." My eureka moment evolved into my PhD, where I decided to employ a case study approach and set out to interview parents, their children and school career counsellors. However, before taking this plunge, I decided to conduct pilot interviews with some of my own students and their parents. Their responses opened up another realm, the Pandora's Box. One parent lamented about her own past educational experiences:

There was no one in the family – and we chose very common subjects, like the basic arts, English, Hindi, Punjabi, political science and history. So we did not get into the science and commerce stream. When we got knowledge and stuff, that time we were late, we could not do anything. And now, being in Australia, I do not want this to happen to my daughter. (Simone, 2014, June).

I had found some answers to my questions. Again, how did the daughter perceive her mother's challenging experiences? Why did she end up choosing the subjects that she had chosen? With my own experiences as an immigrant and as a high school teacher in the Australian educational context, etched in my mind, I questioned how the acculturation experiences of such immigrant families might have influenced my students' subject and career pathway choices. There was so much involved in this questioning journey to unveil the immigrant parents' beliefs, values and expectations within an acculturation process, and this turned into my PhD thesis.

## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

The reason for choosing medicine is not only having money or something. Medicine is a profession where it gives you satisfaction and respect. Science is a subject where you keep many doors open for you to do whatever you want, but if you just close it from now, doing arts or law or commerce kind of thing, you cannot get into those. Although in Australia it is acceptable, Bangladesh is not acceptable at all. (Ishi, 2015, March).

Ishi's vignette is rich with her beliefs, values and expectations about wanting her child to pursue a medical profession and, hence, choose science subjects. What did Ishi mean by an "acceptable subject and career choice" in Australia? How did her own perceptions of education and related experiences in Australia influence her child's perceptions of subject choice? This paradox calls for an investigation to understand immigrant parental influences on children's subject choice and career pathway decisions. This thesis offers a new direction by investigating, firstly, how the sociocultural role of immigrant parents, in particular, parental beliefs, values and expectations, can influence their children's subject choices in a senior secondary schooling context in Australia. Secondly, this study investigates the role of the familial acculturation process in shaping immigrant children's subject choice thinking. Thirdly, this study also examines the perspectives of school's Career and Pathway Transition (CPT) leaders on the role of parental influence in their children's subject choices.

### **1.1 Context of this Study**

Despite the recent introduction of the National Career Development Strategy [NCDS], which was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] to identify and analyse the career development needs and wants of young people (5–24 years), research reports continue to highlight gaps in understanding the role of parents in students' decisions around their subjects and career pathways (NCDS, 2011). There is general agreement that school career practitioners and parents have a significant influence on in the post-secondary study and career development decisions of students who come from culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) backgrounds. To align student subject choices with their capabilities, values and interests, the Australian

Blueprint for Career Development (2010) problematises issues around understanding school career practitioners' and parents' needs to provide informed guidance and support to students. In their endeavours to create a foundation for a cost effective, enjoyable and rewarding secondary school experience for students while making subject and career pathway selection, several career information resources have been developed. Some of these include the Australian Government's 'myfuture' website ([www.myfuture.gov.au](http://www.myfuture.gov.au)) (Galliot & Graham, 2015), 'Career Bullseye' posters (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, [DET], 2013), and the 'Parents Talking Career Choices' brochure, which is the sole resource for engaging parents in career development communication with their children (DEEWR, 2012a). Although these online resources provide insights into career pathway information for parents and students, none of these target the education of parents and children from immigrant backgrounds.

Moreover, when school career counsellors encounter problems in their endeavours to communicating career information to immigrant families with various cultural backgrounds, the collaboration and partnership between such families and the school becomes vital (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). Australian Multicultural Education Services [AMES] (2017) highlights that the prerequisite in developing career intervention programs for adolescents is to understand how diverse families promote career development of their children. This can foster educational resilience and promote empowerment in children and their parents to bridge the cultural gaps among schools and communities while seeking a holistic understanding of student subject and career pathway development (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). Although AMES (2017) and NCDS (2011) propagate the need for schools to understand the challenges and backgrounds of immigrant families, the current provisions to support immigrant parents and/or children in the context of immigrant children's education and career choices still remain in question. This research therefore predominantly endeavours to demystify the role of immigrant parents, who in their interactions within the home and school context can influence their children's subject choices and career decisions. The main school context involved in this study is the career counselling process practised in public secondary schools in Australia, Victoria, which enables students to make subject choices in an informed way. I have chosen parents and their children studying in senior secondary schools (Years 10–12) as well as career counsellors because the research tradition that documents their perceptions in the context of students' senior subject selection and career

pathway counselling is limited (Boon, 2012; Galliot & Graham, 2015; Vanin, 2015; Yip, 2013). Also, the paucity in research around parental influence on developing children's skills and knowledge for making informed career decisions has not escaped criticism from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET, 2017).

There are two specific motives guiding this study. The first is a theoretical need and the second is related to my personal motivation. In relation to the theoretical need, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that all human activities should be investigated within a sociocultural context. He asserted that any observation and analysis of human mental processes should be conducted within their environment. To study the psychological development of a student, "We need to concentrate not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 64). The *process* refers to sociocultural events and happenings that students partake in within the realm of their environment. Therefore, taking a Vygotskian theoretical stance, this study considers parents and career counselling personnel (career counsellors and teachers) to be part of students' subject decision-making environment. Taken together, these entities can contribute to promoting and shaping the development of adolescents' academic pathway decisions in senior secondary school. This conceptual aspect of my thesis will be clarified fully in the coming chapters. Meanwhile, my personal motivation for this study comes from my own experience as an immigrant and my observation and experience as a science and maths teacher. I narrate this experience next.

## **1.2 Why is this Study Important to Me?**

I started my educational career as a secondary school teacher, together with part-time tutoring, sometime in the year 2000 in India. I had completed my undergraduate studies in chemistry, securing first rank in the Chemistry Department of my university. Since then, I have been very passionate about teaching secondary science, especially my field of organic chemistry. In my home country, during my schooling days, subject selection and career counselling options were not available, as there were only mandatory subjects, and no electives were offered until university studies. As high school students, for subject and related course advice, we were compelled to rely solely on support from parents and extended

family. Hence, the cultural component of parental influence on children's subject choice thinking, given the Australian context, intrigued me even more.

In 2006, after moving to Australia from India, I had an opportunity to further pursue postgraduate studies in education at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. While doing so, during my early period of settlement into Melbourne, I continued to tutor students from Years 7 to 12 in subjects such as science and maths to help them achieve better academic test scores and further their understanding of the subject matter. I really enjoyed assisting my students, as it gave me a sense of satisfaction that I was able to add meaning to my students' needs and capabilities and accelerate their learning. In doing so, I realised my passion for teaching and liaising with parents to achieve the common goal of my students' high academic achievement. Such teaching experiences acquainted me with the Victorian education system, which consists of primary school (Prep–Year 6) followed by six years of secondary schooling (Year 7–12), of which Years 10–12 are non-compulsory senior schooling years. After having tutored secondary school students, I understood that students in senior secondary schooling complete one of the following courses: the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE/Year 12), Vocational Education and Training (VET) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Students' entry into university is based on their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score. The ATAR is calculated to rank students who complete the VCE, and is taken into account for students' admission to tertiary courses (Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, VCAA, 2014). As such, parents who arranged tutoring for their children expect the tutors and the teachers to assist their children to achieve a decent ATAR entry score in order to pursue university studies.

The day then came when I secured my first official teaching job as a science teacher in a public secondary school in Melbourne. I was thrilled to interact with parents and to share my experiences and knowledge, and to help achieve successful academic outcomes for my students. During casual conversations with other teachers whilst in domain meetings, I always wondered how students made decisions regarding their subject choices, given that there were a myriad of subject and career pathway choices available in the Australian context, unlike my past educational experiences in India. Moreover, within my role as the Head of Science Domain (during my four years tenure at the time) at my home school, I liaised with the student career counselling team and the Career and Pathways Transition

(CPT) leader. I was involved in the organisation of science subject descriptions and parent and student career information evenings, and also the advertising of science subject pamphlets for parents. Additionally, I was involved in providing students' maths subject recommendations to the career counselling team, which was a formal school process. My own teaching experiences gave me critical insights into the whole subject selection and career counselling process at my school, including how immigrant parents were involved in their children's subject choice processes. I had the burning desire to investigate what the role of parents was; in particular, what their beliefs and expectations were for their child's future education. What might have been their experiences after moving countries that could have perhaps impacted their children's thinking when making particular subject and career pathway decisions? My own immigrant background, current Australian teaching experiences and involvement with the school's CPT leaders as a teacher practitioner triggered my thinking and enthusiasm for researching the above intriguing questions. I strongly believed that translating this passion into research could help serve my school community and promote schools' understandings of immigrant parents' role in student subject selection. This may simultaneously allow parents to understand the significance of the school's career counselling process and the career in their children's successful future educational outcomes. Having articulated my reasons for this study, in the next section I present an overview of the Australian sociocultural context and parents' and career counsellors' roles in such a context. I then define the research problem and delineate the research questions, followed by a discussion of the significance of this study to research academia. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the thesis structure.

### **1.3 Changing Sociocultural Context in Australia**

Australia is a metropolitan country with a population of 23.7 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017a). English is the national language for both written and verbal communication and speech. As of 30 March 2017, ABS (2017b) data report that the proportion of Australians born overseas continues to reach new heights, with over 28 per cent of Australia's population born overseas. According to the figures released in 2015–16, the ABS states that over the past 10 years, the number of Australian residents born overseas has continued to increase; in particular, those born in India and China have both more than doubled during this timespan (ABS, 2017b, 2017c). In contrast, there has been almost zero growth in Australian residents born in Germany, and those born in Italy have seen more than



a 10 per cent drop. The number of Australian residents born in neighbouring Asian countries had the largest growth, including Japan (24 per cent), China (8 per cent), Malaysia (7 per cent) and India (6 per cent). In 2009-10, of the 2.5 million migrant families in Australia, just over 1.5 million families had at least one non-English speaking key member. With respect to the immigrant population of Victoria, one of the six Australian states, the ABS (2011) data recorded Victoria to have the second highest proportion of its residents born overseas with 26.2 per cent, which is up from 23.8 per cent in 2006 (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2017). In 2009-10, in Victoria, 45.2 per cent of migrant couple families were with children aged 1–17 years and accounted for 40 per cent of all families (ABS, 2013). Moreover, with respect to cultural diversity in the Victorian demographics reported that there were higher proportions of residents born in India (2.3 per cent), Italy (1.5 per cent), Vietnam (1.4 per cent), Greece (1.1 per cent) and Sri Lanka (0.9 per cent) than any other Australian state or territory. As such, the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia's resident population has been reshaped by migration over many years (ABS, 2017b). The Australian population is characterised by immigrants, particularly immigrant children and is highly selective of particular cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. With such dramatic changes in the Australian society due to migration, individuals encounter others from various regions and countries, and their sense of self is no longer a simple matter of identifying with a united ancestry or nation (Wu, 2004). As a result, a broader definition of an individual's sense of self is required in order to meet the needs of modern Australian society. This sense of self can be related to an individual's sociocultural values and belief systems, and past and current evolving acculturation experiences; hence, it can be seen as a core element of an individual's identity (Berry, 1997; Wu, 2004). Consequently, this has always been a significant component in Australian censuses. In the Australian census today, there are 10 ethnicity-related questions. These ethnicity-related questions in the census have changed significantly over the years, primarily because the reasons for asking the questions have changed. These measures have included ancestry, indigeneity, religion, citizenship, race, birthplace and the newly introduced educational levels (ABS, 2017c). With waves of immigration that have enriched the Australian society, immigrants and their descendants can play a significant role in Australia's history and in shaping the nation in this globalising world (ABS, 2017c). As such, the huge proportion of immigrant (student) population in Victoria, as indicated by the ABS (2011, 2013) data, for instance, emphasises how pressing it is to attend to immigrant children's educational outcomes.

Moreover, in the face of planning educational reforms that encompass targeted education, schools continue to place emphasis on the analysis of the socioeconomic status and sociocultural backgrounds of parents and families with a view to improve students' educational performance (DET, 2013). Yet, overall, the lack of information on particular sociocultural aspects, such as not only immigrant parents' beliefs, values, and expectations for their children's future educational trajectories, but also their familial acculturation experiences, can hinder schools from contributing to students' decisions about subject choice and career pathway.

#### **1.4 Defining the Research Problem**

Liu, McMahon, and Watson (2015) contend that parents have positive influences on their children's educational and career outcomes. A large body of research has documented the substantial influence of parental involvement on students' academic achievements and behaviours (Rosenblatt, 2015; S. Phillipson, 2009, 2010; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010; Ying & Han, 2008). The impact of parental involvement on student academic achievement has also been recognised by teachers, administrators and policy makers who consider parental involvement to be one of the integral parts of new educational reforms and initiatives (Wilder, 2013). For example, the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement is strongest if parental involvement is defined as parental expectations for academic achievement of their children (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). However, while considering immigrant parents' influence on their children's senior subject and career pathway outcomes, there has not been much research conducted in this field in the Australian context. Studies in Australia have focused mainly on Indigenous, rural and refugee students' academic achievements (Boon, 2012; Clinton & Hattie, 2013; Fleming & Grace, 2015). In relation to career development resources in the state of Victoria, the Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework (VCCF) provides support and help to all Victorian young people to prepare for their future through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies required to make decisions about post-secondary educational pathways (VCCF, 2013). DEEWR (2012b) recognises that due to rapid changes in learning and the workforce in today's world, the career development of young people does not happen in isolation. Recently, there has been much emphasis placed on parents undertaking a more active role in their children's subject choice decisions with a view to attaining successful future career outcomes (Ministerial Council for Employment, Education Training and Youth Affairs

[MCEETYA], 2010). Yet, the discrepancy between adequately understanding the needs of immigrant parents and their children regarding their knowledge and skills in making informed career pathway decisions and avoidance of making poor subject choices continues to challenge students, parents and school career practitioners (AMES, 2017; DET, 2017).

Furthermore, the Department of Education and Training in Victoria, Australia has recently problematised the need for addressing the complex needs of students who are disadvantaged or vulnerable due to their immigrant backgrounds, low socioeconomic status and poor acquisition of English language (DEEWR, 2011a). The DET further contends that while considering concepts of parent–school relationships, policies attempt to apply a universal understanding and treatment of all families and do not take sufficient account of parental sociocultural background, familial values and belief systems, and parental expectations for their children’s future educational outcomes (Saltmarsh, 2015). The review report of the Australian Blueprint Career Development program (2012) highlights issues around assessing whether the information schools gain from career information websites, such as [www.myfuture.edu.au](http://www.myfuture.edu.au), differs from information gained from observing and listening to parents’ views of student subject choice and related influences. Schools, for example, need to offer better opportunities to get parents and the wider community more involved in their endeavours to implement a more viable career development program (DET, 2013).

From a global perspective, the focus on parent–school collaboration has currently been observed in a number of recent international initiatives (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012) and German initiatives (The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, 2013). These initiatives focus on addressing issues around enabling immigrant parents and their children from less educated background, to acquire the necessary information and competencies to better support their children’s educational career development. Overall, there is a dearth of research that examines the differential effects and intricacies around parental beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation process to explore the influences these factors can have on children’s school subject choices. Therefore, more holistic information is needed to understand parental activities and interactions with their children, while also considering the views of school career and pathway leaders regarding the role they envisage for parents in

collaboratively promoting and shaping the development of students' subject choices in secondary school.

### **1.5 Why Investigate Immigrant Parental Role in Student's Thinking about Subject Choice?**

Past studies in the area of parental influences have tended to focus on parents' involvement in students' academic achievement in general, where parental involvement works as a platform to transfer their beliefs and expectations to their children (Melhuish et al., 2008; S. Phillipson, 2009). Melhuish et al. (2008), for example, found that parents' beliefs, regardless of their socioeconomic background, impact on children's educational learning. These beliefs are transferred through everyday parent-child interactions and involvement at home. Boon's (2012) study on Queensland regional parents noted the influence parents had in guiding their children's career choices, particularly for science based subjects. Their study signals how parents' views must be considered in any examination of student career choices to ascertain whether or not such views are internalised by children while making subject choice decisions, given that there are fewer studies based in an Australian school context, particularly in Victoria. Moreover, this lack of research in a Victorian context suggests that there is a need for partners (schools and parents) to take more responsibility to better inform young Victorians about the diverse career pathway choices when they are in their senior secondary school years. Such measures will better prepare them for future success in senior secondary qualifications and higher education, as well as training and employment opportunities (VCCF, 2013).

Furthermore, given the multicultural background of Australia, investigation of immigrant families and the impact they can have on their children's subject choice has major implications for future educational and government policy reforms. As seen from the ABS 2017 data, in this globalising world, and multicultural Australia in particular, culture seems to mean much more than ethnicity, as individuals may identify with multiple cultural groups at any one time (Wu, 2004). For example, within each ethnic group are sets of values, beliefs, norms and practices that may be passed down from one generation to another. Even after moving countries, these shared practices and values provide a sense of identification and belongingness to members of the group that keeps their culture alive and allows them to

survive (Berry, 1997). Moreover, subject choices seem to have a great input into and impact on how the economy is being built or how the government invests in particular areas/fields to create jobs. The contribution of immigrants to in the workforce is significant; therefore, having data or findings from current research about specific communities can contribute to future planning and reforms. DEEWR (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) also puts forward the notion that career counsellors need to not only be aware of their role in schools, but also need to include parents in the career development of students. As such, what needs to be taken into account is the specific understanding of the role of parental values and beliefs, expectations and experiences within an acculturation process in influencing student thinking about their subject selection and career pathway decisions.

Although mounting evidence exists about an array of factors that impact on students' academic achievement (e.g., Melhuish et al., 2008; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010), this study focuses on a different angle – the parental sociocultural role as mediators in using cultural tools such as parental beliefs, values and expectations in shaping children's thinking about subject and career choice. Parental expectations usually stem from familial beliefs and values, which can sometimes be negotiated through an acculturation processes when families move countries. Parent-child perceptions are also critical to unpack from the third party perspective of career counsellors with respect to how they view the parental role in a similar context. The value of this study lies in triangulating the perceptions of parents, their children and the school CPT leaders. Hence, this study is a unique attempt to provide a local and contextualised understanding of the sociocultural role of parents in the domain of subject and career pathway choice.

As stated in the research problem, there are tensions in the Australian Blueprint Career Development programs and strategies in taking into account how immigrant parents influence students' subject choice processes (MCEETYA, 2012). Anecdotal evidence indicates that school counsellors are required to deal with complicated cases while trying to achieve successful career pathway outcomes for their students (Vanin, 2015; Yip, 2013). However, when it comes to understanding the parental role, particularly parents' beliefs, values systems, educational expectations and familial acculturation processes, career counsellors and teachers may not have the breadth of knowledge and skills to address the viability of

students' subject choice decisions. At a deeper level, the current study will contribute data that will help education policy makers rethink the programs and strategies that are currently under question with respect to understanding the role of parents in student subject choice. This will eventually not only benefit school career counselling personnel and subject teachers, but also allow students themselves to see the important indicators for making successful career pathway choices. As such, this qualitative case study explores the perceptions of all three imperative parties – parents, students and career counsellors in the phenomenon of making subject and career pathway decisions. The benefits lie in making sense of these perceptions and experiences to assist school–family–community partnerships to engender innovative and comprehensive strategies for facilitating student career development and success (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

The outcomes of this research study are likely to be an action, rather than the production of generalisable knowledge and, as such, are subject to a range of sociocultural dimensions and factors that are value laden (Tytler, 2007). Findings from this study can have several implications for informing stakeholders and policy makers in education about the ways to improve student subject choice decisions and career counselling in schools, particularly when it involves families from immigrant backgrounds. The findings endeavour to uncover the current issues of immigrant parental involvement and communication with the school career counsellors regarding their children's subject choices. The current study also highlights the importance of increasing students access to career-related acquaintance and resources with a view to maximising viable career outcomes. Some of the past research discussed in the above sections has shown that families provide an important perspective, within which students either pursue or abandon particular aspirations related to their future studies and careers (Boon, 2012; Clinton & Hattie, 2013). Thus, the significance of this study is to provide an understanding of immigrant parental influences on student subject choice and contribute to existing information, or provide nuanced openings, to an area of study that has not been conducted, thereby filling a gap in existing knowledge. The next section delineates the study's research questions.

## 1.6 Research Questions

At the heart of this study is a passion to understand how the parental sociocultural role can influence subject choice thinking and career-pathway decisions of immigrant secondary students in Victoria, Australia. In order to do this, three research questions were framed:

1. How do immigrant parents' beliefs, values and expectations about education influence their children's subject choice thinking?
2. How do familial acculturation processes influence immigrant children's subject choice thinking?
3. What are the perceptions of school CPT leaders in relation to immigrant parental influence on their children's subject choice thinking?

## 1.7 Definitions of Terms in this Study

**Parental Sociocultural Role** – is an inclusive term that describes the role of parents who, through their social interactions and relationships with children, employ culturally constructed artefacts, such as books, texts and spoken language, to promote and shape human forms of thinking (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Immigrant** – the United Nations (1998) defines an immigrant as one who changes his or her usual country of residence. As the ABS (2005) purports, researching immigrants goes beyond numbers.

**Senior Secondary Student** – for the purpose of the current study, a senior secondary student is a student in Year 10 to Year 12. This means the 14 to 18 years age group.

**Career and Pathway Transition (CPT) Leader/Career Counsellor** - leads the career counselling process in secondary schools and provides information, guidance and advice along with career counsellors and teachers. Within this process, subject choice and more detailed and specific information on the range of jobs and career pathway information is provided to senior secondary students, their parents/primary carers and families to assist them with making better choices in relation to their learning, education, employment and career success (National Career Development Strategy [NCDS], 2011).

**Subject Choice Thinking and Career Pathway Decisions** – refers to the process of thought development, mindsets and maturation required to build thinking capacity, knowledge, skills

and confidence in making decisions regarding subject selection and career pathways (MCEETYA, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978).

**Immigrants from Asian and Mediterranean Background** – includes immigrants from different generations into Australia from ethnic groups such as South Asians and Southeast Asians (Asians) and ethnic groups such as Serbians, Spanish and Polish (Mediterranean).

## **1.8 Thesis Structure**

After providing the rationale and significance of the present study in this chapter, this thesis now moves to present a detailed view of the theoretical concepts employed to answer the study's research questions (Chapter 2). Subsequently, the literature review (Chapter 3) is presented, providing a critical framework around understanding some of the key notions within this study, such as the role of parents and the use of cultural tools in student academic choices given the different sociocultural backgrounds of immigrants. Literature around the views of career counsellors and teachers on the parental role in children's subject selection is also explored. Chapter 3 also presents the proposed conceptual model that underpins the study's theoretical and sociocultural dimensions and lenses. The thesis then progresses to describe the methodology and research design (Chapter 4) employed in this study. Steps in the data collection and data analysis along with explanations of issues relating to credibility and ethics are also addressed in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the results from the semi-structured parent–student dyad interviews and school CPT leaders' interviews, respectively. Chapter 7 presents a discussion of how this study's findings provide an informed response to the research aims. The discussion in Chapter 7 probes further to gain an understanding of the emergent issues in relation to the implications of this study. Recommendations for future research are provided in the conclusion.



## **CHAPTER 2: Student Thinking of Subject Choice—A Vygotskian Perspective**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The introductory chapter of this thesis discussed the context and the significance of the study, and delineated the research questions. This chapter aims to present a detailed review of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which forms the theoretical basis of this study. The key concepts in this theory, such as mediation and internalisation, are discussed to highlight parental influence on children's subject choices within the Australian school context. Drawing on sociocultural literatures, the concept of culture and acculturation are explored in relation to their contribution to the conceptual model of this study.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework for Understanding Student Subject Choice**

The focus of this study is based on the one social construct of Vygotsky's mediation framework that can be explained by sociocultural theory. Hence, the following discussions begin with the definition and discussion of sociocultural theory.

#### **2.2.1 What is sociocultural theory?**

Sociocultural theory is based on the research and writings of the Russian psychologist, Lev Semenovitch Vygotsky (1896–1934). Vygotsky's writings were influenced by the works of Marx, Engels, Hegel and Spinoza. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that all human activities should be investigated within a sociocultural context as they operate in tandem to form a qualitatively unique understanding of higher mental functions. For example, reciprocal social interactions between parents and children in their wider cultural context can contribute to children's higher order functions, such as verbal thinking (Rogoff, 2003). One of the main proponents of Vygotsky's works, Lantolf (2004), describes sociocultural theory:

Despite the label 'sociocultural', the theory is not a theory of the social or of cultural aspects of human existence... It is, rather... theory of mind... that recognises the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artefacts play in organising uniquely human forms of thinking. (p. 30)

For Lantolf, sociocultural theory involved a number of specific operations, such as culturally constructed artefacts and how they may inform human mental functioning. Similarly, Wertsch (1995) contended that “sociocultural theory is the study of the relationship between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and cultural, historical and institutional settings, on the other”. (Wertsch, 1995, p. 56). This suggests that sociocultural theory is mainly concerned with how human cognitive development involves the cultural and social aspects of life. Since the current research aims to understand how students develop their thinking in making subject choice and career pathway decisions, it is important to examine the interactions in their everyday activities within their sociocultural environment. Vygotsky (2004a, 2004b) claimed that mental abilities could emerge during childhood from many different sources, which can be the result of internal or external processes. For example, external processes can emerge from the home and school environment (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996). Specifically, students’ ways of thinking and feeling may be influenced and shaped by norms, values and practices that are shared within their home environment and can be embedded in their culture (Bakhurst & Sypnowich, 1995). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the concept of culture, which is explored next.

### **2.2.2 Concept of culture.**

Early discussions in psychology and sociology conceptualised culture as a pattern of traditions, artefacts and ideas, especially attached values and behaviours, that can be acquired and transmitted by symbols (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). For contemporary cross-cultural anthropologist Triandis (1995), culture is a system of thoughts, values and beliefs that lead to the construction of artefacts. In line with these ideas, for Vygotsky, culture was a collection of artistic products and processes of human creation (1978). Specifically, Vygotsky’s ideas about culture are that it plays an essential role in human psychological processes. In this study, the term ‘culture’ is used from a sociocultural perspective to examine the complexities that reside within the acculturation experiences of immigrant students. Equally, the study explores the familial beliefs, values and expectations and the ways these factors can shape, constrain or facilitate subject choice and career pathway decisions for immigrant children.

In addition, to being a theory of development, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory also focuses on cultural transmission. It was in the service of both the psychological and cultural aspects that Vygotsky placed an emphasis on the role of language in human’s mental life and

development. Vygotsky (2004c) proposed that humans use language and cultural tools to interact with people, objects and concepts of the world, and themselves. For instance, tools such as a human's own beliefs and value systems and past experiences can be used as communicative tools that shape minds. In this complicated world of stimuli, cultural thoughts, parental beliefs and expectations can mediate the “conditional learning” of children that results in the development of the capability to make decisions (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky suggested that cultural activities facilitate students' psychological development through interactions with people and social artefacts, such as books, texts and spoken language, within the social and cultural environment (Lerman, 2001). This interaction with artefacts and the environment, in turn, leads to maturation processes that allow for cognitive development and acquisition of higher mental functions. Students are then able to reflect on their own thought and speech. Hence, student subject choice and career pathway decisions can be considered a socially oriented process. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, therefore, provides the theoretical foundation for investigating the research aims outlined in this study. Using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the mediation framework, this study develops an understanding of parent–child interactions and the school career counselling process as the contexts of the students' decision-making processes. Students experiences within such contexts are considered to shape their perceptions about subject choice and career pathway decisions.

### **2.2.3 Mediation and cultural tools.**

An important aspect of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that is relevant for the current study is the consideration of the concept of mediation. Vygotsky (1978, p. 26) regarded mediation as a means of reaching a goal through “(indirect) methods” and viewed it as central to the acquisition and progression of higher mental functions. Wertsch (2007) introduces the concept of mediation in the following manner:

A hallmark of human consciousness is that it is associated with the use of tools, especially “psychological tools” or “signs”. Instead of acting in a direct, unmediated way in the social and physical world, our contact with the world is indirect or mediated by sign. (p. 178)

Wertsch suggests that mediation is a process in which humans use tools such as signs and symbols to interact with their environment. For the mediation process to take place, Vygotsky

(1978) regarded tools as a mediating device or the raw materials, which when placed in the environment, can affect mental events. Cultural tools such as spoken language, writings, symbols, signs, gestures and body language can be used as communicative tools to shape the human mind (Wertsch, 2007). Furthermore, a fusion of psychological tools such as parental beliefs, values and sociocultural practices are used to shape students' cognitive abilities and attributes of the decision-making processes, which, in turn, can influence academic achievement (S. Phillipson, 2009). Similarly, Fler (2011) suggested that families' interaction through play works as a cultural tool for supporting children's emotional development in everyday life. In complementing the previously mentioned examples of uses of cultural tools, this study takes a different approach to examining ways students learn and shape their psychological development through communication of cultural tools such as skills, knowledge, values and beliefs. However, neither symbols nor written language are automatically acquired without the systematic guidance and instruction of a human mediator. As such, a mediator is the expert in the children's social and cultural environment (Rogoff, 1990). In this study, it is crucial to examine the significance of a 'human mediator', who is considered an expert in facilitating children's learning and the decision-making processes.

#### ***2.2.3.1 Mediator.***

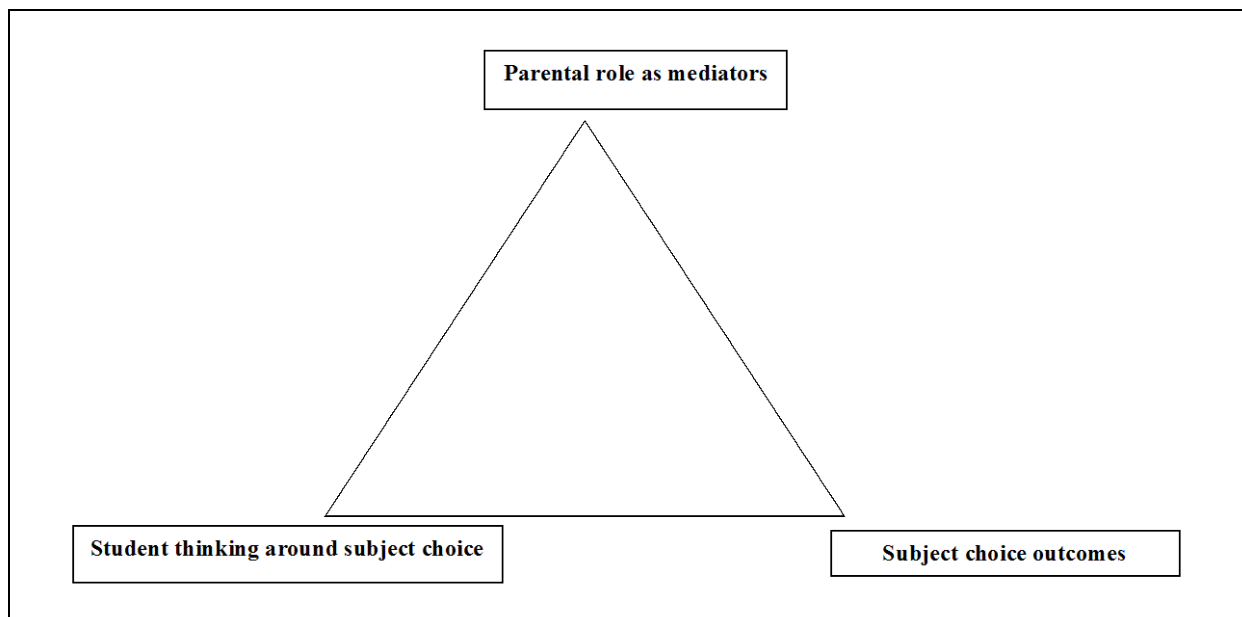
Within the mediation process, it is considered that cognitive development results from the social interaction of children with more competent persons, whether they are parents and/or school personnel, and who are referred to herewith as a mediator. A mediator is considered to be the more knowledgeable other who frames, filters and interprets information with the aid of cultural and psychological tools to facilitate development of higher mental functioning (Vygotsky, 1978). Parents, as part of students' sociocultural context, are viewed as mediators who, through their cultural values, beliefs and expectations, can influence and promote students' learning and development (Rogoff, 1990). In practice, this means that parents, teachers and career counsellors, who have more knowledge and experience within the students' sociocultural environment, act as the more knowledgeable other who filters their experiences on to the students. For example, high quality parental involvement in balance with high expectations can filter experiences relating to school success indicators (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The following section highlights the connection between mediation and the internalisation process, with reference to the parental sociocultural roles that form this study's research questions.

#### **2.2.4 Connection between mediation and the internalisation process.**

Internalisation is viewed as “the inclusion of signs into human action that does not simply lead to quantitative improvements in terms of speed or efficiency. Instead, the focus is on how the inclusion of tools and signs leads to qualitative transformation” (Wertsch, 2007, p. 179). Internalisation is seen as the process that happens between the social environment and the individual. According to Vygotsky (1978), internalisation of socially and culturally rooted developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology. Since the focus of the current study is on the parental sociocultural role and their use of cultural tools in mediating students’ thinking to make subject choices, the mediation process is seen as an internalisation of cultural tools that are fundamental for students’ cognitive development. Parents are observed as the more knowledgeable other who transfer their culture’s tools, such as their beliefs, values and expectations for education, on to their children. Vygotsky (1978) explained this acquisition of children’s decision-making processes solely as the mastery and internalisation of such cultural tools. With guidance and instructions from more skilled parents, children absorb and internalise the information and cultural tools exposed to them at different levels and in different ways (Rogoff, 1990). As such, development of higher mental functions that allow them to make subject choice and career pathway decisions is a process underpinned by the notions of mediation and internalisation. Thus, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, and mediation and internalisation processes in particular, provides the basis for the social and cultural processes of parents’ interactions with their children, on the one hand, and how their children internalise and develop their individual mental processes on subject choices, on the other.

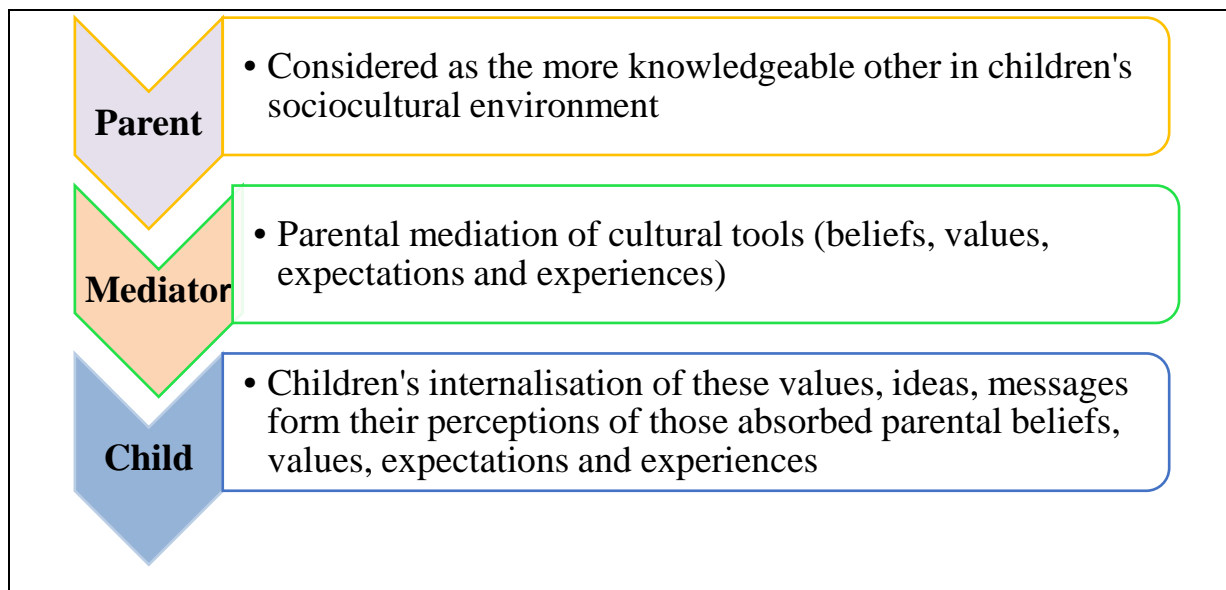
Taking both mediation and internalisation processes together, as proposed by Wertsch (1991, 1998), the current study is conceptualised based on Wertsch’s three central considerations: (1) agents and their cultural tools; (2) culturally mediated action or “agent-acting-with-mediational-means” and (3) the link between action and the broader cultural, institutional and historical context. Wertsch’s (1985) mediatory triangle represents subject–object relations in human activity as mediated by culturally available tools. Vygotsky’s principle concern was how tools, which are sociocultural in origin, mediate action. In this study, it is considered that parents engage in a culturally mediated action that can conceptualise children’s thinking around making their decisions about subject choices. As depicted in Figure 2.1, which is an adaptation of Wertsch’s triangle, the mediatory path

between student thinking around their subject choice and subject choice outcomes is through an indirect influence of parental sociocultural role as mediators.



*Figure 2.1.* Mediator triangle model (The basic triangular representation of mediation – Wertsch, 1985).

This means that in their capacity as mediators, parents use their cultural tools, such as language, texts and gestures, to communicate their values, beliefs, expectations and experiences to their children. These tools then tend to assimilate into children's thinking, exerting a culturally mediated action, which in this study is concerned with children's subject choice outcomes. Accordingly, parent-child dynamics in a sociocultural setting are seen to influence student subject choice and eventual career pathway decisions through the mediation and internalisation processes. Figure 2.2 presents an overview of the theoretical concepts applied to answering the research questions, which contributes to understanding parent-child interactions around making subject choice decisions.



*Figure 2.2.* Process of mediation and internalisation in a sociocultural setting that contributes to parent–child interactions around making subject choice decisions.

As depicted in Figure 2.2, the mediation and internalisation processes can be considered to occur between parents as the mature and expert individuals and their children as students. Thus, for learning to be efficient and for cognitive development to be realised, parents in their sociocultural role as mediators should have abilities that are more developed than those of the learners (Tzuriel & Shamir, 2007). More specifically, in order to assist students in making their subject selection and career pathway decisions whilst in senior schooling, mediators are required to organise, integrate and apply the learned knowledge for the student. Parental aspirations and expectations, when communicated either implicitly or explicitly to their children in their everyday interactions, are likely to directly or indirectly shape the way children perceive education and make their subject choices (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; S. Phillipson, 2009). The following section discusses the strengths and limitations of the chosen theoretical framework.

### **2.2.5 Strengths and limitations.**

Several theorists have proposed theories in support of the complex process of children's cognitive and psychological development. One such theory is Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952), which views children's cognitive development as a progressive reorganisation of mental processes resulting from biological maturation and environmental experiences. Piaget believed that children construct an understanding of the world around

them, experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment, and then adjust their ideas accordingly. Moreover, Piaget (1952) believed that views shaping of cognitive development takes place in universal stages and content of development and stems mainly from independent explorations in which children construct their own knowledge. As children progress through the stages of cognitive development, they try to adapt while applying previous knowledge (adaptation), which is achieved through a mechanism Piaget called equilibration. Equilibration helps explain how children are able to move their cognitive processes from one stage of thinking into the next.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952) could have possibly provided a contextual framework for this study, where parents can be perceived as influential persons in a student's environment providing maturation and cognitive development experiences. However, Piaget's theory somewhat ignores that individual development cannot be understood without reference to the social and cultural context, which is a concept that is embedded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. In contrast, Vygotsky placed more value on the role of internalisation of language and cultural tools. Rather than assuming that a single set of principles, such as adaptation and equilibration, can account for all aspects of cognitive development, Vygotsky argued that such principles need to be considered within a sociocultural phenomenon (Wertsch, 1985). Within their sociocultural role, parents act as mediators and, being the more knowledgeable other, transmit their cultural values and beliefs to their children, both explicitly and implicitly, through their everyday interactions. This subsequently facilitates and shapes children's thinking development around making their subject and career pathway choices.

In addition, for Vygotsky, thought, speech and language are a progression from outside in, unlike Piaget's "formal stage operations". In principle, Vygotsky believed that language is a tool of the mind. According to Vygotsky (1978), children learn through social interactions with a skilful tutor (parent, teacher or career counsellor). The child seeks to internalise the information, using it to guide or regulate his own performance and decision-making skills. In essence, this study relies on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory to provide the contextual and conceptual framework to explaining parents' sociocultural role as mediators in influencing student subject choice thinking. Thus, parent-child dynamic interactions in a sociocultural environment can be better understood with Vygotsky's



sociocultural theory. However, one limitation of using Vygotsky's mediation and internalisation processes (see Figure 2.2) is that the possible bi-directional parent–child influences are not addressed in the current study's theoretical approach. Rather, the child is positioned as a passive recipient of the influence of the more knowledgeable others.

Another criticism of Vygotsky's work perhaps lies in the assumption that it is applicable to all cultures (Mcleod, 2007). The notion that Vygotsky's ideas are culturally universal and heavily dependent on verbal instruction may not be equally useful in all cultures. Moreover, they may also not be generalised to all types of learning and development of mental processes. Additionally, therefore, the next section sets the stage for understanding the role of the familial acculturation process and its relationship with mediation of cultural tools in the context of the current study.

### **2.3 Familial Acculturation Process and the Mediation of Cultural Tools**

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact (Berry, 1997). Cultural changes include alterations in a group's customs, encompassing, for example, the social, economic and academic areas of their lives; whereas, psychological changes include alterations in an individual's beliefs and value systems, and the expectations they may have for their own or their children's future (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). As described in Chapter 1, because Australia is a multicultural society with an influx of immigrants, it is imperative to consider the acculturation process using Vygotsky's perspective of cultural tools in mediating students' thinking around their subject choices and career-making decisions. Vygotsky's (1978) assertion about changes in sociocultural circumstances after moving countries suggests that there are possibilities that can give rise to changes in the ways parents can use their cultural tools, which can alter the patterns of construction of children's higher mental functions and how they would perceive subject choices (Wertsch, 1998). This important factor needs to be considered when exploring sociocultural studies of human mind and cognitive development. Even if a child has excellent natural abilities, such as memory and behaviour, due to lack of cultural symbolic tools, psychological development and acquisition of higher mental functions maybe slowed or hampered.

In a similar vein, Feuerstein's (1979) to sociocultural approach to understanding immigrant families' experiences was in consistency with Vygotsky's (1978) approach. Feuerstein's findings were significant for educational solutions in the 1950s and 1960s for thousands of immigrants in Israel who were dislocated from their familiar sociocultural milieu. These immigrant children had good learning skills that were mediated by their original culture, which made it easier for them to acculturate with their new educational culture. However, being culturally deprived after leaving their own sociocultural environment can pose challenges while adapting to the new host culture, which ultimately affects the learning potentials of families and children. As such, immigrants' familial acculturation process and the influence of mediated cultural tools is a field of study that requires further attention in Australia. This study is a step forward in investigating immigrant children's thinking and capacities for subject choice and career pathway decisions, which is influenced by their familial acculturation processes and the mediation of cultural tools.

Additionally, in the context of the current Australian study, it is important to emphasise that culture and ethnicity, which are embedded in the use of the term acculturation, are multifaceted. Culture is one of the basic building blocks of ethnicity (Nagel, 1994); whereas, Goulbourne and Solomos (2003) argued that ethnicity is understood in terms of its fluidity and flexibility due to different personal and individual experiences and shared common characteristics with other members of a group of people. As such, ethnicity is an important dimension in shaping an individual's culture (Nagel, 1994). For example, there is a broad sweep in the use and understanding of the term 'Asian culture'. In different parts of the world, by geography, an Asian includes Indians but, generally, in Australia, Indians are called South Asians (e.g., Bangladeshi, Indians etc.) versus Southeast Asians (e.g., Indonesian, Vietnamese etc.) (ABS, 2017b). Moreover, the complexities around beliefs, values, norms and practices may be different in South Asians versus Southeast Asians, or more so in different ethnicities. The current study considers that it is not much a particular ethnicity that shapes the immigrant parents' beliefs, values and expectations for their children's education, but rather the experience of migration and the acculturation processes that families undergo while trying to live interculturally (Berry, 1997). Considerable research has been devoted to the understanding of the acculturation process of adults (Berry et al., 2006); however, there is less emphasis on addressing the issues of how immigrant families' acculturation process can influence children's subject choices and career pathway decisions in Australia.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

By employing Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this chapter presented an overall vision of how the parental sociocultural role as mediators, in particular parents' beliefs, values, expectations and familial acculturation processes, can influence student subject choice thinking. Of particular significance, Vygotsky's mediation and internalisation constructs have been discussed as the leading theoretical framework that underpins the sociocultural lens taken in this study. In order to understand how aspects of mediation and internalisation can be investigated, the next chapter provides a detailed review of previous studies conducted in the area of the parental role in shaping children's academic trajectories.

## **CHAPTER 3: Literature Review - Situating the Theoretical Orientation**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The focus of the previous chapter was primarily on delineating the significance of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the meaning of mediation and internalisation constructs in the context of this study. This chapter extends the review of the literature to the three main factors that are the focus of this study; (1) the role of cultural tools in immigrant parent's beliefs, values and expectations and how they influence children's subject choice thinking, (2) the role of the familial acculturation process in shaping immigrant children's subject choice thinking, and (3) the perceptions of school CPT leaders in relation to parental influence on their children's subject choice thinking. The conceptual model for this study is then presented at the end of the chapter in light of the literature review and the study's research questions.

### **3.2 Influence of Immigrant Parental Beliefs, Values and Expectations on Student Subject Choice Thinking**

This following section is organised around understanding the role of cultural tools, that is, parental beliefs, values and expectations, in their children's education in a sociocultural context. A discussion of the literature in relation to how these factors play a mediatory role in shaping children's subject choice and eventual career pathway decisions is also explored.

#### **3.2.1 Understanding cultural tools: Immigrant parental beliefs and values for student subject choice.**

As noted in Chapter 2, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of culture for the purpose of the current study is considered to be a shaping element through which children can make and develop ways of thinking that are specific to cultural beliefs and practices. For instance, immigrant parental beliefs and values are significant cultural tools that can influence their children's intellectual adaptation and development. Parents are thought to develop goals and care strategies that maximise the likelihood of children attaining culturally valued skills and characteristics (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Everyday interactions with children such as dinner table conversations and discussions about the child's day at school, and also being involved in

informal choices such as social interactions with peers, can play an integral part in forming children's decision-making skills. As such, parents can be seen as more mature or experienced actors who use their shared knowledge of the world and their prior experiences while communicating with their children (Miller, 2015).

However, globalisation and the processes of migration are changing the ways immigrant families shape their cultural beliefs, values and practices (Windle, 2015). Parental beliefs and values may shift in response to the available resources in the host environment. Children's thinking development can therefore change according to the sociocultural situation created by the parents in their capacity as the significant other, which can modify the ways in which children may internalise culturally mediated thought and action (Vygotsky, 1978). The current study considers the child's environment to be comprised of their parents and their culture, thus placing an emphasis on parent-child interactions and the communication of those cultural tools in influencing student subject choices. Parents create and develop tools such as beliefs and values that form the culture in which they live in (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, beliefs and values can have multidimensional characteristics within an individual's culture. For example, a person's beliefs or values can be about one or more aspects of life, in particular, education, religion or culture. Viewed through the lens of the mediation and internalisation constructs, parents can provide opportunities to build children's conceptual understanding and thinking processes around subject and career pathway decisions.

### ***3.2.1.1 Significance of parental beliefs and values on student subject choice.***

To explore how parental beliefs and values can shape children's subject choice decisions, it is important to consider what constitutes such beliefs and how they can vary in different sociocultural contexts. This section examines the literature around parental beliefs and values and the related influence on students' subject choice and career pathway decisions.

Aunio, Aubrey, Godfrey, Pan, and Liu (2008) postulated that Chinese parents largely believe that mathematical knowledge is the way to achieve higher academic scores. Thus, children in their study were often expected to practise and learn maths. Similarly, Lau, Li, and Rao (2011) highlighted the value that many Chinese parents place on education. There is a

general preference for Chinese parents to enrol their children in private tuition or enrichment classes, to promote and support the high academic achievements of their own children. Moreover, the Chinese parents in their study believed that high academic achievement is the primary route to success, higher social status and wealth. In supplementing such studies on Chinese parents' beliefs and values, Frewen, Chew, Carter, Chunn, and Jotanovic (2014) explored parental beliefs about children's academic achievement in Singapore. The results, which were similar to the Lau et al. (2011) study, indicated that most parents believe academic achievement is the primary route to success. However, in Frewen et al. (2014) Singaporean study, such parents' beliefs and values about education evoked anxieties in all parents, who viewed their children's education as a future investment. These researchers concluded that some parents might hold 'unhealthy' levels of beliefs and desires around their children's academic focus. As such, parental beliefs and values, particularly for immigrant families, is a domain that warrants further investigation. Such studies provide an overview of widely held Chinese parental beliefs and values, where they place significant importance on children's high academic achievement and future educational outcomes. As such, parental beliefs and values can mediate the relationship between children's own perceptions of parental beliefs and their actual scholastic behaviours and achievement outcomes (Benner & Mistry, 2007; S. Phillipson, 2009). Of significance to the current study is that the impact of immigrant parents' beliefs and values on their children's education, and, thus, the related impact on their future subject choices and career outcomes, can never be understated.

Furthermore, in terms of what subjects to pursue at school, Poulsen (2009) argued that many South Asian parents believe that a child's performance in academics, sports, or a future career is a reflection on their family's honour and reputation. Wei and Eisenhart (2011) claimed that such parents place an emphasis on studying academic subjects, including maths and science, as a matter of necessity. Mathematical reasoning is highly valued and encouraged at a young age because it is perceived to be the foundation for a broad spectrum of future academic learning (Aunio et al., 2008; Liu, 2006). In the context of Australian parents, Boon's (2012) study which was conducted in regional Queensland noted the influence parents had in guiding their children's career choices, particularly for science-based subjects. The findings clearly indicated the influential role of cultural variables such as parental beliefs and attitudes on whether or not their children studied science-related subjects. Consequently, the study signalled that parental beliefs and values must be considered in any examination of student career choices

to ascertain whether or not such views are internalised by children while making subject choice decisions. However, Boon's (2012) study was more specific to students' post-compulsory science participation trends.

Bhalla and Weiss's (2010), study examined immigrant Anglo Canadian and East Indian parents' beliefs and values about studying sports-based subjects. They found that parental values were much more strongly oriented towards academic school achievement than sports accomplishments. However, parents acted as emotional supporters and providers of experiences for children's participation in sports-based subjects. Therefore, it seems that when adolescents have to make decisions, they can be mediated and influenced by parents' own sociocultural beliefs and values as practised in their surrounding environment. In particular, in Australia, the key issue to be explored is an understanding of how the interplay between immigrant parents' beliefs and value systems and their children's future education can contribute to the better preparation of students' disposition toward subject choice and career pathway decisions (Windle, 2015).

As discussed in these studies, there are several complexities around how cultural tools such as parent's beliefs and value systems can mediate students' perceptions about subject choice and future career decision processes. Also, the desire of families to emigrate is often fuelled by certain expectations and ambitions that they believe will only be fulfilled within a host country. The next question resides in examining how cultural tools such as immigrant parents' expectations can be associated with their beliefs and values to predict their children's educational prospects.

### **3.2.2 Understanding cultural tools: Immigrant parental expectations about student subject choice.**

Although the term "parental expectations" has been defined in various ways in the literature, most researchers characterise parental prophecy or expectations as realistic beliefs or judgments that parents have about their children's future achievement (Glick & White, 2004; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). Such desires may be reflected in children's maths course grades (e.g., Aunio et al., 2008; S. Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007), or the highest

level of schooling attained (e.g., Benner & Mistry, 2007; Glick & White, 2004). Additionally, in defining parental expectations, seminal studies ranging from 1972 to 1998 have juxtaposed parental expectations with parental aspirations, which typically refer to desires, wishes or goals that parents have formed regarding their children's educational achievement, such as future career choice, rather than what they realistically expect their children to achieve (Seginer, 1983). Alternatively, parental expectations can influence student subject choice by conveying messages about their child's abilities and academic capabilities, which, in turn, can develop students' competency in future career-making decisions (Eccles, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). These views highlight the significance of parental expectations, and it suggests how parents can transfer their own wants, desires and aspirations onto their children. Thus, parental expectations can function as a "mediator" (Vygotsky, 1978) or "expectancy socialisers" (Eccles et al., 1982) focusing on the ways in which parental expectations function as an "environmental press" that compels students to meet parental standards (Marjoribanks, 1972). Also, how students consequently construct their own thinking and make decisions about subject selection can be dynamic and generative, thus making it imperative to focus on the impact of parents' expectations.

Furthermore, parental expectations can vary across sociocultural contexts. In a study involving Asian American and European American families, Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) found high parental expectations in Asian American families as compared to European American families motivated children to achieve academic success within school and to have aspirations to attend college. Parental expectations were internalised by their children, which made the children value education and thus pursue rigour in their own academic trajectories. Although this study highlighted that parents expected their children to attend college, it is noteworthy, that the study drew attention to the research gap relating to how students' career-making decisions were influenced by parental expectations of post-secondary outcomes. Upon recognising that children internalise their parents' valuation for achievement, the study raised questions about how parental expectations might have an effect on student's educational decisions.

Another significant parental expectation relates to educational attainment and financial success (Poulsen, 2009). For example, East Indian parents tend to impose high expectations on



their child to attain success in any endeavour they pursue. This sometimes creates an extreme emphasis and negative impact placed by parents, while expecting non-negotiable success from their children in academic trajectories (Poulsen, 2009). With respect to an East Asian context, including Japan, parental educational beliefs and practices typically emphasise providing widespread private lessons, and place a high value on educational credentials for their children (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010; Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2016). Such culturally mediated expectations for academic success may uniquely affect parents' expectations and the way they offer support for their children's education.

Chen, Newland, Liang and Giger's (2016) recent study presented how Asian parental expectations mediated children's school success in primary school. The findings also revealed that the parents' wished expectations of their children stemmed from the values, beliefs and motivation of being involved in their children's academic endeavours. This, reciprocally, contributed to children's future educational success. The findings warranted future studies to replicate and extend the research by including representative samples from other geographic locations and cultural groups, given that parental expectations can influence children's thoughts and perceptions around subject choice decisions.

While these studies illustrate the influence of parental expectations on children's academic achievement, they provide a limited view of how parental influences and the use of cultural tools could have contributed to children's senior subject choices and career pathway options. In Australia, parents and families are significant players in the cultural growth of children, which is suggested by the dynamic multicultural forces and migration history of the country (ABS, 2011, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Although there has been considerable research on the multitude of parental influences that shape the process of child development, questions about the specific ways in which immigrant parents' beliefs, values and expectations can mediate their children's future career-making decisions remain unanswered. The research discussed in the preceding sections has clearly shown that there are critical links between cultural tools and children's school outcomes, however little progress has been made on establishing what the current study calls the "parental sociocultural role as mediators" using a qualitative approach. This mediatory role encompasses the cultural tools of parental beliefs, values and expectations that can shape students' subject choice thinking. Understanding the

ways in which parents mediate children's thinking around making decisions about their post-secondary outcomes warrants formal study. In fact, there needs to be a focus on examining both parents' and children's views on the influence of such cultural tools, as they are a key issue in understanding immigrant students' subject choice and career pathway decisions in Australia.

### **3.2.3 Understanding immigrant parental beliefs, values and expectations in a sociocultural context.**

Parental beliefs, values and expectations about children's achievement can vary within and across various ethnic groups. Such aspects of immigrant parents in relation to children's achievement have been the focus of international research (OECD, 2012). In a time of globalisation and migration, a majority of educators have realised the importance of parents from all ethnic and economic backgrounds becoming involved in their children's educational process (Windle, 2015). Given the multicultural background of Australia, investigation of immigrant parental influence on their children's subject choices can have major implications for future educational and other government policy reforms. Although the current study does not focus on comparing cultural groups and their encompassed beliefs, values and practices, it explores mediation of cultural tools within immigrant parents' familial context to create affordances for student subject choice and career pathway decisions. Regardless of how each culture differs in the values that are considered important, these values nonetheless impact on the upbringing and education of children. What follows is a discussion around research that demonstrates how parental influences vary within different cultural contexts.

The five-year longitudinal study in the United Kingdom conducted by Archer et al. (2012) explored how families within different cultures can shape children's propensity to choose science subjects and have related career aspirations. The researchers reported that students' (aged 10–14) decisions to choose Science subjects were shaped by experiences in the family within a particular culture. Their study highlighted the concept of family values and the role of cultural backgrounds and practices within families that can profoundly shape children's potential identification with science-related subject choices. As such, student subject choice and related career aspirations can stem from the influence of experiences in the family that can

inform students' education outcomes, and this issue has been comparatively less studied within the Australian context.

Another study conducted by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) suggested that parental beliefs and values vary by ethnicity. In their study involving European American and African American high school students, parents conveyed the importance and value of education and discussed plans with their children. This, in turn, motivated children to engage in their academic work and predicted academic success. However, parents faced circumstances such as lack of time to be involved at school due to busy work schedules. Parents' limited access to resources and knowledge about future career opportunities for their children acted as constraints in their children's academic socialisation, thus highlighting the lack of parental mediatory influence on their children's future course decisions (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). In presenting a new perspective for exploring the understanding of the parental sociocultural role, with an analysis of their expectations for their children, this study in some ways informs this current study. Therefore, the question here is not so much about what the parental sociocultural role is, but how far parents' beliefs, values and expectations can influence immigrant students' subject and career pathway decisions.

Similarly, Ule, Živoder and du Bois-Reymond (2015) conducted a study in Europe, where they claimed that parents could act as children's confidants, advisers and emotional psychological supporters in their decisions. Parental decisions about their children's education were based on their beliefs, life contexts and school involvement, as well as their own desires for their children's educational paths. The authors suggested that European parents generally invest a great amount of emotional, social and economic resources into supporting their children over the course of their education. Many parents in their study believed that education is the most promising and secure path towards a prosperous future for their children in the risky and unpredictable circumstances of contemporary life. There were also accounts of parent-child interactions that demonstrated parents and their children had a shared responsibility in terms of planning for future education, however, the study did not specifically take into consideration the role of parental beliefs, values and expectations that could formulate children's subject choices and career-making decisions.

In addition, it is important to question the significance of parental beliefs and practices as predictors of students' attitudes towards their career development. For example, Hughes' (2011) cross-cultural study accentuated the relationship between career maturity and parenting practices across Australian and Thai cultural contexts. The findings revealed that the students' attitudes towards career planning in the Thai cultural group relied on their relationship with their parents, where parents were found to be overprotective and over-caring. In contrast, Australian students perceived their parents as demonstrating a caring parenting style that was not regarded as overprotective, and hence had a positive attitude towards career maturity. These relationships, however, did not apply in the Thai cultural context. Hence, parental practices and career development in one cultural context may differ from another cultural context. This cultural difference can play a key role in how children make meaning of parents' beliefs and expectations and subsequently negotiate their decisions while selecting their high school subjects.

Similarly, Jose and Bellamy's (2012) multicultural study involving American, Chinese, Japanese and New Zealand parents also examined the possibility that parental expectations can influence the ways in which children approach academic tasks. Parents in their study believed in being persistent, and encouraged children to pursue academic tasks. In turn, they expected children to excel in their overall academic achievement. As it appears these elements of parental expectations have an impact on children's scholastic outcomes, investigating their role in mediating subject choice and career making decisions has never been more imperative.

In sum, a range of cross-cultural studies has helped to ascertain the influences of parental beliefs, values and expectations on children's educational outcomes. For example, Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) compared Asian parental influences with European or American parental influences and found that Anglo Celtic parents in Australia encourage their children to do their best in school, and their best need not necessarily equate to high academic achievement. Other recent studies have reported that Asian parents mostly believed in being more involved, for example, they help their children with their homework by tutoring them, checking over their work, assigning additional work and structuring and monitoring their time (e.g., Frewen et al., 2014). These parents tend to value education very strongly and have high academic expectations and performance standards for schooling (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010), while

they equally believe in the importance of hard work and effort (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Moreover, cultural tools that include parental beliefs, values and expectations could work as a platform for parents to influence their children's academic achievement and educational outcomes (Melhuish et al., 2008; S. Phillipson, 2009, 2010). The current study aims to critically examine the role of immigrant parents in shaping their children's subject choice decisions in the Australian sociocultural context. Of significance to the current study is recent research around how parental beliefs and expectations can sometimes be shaped or modified through parental past educational experiences (Miller, 2015). The next section reviews the literature around parental past schooling experiences that can facilitate children's thinking around their academic choices and post-secondary options.

### ***3.2.3.1 Influence of parental past schooling experiences on student subject choice.***

Older studies such as Dick and Rallis (1991) concurred that not only are the experiences of students regarding their test scores and level of achievement at school significant, but also that the past schooling experiences of their parents can act as mediators to influence career choice. Recently, Wilder's (2013) meta-synthesis of nine studies around parental involvement in children's academics found aspects of parents' own past educational experiences to be strongly associated with their children's future educational attainments. As such, research has indicated that making subject choice decisions at high school does not occur in a vacuum, but rather can be influenced by direct and indirect experiences within their environment (Turunen, 2012). In order to understand the intertwining role of parental beliefs, values and educational expectations on their children's education, it is necessary to also understand the roots of such an occurrence. The interactions parents have with their children can stem from their own experiences of schooling, which can often offer important insights into children's preparation for school (Miller, 2015). Parents' past educational experiences can act as the driving force for their children's career decisions. Few studies have considered the influence of such educational experiences on student subject choice. Moreover, understanding how flexible or rigid parents' beliefs and expectations can be while integrating their past educational experiences and aspirations with mediating children's subject choice is another question to be addressed.

Additionally, based on the premise that school memories can be carried through for many years, it is important to determine how positive or negative memories of schooling can

influence parental expectations for their children's future academic outcomes (Miller, 2015). For example, parents with positive attitudes may give increased attention to events that speak for the child's progress; whereas, parents with negative attitudes may focus on potential problems, which they could unconsciously try to exacerbate as a result of their own past negative experiences (Räty, 2007). Parents who recall their schooling as positive and supportive may be conditioned to believe that schools are positive places for their children (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004). In contrast, parents who describe their school experiences as negative or challenging may have a negative disposition towards schools. This may subsequently reflect how parents build their opinions and ideologies and make choices about their children's schooling. Reay's (2001) study revealed that working-class women were more likely to recount their own negative experiences in school and were challenged when offering encouragement and enthusiasm to their children. This suggested that a mother's past educational experiences might influence children's thinking towards education. More specifically, the gap in the literature warrants speculation about how such parental beliefs, values and expectations may be directly linked to parents' own educational experiences, and therefore produce different outcomes for children's subject and career choice.

In another study, 40 mothers with preschool-aged children were interviewed to ascertain the influence of their school-related histories on children's preparation for school (Miller, Dilworth-Bart, & Hane, 2011). The individual educational memories of the mothers were the most meaningful in guiding the preparation of their own children for kindergarten. The mothers also reflected on intergenerational influences with respect to how they were also primed for and supported by their parents during their schooling days. The study by Miller et al. (2011) highlighted how parental past schooling experiences can underscore their own perceptions to better understand children's educational preparation process. Further, in 2015, Miller continued to examine the links between parents' memories and their current thoughts as they prepared their child for kindergarten. In a sample of 24 parents from lower income backgrounds, Miller (2015) found parents' recollection of their many years of first-hand exposure to school settings and school transitions that appeared to impact on the way they prepared their children for school and their consequent relationship with the school community.

In sum, it can be said that the perceptions and attitudes of parents towards their children's education can stem from their own educational and professional experiences. Therefore, these experiences can also contribute to the development of children's thinking and decisions about selecting subjects at school. The current study aims to bridge the research gap in explaining how parental past educational experiences coming from different cultural stereotypes may exert an influence on the student's career choice. Moreover, after moving countries, immigrant parents can typically bring along their past schooling experiences, which eventually have an influence on how they adapt and understand the new educational context in their host country. In considering the impact of migration and relocation, it is essential to focus on what happens to immigrant parents' traditional beliefs and value systems, and their expectations for their children's future (Belford, 2013). While attempting to realise the parents' expectations for their children's future, familial acculturation experiences, can undermine or develop children's perceptions of career choices. In particular, parental beliefs, values and educational expectations may be important predictors of children's achievement. Such an argument focuses on how much the familial acculturation processes after moving to Australia can influence the children's perceptions of subject choice. The following literature review examines familial experiences within an acculturation process and aims to build an argument around the same.

### **3.3 Influence of Familial Acculturation Process on Student Subject Choice**

As examined in the previous discussion, the cultural tools of parental beliefs, values and expectations, as well as parental past educational experiences, can act as mediators in influencing subject and career pathway decisions (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Melhuish et al., 2008; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Moreover, parental aspirations and expectations of their children can stem from cultural values that they believe and practise within their home and community (S. Phillipson, 2009). However, the relocation experiences for immigrant parents can equally make them feel dislocated from their original culture (Belford, 2013). When exposed to the host society's cultural norms and a new educational system, families can have their expectations for their children's educational outcomes impacted upon (Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013). Therefore, another important factor to consider is how the familial acculturation experiences shape children's subject choice thinking. In the context of this study, the acculturation process is viewed as a process of parental adaptation to the new Australian environment (Sam, 1995, 2006a). In particular, acculturation processes that involve adapting

to new Australian sociocultural and educational environment and available opportunities can play a significant role in shaping parents' aspirations for their children's career success. Consequently, parental aspirations can influence their children's thinking and internalised characteristics around making subject and career pathway decisions.

### **3.3.1 Familial acculturation experiences.**

In this globalising world, the process of acculturation is referred to as a process that takes place between native populations and newcomers (Van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martinez, 2015). Berry (1997) described acculturation as the extent to which an individual is willing to retain an old culture and adopt a new one (Berry, 1990, 1997). This results in four types of acculturation attitudes: integration (accept old culture, accept new culture), assimilation (reject old culture, accept new culture), separation (accept old culture, reject new culture), and marginalisation (reject old culture, reject new culture) (Sakamoto, 2007). More broadly, acculturation can also be viewed as psychological changes that result in the immigrants' cultural beliefs and values moving towards those of the host country (Rogler, 1994). The familial acculturation process has a significant influence on how the inherited or fossilised cultural norms and values of the immigrant parents and their children to shift, and it is important in the context of the current study to examine the role of such acculturation experiences in regard to immigrant parents and their children in Australia.

Research on the acculturation process of immigrants largely explores ethnic identity, mental health issues, socialisation, language and family hassles (Sakamoto, 2007; Sam 2006a; Titzmann, Silbereisen, Mesch, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2011). For example, Titzmann et al. (2011) investigated the adaptation of immigrant adolescents from the former Soviet Union, ethnic Germans in Germany, and Russian Jews in Israel. Their results indicated that the adolescent immigrants experienced fewer acculturation-related hassles, particularly language struggles, after being in the country for a longer period of time. As such, the authors highlighted the necessity for increased opportunities to enable immigrants to allow smoother integrate into the receiving society more smoothly.



Additionally, it is also worth noting that parental expectations for their children may be derived from their own childhood educational experiences. Upon migration and when trying to settle in a foreign country, the degree to which parents acculturate may depend on their intercultural competencies, their own beliefs and their prior educational experiences (Van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martinez, 2015). In a recent Singaporean study on Indian immigrants, Kusurkar (2014) found the sociocultural and educational environments of both Singapore and India had a role in shaping Indian parents' educational and occupational aspirations for their children studying at the pre-university level. Additionally, the competitive educational environment in India prior to acculturation into the Singaporean context played a significant role in shaping their aspirations. With respect to acculturation experiences the studies showed, some parents wish to retain some of their personal characteristics and childhood experiences, whereas others underwent a change in the new environment. This difference depended on whether their acculturation strategy, which about integration or separation. Due to the complex interplay of beliefs, values and acculturation processes in shaping parents' aspirations for children's occupational attainment, it does not come as a surprise that Kusurkar (2014) recommended further research into immigrants' acculturation experiences. As such, with the changing sociocultural context in Australia, it is important to examine the implications of how such changes can influence children's thinking around making their future career decisions. After all, acculturation is a complex manifestation of cultural influences and mediation, where two or more cultures come into contact in a new environment (Berry, 1997). Preparing their children for academic endeavour while adjusting to the host country's norms, practices and educational environment can be a challenging task for immigrant parents.

Furthermore, Van Oudenhoven and Ward (2013) highlighted the relations between immigrants and members of the host societies and considered how immigrants adapt to their society of settlement. For example, integrated immigrants, who value both cultural maintenance and contact with the host society, may extend or strengthen their means of cultural maintenance through an amicable relationship with their country of origin. As a result, upon migration, parents may consider maintaining their cultural values as well as simultaneously integrating and becoming familiar with both their host country beliefs and values and those of their country of origin. In essence, this could represent a version of 'integration' into two societies (Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013). While trying to integrate into the host society, and living simultaneously in two strongly distinguishable cultural worlds, parents and their children

may develop a sound form of bicultural competence (Sam, 2006a). This development may be because what they experience in one culture is not oppositional to what they experience in the host society, or perhaps parents may merely wish to take the path of becoming more accepting toward the host country's cultural norms (Naval & Hussain, 2008). The acknowledgment in the literature that acculturation processes upon migration place a requirement on families to either recognise, abandon or integrate into the host society's norms and value systems justifies why this current study is timely and needs to be conducted in the Australian context. Parents may expect and foresee better educational opportunities for their children, whilst simultaneously trying to understand the new school's educational system. Part of the current research throws light on immigrant familial experiences and how relocating to Australia can render such parental proficiencies in using their cultural tools to mediate children's subject choice decisions.

With respect to differences in parents' and their children's acculturation experiences, Goforth, Pham and Oka (2015) suggested that parents and children were likely to undergo the acculturation process differently due to external factors (e.g., community, school, employment) or internal factors (e.g., cultural beliefs and values). In their study on Arab American families, although parents and children experienced similar levels of acculturation towards the American mainstream, parent-child conflict created an acculturative stress within families. Similarly, Panelo (2010) found that internal factors such as parents' beliefs and high expectations could present pressure from home, which can often lead to children's mental health issues. In this study, Asian American students acculturated to Western values in United States colleges, and, in doing so, they sacrificed elements of their Asian values and beliefs. However, this consequently made it difficult for them to relate to their parents' traditional beliefs and practices. In addition to such parent-child acculturation differences while interacting with the new environment, parents and children may also be faced with challenges such as limited language proficiency, discrimination and the uncertainties regarding the implications of different cultural values, as well as social, economic, educational and political norms (Concha, Sanchez, Rosa, & Villar, 2013). Accordingly, the next sections review literature around challenges immigrant parents and children face in acclimatising to the educational systems in the host country.

### ***3.3.1.1 Challenges for parents in acclimatising to new educational system.***

The recent increase in cultural and linguistic diversity in Australian society is often perceived as a challenge for school career counsellors and teachers who work with immigrant families with unique needs (Goforth, Pham, Chun & Castro-Olivo, 2017). One of the major challenges is the cultural dissonance between the immigrant parents and students and the school personnel, since the host country's school providers also carry cultural and social attitudes that may influence their own actions and perceptions of immigrants (Goforth et al., 2017).

Within an acculturation process, immigrant parents may also be faced with challenges associated with the new environment, including new settling experiences for themselves and their children within the new educational system. Gilby's (2012) New Zealand study examined the extent of Asian immigrant parents' understanding and the effectiveness of their current home-school communication practices. The findings highlighted that parents experienced extensive language barriers and had inaccurate knowledge of the host country's educational system, which impeded the effectiveness of immigrant parents' communication with the school. Equally, there were potentially conflicting worldviews of education, whereby the Asian parents' values, beliefs and expectations around children's education were different to the New Zealand norms and educational practices. The current home-school communication processes around parental involvement were seen to be largely ineffective with the Asian immigrant parent group, and highlighted the disparity between high parental expectations and the undeveloped knowledge they had of the New Zealand education context. In contrast, Ying and Han's (2008) study examined the positive contribution of parental acculturation, parental involvement and the intergenerational relationship to the well-being of Filipino American adolescents, which, in turn, enhanced adolescents' self-esteem. The findings indicated that parental acculturation increased parental confidence to be more involved across school, home-education and social contexts. Despite the widespread acknowledgement of these potential benefits and challenges encountered during acculturation, there are still clear gaps between how schools and immigrant parents mutually understand the reality of providing concrete experiences to enhance students' thinking and career pathway decision-making skills.

Another study conducted by Renzaho and Vignjevic (2011) concurred that parents who resettled in high-income countries such as Australia faced many challenges. Negotiating

parenting in a new culture is one of the most pressing challenges faced by most immigrant parents. It was found that the inherent values and practices in the host country's cultural environment might be inconsistent with the ways of parenting in the countries of origin. This led to difficulties and challenges in predicting children's educational outcomes. In another recent Australian study on acculturation of Muslim Iraqi immigrant mothers, Al-deen and Windle (2015) identified that cultural and social capital influenced how these mothers perceived their participation in their children's educational careers. Mothers with limited or a complete lack of access to the cultural capital also believed that they should have an active role in their children's educational work at home, and saw education as a top priority. However, their responses indicated that their involvement in home-based activities was not as effective due to many factors. Language barriers, and other issues such as unfamiliarity with the education system, a lack or lower level of their own educational qualifications due to getting married at a young age, and lack of access to high volume social capital and financial resources were signalled. Al-deen and Windle's study called for further investigation into immigrant parents' acculturation processes in Australia, and suggested that perhaps schools require another set of educational tools to capture the relationship between parents' sociocultural competencies and their disposition in children's education. As such, if taken seriously, investigating familial acculturation processes can inform children's subject and career pathway decisions, while embracing parents' sociocultural capacity to act as mediators by employing their cultural tools.

### ***3.3.1.2 Challenges for students in acclimatising to new educational systems.***

Research has shown that acculturation processes can be predictors of high school students' aspirations for their future subject choices (Vela, Zamarripa, Balkin, Johnson, & Smith, 2013). Students' positive or negative acculturation experiences in relation to the host country's education system can play an important role in what they perceive for their future career options. For example, in a study of Latina/o students in Southwest United States, participants provided their perceptions of support from high school counsellors and their levels of acculturation (Vela et al., 2013). Students perceived that the school counsellors' low expectations of them doing well in their subjects and lack of support blocked students' opportunities to enrol in the Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The study concluded by arguing that students' negative experiences with the school system can have detrimental effects on their academic aspirations. Such findings point to the issues around how the familial

acculturation process can influence high school students' subject choice, and can make collaboration between families and schools challenging.

With respect to one of the few studies that has been conducted in an Australian context, Hatoss, O'Neill and Eacersall (2012) examined Sudanese-background secondary school students' career aspirations, motivations and obstacles. This examination of Sudanese youth who went to regional Australian high schools found that although students had high educational aspirations and motivation, they encountered significant barriers, including racism, interrupted schooling and low levels of English literacy. A larger proportion (50 per cent) of students aspired to attend university and more students planned to go to a TAFE college (30 per cent) or planned to obtain apprenticeships. When asked about how they decided on a career, they reported seeking the advice of friends and relatives and researching the internet. The students perceived that the usual Year 12 direct entry to university was not an option for them because they did not have the level of English to study the senior level subjects required to enter degree programs. Despite high career aspirations to be a doctor or a lawyer, students were not able to follow an academic pathway (Hatoss et al., 2012). Overall, the study's findings drew attention to the need to investigate immigrant students' aspirations and career goals and how they related to their integration into the Australian host community. The study also did not consider the crucial role of parents in influencing student career aspirations and academic choices. Despite the key role acculturation experiences can play in students' academic trajectories, there is a paucity of research in relation to the implications it can have on student subject and career pathway choice. In particular, how parents' beliefs, values and expectations within an acculturation process can predict children's future educational decisions is the phenomenon to be further explored.

### **3.3.2 Variances in familial acculturation experiences depending on host cultural background.**

When families migrate, they often bring along with them their original cultural beliefs and values. As described in Section 3.2.3, such beliefs vary from culture to culture. In adjusting to the new culture, immigrant parents may either choose to forego some of these values, or continue to uphold some of them. For example, some immigrant parents like those from South Asian countries are keen to hold on to their values for education (Modood, 2004). Their strong

aspirations for high educational qualifications are also passed on to their children (Modood, 2004). Moreover, Asian immigrant parents may successfully exercise power and effectively communicate to their children their educational expectations. Children, are more likely to internalise parental expectations and cultural tools, and even though they may not fully be in agreement with their parents, they tend to develop ambitions and priorities that are consistent with those of their parents.

In extreme cases, immigrant parents like those from South Asian immigrant parents may exercise power in such a manner as to put undue pressure on their children with a view to fulfilling their expectations (Baptiste, 2005; Dey & Sitharthan, 2016; Walton-Roberts 2009). For example, Baptiste (2005) found that in spite of being more inclined towards integration, Indian immigrants often continued to maintain a close emotional and cultural attachment with India. While the Indian parents often accepted certain features of the culture of the host country, they also highly valued their original culture and made every effort to retain its key features in the next generation. The study highlighted issues such as pressure from parents about education and future career success. Parents in this study expected their children to maintain the Indian cultural values, which rated a parent's worth by their children's educational success and loyalty to Indian values. Another American study conducted by Jung and Zhang (2016) indicated that for immigrant children of both Asian origin and American and Caribbean origin, parental control and monitoring was not beneficial for their cognitive development and consequently had a negative impact on children's academic achievement. Jung and Zhang (2016) thus recommended further research should be conducted with a view to fostering future academic success by designing and implementing educational programs and practices for immigrant children.

A study conducted by Castillo, Lopez-Arenas and Saldivar (2010) investigated how acculturation processes and parental education levels influenced 106 Mexican American high school students' decisions to apply to college. Acculturation to the white American culture of educational persistence was found to be a more significant predictor of a student's decision to pursue post-secondary education than parental education levels. This study suggested more research be conducted to educate school career counsellors on the cultural strengths of acculturating students and families and provide career advice programs.

Other studies also looked at how parental acculturation experiences can influence their children to pursue particular subjects that fall in line with parental cultural values and their own aspirations. For example, Yu (2014) examined the acculturation experience of first-generation Chinese American parents and the values that inform their high expectations for their children's early childhood music education. Interviews with six first-generation Chinese American immigrant parents who had children under the age of eight revealed how parents valued the importance of the traditional concept of *guan* in Chinese American parenting. Within their cultural parenting practices, they place a high value on education, the function of music in Chinese culture, and the value of music education as a tool for moral cultivation. Considered within the context of the Chinese Americans' acculturation experience, this study brought to light a number of tensions that Chinese American parents confront while upholding their high expectations for their children's music study. Such parental cultural pressures can affect the ways in which children perceive their academic choices. The study's findings indicated the need for more investigation into bridging this 'cultural gap' and balancing the traditional values of immigrant families with those of the host country to provide healthy educational outcomes for their children.

Similarly, in the context of their study, Kim, Chen, Wang, Shen, and Orozco-Lapray (2013) in the context of their study contended that different levels of parent-child acculturation is a risk factor in the development of Chinese American children. Their study identified how unsupportive parenting and a parent-child sense of alienation caused conflicts and acculturative stress within the families. This, in turn, produced depressive symptoms and lower academic performance in children during early and middle adolescence. These patterns of negative adjustment within the familial acculturation process established in early adolescence may persist into middle adolescence, thus affecting children's future educational outcomes (Kim et al., 2013). It can therefore be speculated that acculturative stress within families can evoke tensions for both parents and children in conjointly making comprehensive post-secondary career choice decisions.

With an emphasis on acculturative stress, an exemplified parental belief in educational values and high expectations tends to leave children in a push and pull situation (Baptiste, 2005; Dugsin, 2001; Poulsen, 2009). For example, Poulsen (2009) found that American-born

Indian children were frequently caught between two worlds: that of their parents' birth and origin and that of their own. This tended to put them in a position where the often conflicting parental cultural values and expectations clashed, leaving these children feeling like they were being buffeted along in the middle (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007; Poulsen, 2009). Poulsen's (2009) study found that American-Indian parents often discouraged their children from participating in a particular subject such as sport, because it was presumed unlikely that the child would be able to achieve at a higher level. Parents believed that sports was not a worthy subject, as it was viewed as merely a recreational activity, and hence would not be commendable of recognition or result in a successful career outcome. Their study highlighted that such parental cultural beliefs and expectations have an adverse effect on children's college admission decisions and resulted in children having a low confidence while acculturating to the American context.

In a recent Australian study conducted on the well-being and health risk of Indian subcontinental immigrant adolescents (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans), Dey and Sitharthan (2016) found that these immigrants preferred integration as their acculturation strategy. However, not all members of the same ethnic group used the same strategies to accommodate themselves in the new Australian society. The immigrant adolescents reported acculturative stress within their familial and environmental contexts while finding a balance between maintaining their original cultural heritage and simultaneously accepting the mainstream culture. The study demonstrated a need for more research that investigates the parental role in supporting their children's integration into the mainstream society, with a view to safeguarding their psychological well-being. Thus, it can be argued that immigrant families may experience challenges when finding a balance between their own values, beliefs and expectations that are maintained at home versus those practised by their children in the host external environment, and more significantly at school. As such, not all immigrant parents may choose to impart their original cultural values and belief systems along with their educational expectations onto their children.

In response to culture-specific differences and acculturation processes among young immigrants, Sonderegger and Barrett (2004) examined the cultural adjustment patterns of ethnically diverse immigrants in Australia. In a sample of 273 primary and high school students



(comprised of former-Yugoslavian and Chinese cultural groups), the study found patterns of cultural adjustment differed for children and adolescents according to cultural background, gender, age and length of stay in Australia. Former-Yugoslavian immigrants reported greater identification and involvement with Australian cultural norms than Chinese immigrant youth. This suggested that because former-Yugoslavian and Anglo Australians share a predominantly Caucasian population base and have similar sociocultural norms and language aspects, former-Yugoslavian students are better able to identify with their Australian peers than Chinese students. A sense of belonging to the Australian culture among all participants increased significantly with more time spent in Australia. Although the current study does not focus on comparing the familial acculturation processes based on the ranging levels of residency in Australia, Sonderegger and Barrett's (2004) study reinforces how significant the parents' role within an acculturation process is for mediating children's career pathway decisions.

Given the extant literature around acculturation experiences in various sociocultural contexts other than Australia, it is imperative to further investigate multiple immigrant groups within an Australian educational context. Furthermore, pre-immigration experiences such as cultural beliefs, educational values and past schooling experiences can influence immigrants' adaptation patterns considerably (Titzmann et al., 2011). The lack of information in the literature on familial acculturation experiences in Australia hinders the capacity to fully understand students' thinking around subject choice and their post-secondary career decisions. Having discussed the significance and implications of immigrant parental beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation processes in shaping children's subject choice and career pathway decisions, the next section discusses the worth of understanding school career counsellors' and teachers' perceptions about the parental role in the development of students' subject choice thinking process.

### **3.4 School CPT Leaders' Understanding of Parental Influence on Student Subject Choice**

To the extent that parental beliefs and expectations can reflect the value parents place on children's education, additionally, probing into how schools and teachers, in their communication with parents, understand parents' own aspirations and expectations for their children warrants formal study (Mayo & Siraj, 2015). An educator's attitude, for example,

can be the most significant factor affecting parental involvement in schooling (Erdener, 2016). Most educators and policy makers seek to establish strong connections between parents and school personnel to promote successful student achievement outcomes (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Holloway & Kunesh, 2015; Sheridan & Kim, 2015). In a recent attempt to create a framework of parental contributions and parental needs, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) combined the elements of a number of models that elaborated hierarchies for involvement. They identified eight types of parental involvement: communication, liaison, education, support, information, collaboration, resource and policy. Similarly, Epstein (2001) distinguished six types of parental involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, home tutoring, involvement in decision-making, and collaboration with the community. Epstein's model presented family, school and community as overlapping spheres of influence, yet when there are expectations for the school career counsellors and parents to plan successful career counselling outcomes for children together, schools generally have limited understanding and experience to implement this successfully (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lemon & Garvis, 2013). To date, few studies have explored the views from the "other side" (Holloway & Kunesh, 2015), namely the views of school CPT leaders with regard to parental influence on student subject choice and career pathway decisions. Therefore, part of the current study focuses on unveiling the congruence of parents' and career counsellors' perceptions, which is of considerable importance for the optimal career development of immigrant children.

Indeed, the focus on parent-school collaboration can currently be observed in a number of recent international initiatives (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012), as well as German initiatives (The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, 2013). These initiatives have focused on enabling parents from less- educated backgrounds to acquire the necessary information and competencies to better support their children's educational careers. On the domestic front, the NCDS (2011) acknowledges that school career practitioners and parents are key influencers of the post-secondary study and career development decisions of students coming from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds in Australia. These kinds of arguments highlight gaps in policies, especially when initiatives are taken to implement home-school partnerships in many schools throughout Australia. Therefore, more specific information is needed from the perspective of schools to establish how parental beliefs, values and expectations for their

children's future education can contribute to shaping and influencing students' thinking about their subject choice, leading to their eventual career pathways.

### **3.4.1 Career counsellors' and teachers' views on parental influence on subject choice.**

The importance of examining career counsellors and teachers' perceptions of parental influence on student subject choice cannot be understated because such views can impact on understanding adolescents' educational success and implementing parental involvement programs. In line with this, an older American study conducted by Barge and Loges (2003) articulated teacher's perceptions about the communicative activities of parents whose children were labelled at-risk to graduate from high school and prepare for college. Teachers occasionally specified that parents' attendance at parent-teacher conferences (e.g., an open house) was typically only when there was trouble or a risk of the student not performing well. The teachers presented their concerns and stated that they preferred frequent contact. They also demonstrated their discontent when parents initiated contact with school only towards the latter end of student performance.

Furthermore, Hollingsworth's (2015) recent study provided insight into what middle school teachers perceived as the leading contributors to successful parental and community involvement. Teachers agreed that parental involvement should begin at the elementary level and end when students graduate. However, the teacher perceptions were informative in revealing the various reasons for a decrease in parental involvement once students enter middle school. Some reasons for the decline included additional demands on parents' time, pressure from their child to be more independent, students' capability of articulating their own needs and less knowledge of the curriculum. When pressed to propose solutions for improvement in school-community relations, the teachers suggested facilitating and fostering a healthy welcoming environment for parents to partake more frequently in school communication. Hollingsworth (2015) also recommended that future studies should include perceptions of teachers at the high school level for grades 9 to 12, with a view to enabling school professionals to tap into resources that could support student academic and future career success. These year levels are considered a critical period for adolescents when they engage in their thinking of career goals. In addition, in Hollingsworth's (2015) study,

teachers overwhelmingly agreed that schools should not only educate their students, but also educate their parents. Several of the teachers believed that understanding parental expectations and goals for their children's education would contribute to student career success.

In relation to the perceptions of immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education, teachers in Theodorou's (2008) study described immigrant parents as "disinterested" and "little involved" in their children's education. Teacher perceptions acknowledged the hurdles faced by immigrant families in their adjustment to a new cultural environment. Despite these challenges, the teachers were critical of the parents' lack of involvement in their child's education. Rather, they interpreted the parents' absence as an indication of deficiency: lack of interest, lack of time, or lack of education. In relation to teachers' perceptions of barriers to immigrant parents' school involvement, Hill's (2009) American study identified the most frequent reasons for the lack of parental involvement. These included work schedules and a lack of education that resulted in parents' feeling of insecurity and fear when interacting with teachers. Parents were ignorant of the importance of them being involved in their children's education, and they did not know what questions to ask, or demonstrated a lack of interest in doing so. The teachers perceived such parents' lack of education to have drastic consequences on parents' communication with school personnel.

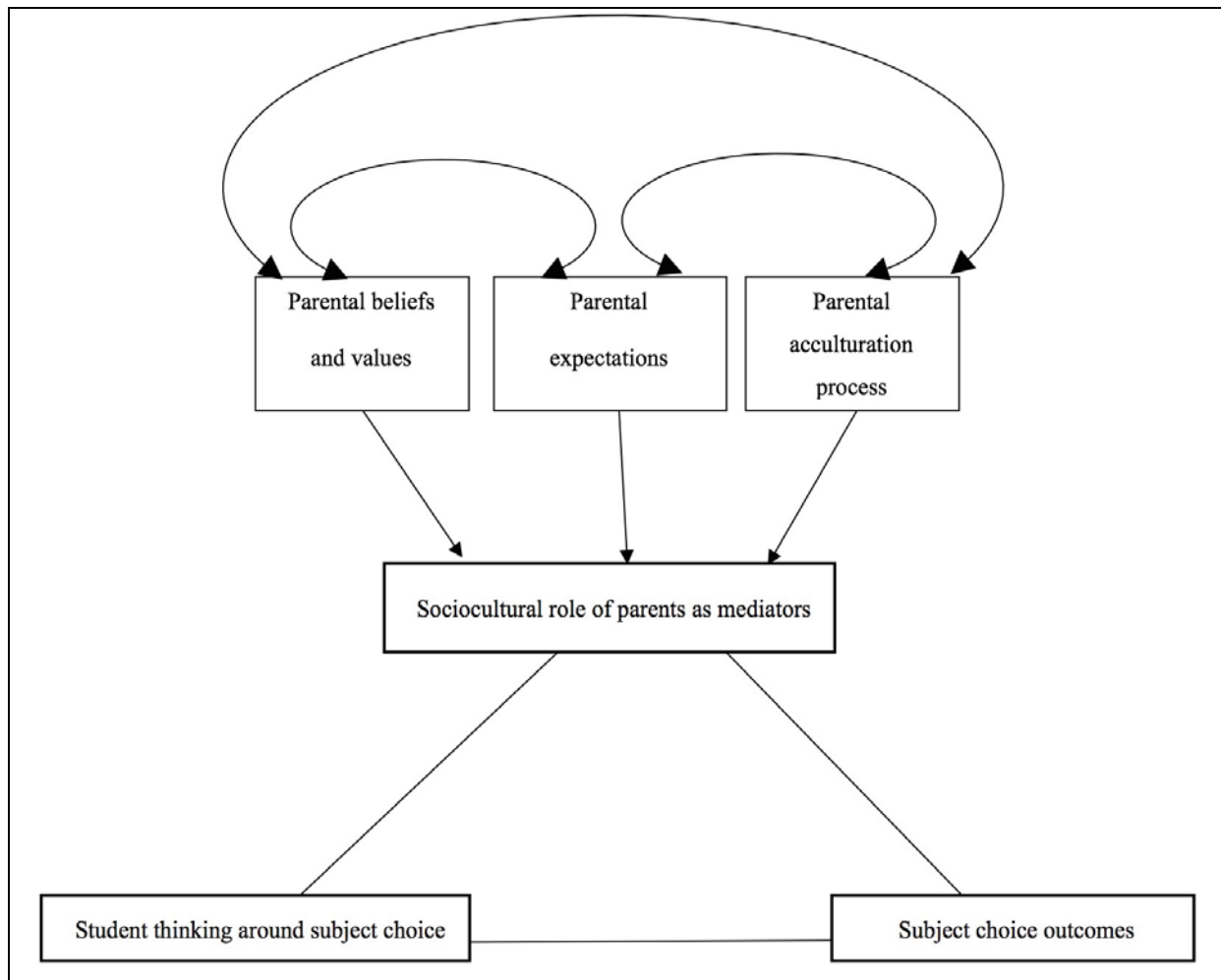
#### ***3.4.1.1 Role of career counsellors and teachers in student subject choice.***

With respect to how students viewed the role of teachers in influencing their academic outcomes, Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) asserted that based on evidence from a wide range of teacher–student interactions, students believe that their teachers can influence their view about subject selection and career aspirations. This American study recognised that students' satisfaction with school experiences was linked to their sense of belonging, connection to school and the related achievement. Findings also reflected a wide range of student attitudes that included positive as well as negative feelings about teachers and the educational system, which seemed to have some influence on student learning and academic achievement.

Moreover, in a recent Australian study on the role of career counsellors in enhancing secondary students' career development process, Vanin (2015) highlighted concerns over the implementation and delivery of student career pathway advice. The study indicated that secondary schools have disparate approaches to student career development. The career counsellors in Vanin's study were constantly confronted with factors such as a lack of understanding of students' personal and career needs and the sociological factors related to external influences that hindered their capacity to provide career advice. Students presented themselves as being uncertain and confused about their career choice and this impacted on their access to effective and beneficial career counselling. As such, Vanin's (2015) study argued the need for considering parents and family as the greatest external influence in mediating student career pathway decisions, although their study did not have data from parents to confirm the same. Recognising the fact that students grow and learn at home, at school, and in their communities, they may be influenced by mature partners consisting of families, teachers and career counsellors (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Bright (2014, p. 16) states that there has been 25 years of career development research in Australia; however, he questions where it is heading. Recent emphasis is on how career counsellors and parents can understand their own domain of influence to serve the common interest of formulating students' viable subject and career pathway decisions. Therefore, this study is appropriately placed in the present time and context of increasing pressure on schools and families to escalate their understanding of each other's role in the career development of secondary school students in Australia. Consequently, the current study's focus on fulfilling the research gap in investigating both career counsellors' perceptions of parental influence and parent-child perceptions of subject choice thinking is justified.

### **3.5 Devising a Conceptual Model for Student Subject Choice**

This study focuses on a conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) that draws on the previous (Chapter 2) and current discussions around the theoretical and sociocultural dimensions and lenses, including cultural tools. Parental beliefs, values, expectations and familial acculturation processes are considered to operate in conjunction to shape immigrant students' thinking around subject choice outcomes. To investigate these constructs for the purpose of this study, a model that has been adapted and extended from the conventional understanding of Vygotsky's mediation and internalisation constructs guided how the findings were interpreted and discussed.



*Figure 3.1.* Conceptual parental mediatory model in influencing student subject choice within a sociocultural context.

In the conceptual model (Figure 3.1), parents as part of students' sociocultural context are viewed as mediators, who, through their cultural tools of values, beliefs and expectations, influence students' perceptions about subject choices. When internalising the communicated parental beliefs, values and expectations, students accordingly formulate their subject choice and career decisions (Vygotsky, 1978). The conceptual model proposes that influence on student subject choice and career pathway decisions is a path mediated by parents. Extending the sociocultural role of parents as mediators, cultural tools such as parental beliefs, values and expectations are seen to mediate student subject choice. The role of culture is also considered to significantly impact on immigrant parents' beliefs, value systems, and educational expectations of their children. As reported by Berry et al. (2006), immigrant parents' expectations from their children are significantly shaped by their acculturation experiences as

an immigrant. Familial acculturation processes set up an integral part of their life experiences in the host country (Kusurkar, 2014). Thus, in the context of immigrant parents in Australia, it can be argued that their familial acculturation experiences are interrelated with their beliefs, values and expectations, which, when taken together, mediate children's subject choice thinking processes. Only when children's own thinking and values reflect that of their parents can parents then be considered as mediators in shaping students' career pathway decisions. This parental mediatory model will be crucial for presenting and discussing the findings while maintaining a focus on the aims of the study and the delineated research questions.

1. How do immigrant parents' beliefs, values and expectations about education influence their children's subject choice thinking?
2. How do familial acculturation processes influence immigrant children's subject choice thinking?
3. What are the perceptions of school CPT leaders in relation to immigrant parental influence on their children's subject choice thinking?

### **3.6 Chapter Summary**

At the heart of this study is a belief that parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's thinking about their subject choice and career pathway decisions. How effective the mediatory role of parents' beliefs, values, expectations, and acculturation process is in influencing student subject choice is the central question at hand. The literature reviewed in this chapter has not only helped in identifying gaps that have not been addressed in those studies, but has also shed light on the study's significance in the context of multicultural Australia. The next chapter outlines the qualitative paradigm and case study design that are used as the research methodology for this study.

## **CHAPTER 4: Researching Parental Role in Subject Choice - Research that Matters, Methodology that Counts**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the literature around the significance of studying immigrant parental influence, particularly how the differential aspects of parents' beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation processes influence students' subject choice thinking and career pathway decisions. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of a qualitative research paradigm with a constructivist approach. A case study research design is discussed, with a focus on the research methods, data collection procedures and techniques, and data analysis used in this study. While doing so, I have also addressed and provided explanations of issues pertaining to validity and credibility and the ethical considerations in the overall research process. Throughout this whole process, I define my role as being a researcher practitioner who set out with a passion for understanding how the parental sociocultural role as mediators influences the subject choice thinking and career making decisions of senior secondary students in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. In order to achieve this, three research questions were framed:

1. How do immigrant parents' beliefs, values and expectations about education influence their children's subject choice thinking?
2. How do familial acculturation processes influence immigrant children's subject choice thinking?
3. What are the perceptions of school CPT leaders in relation to immigrant parental influence on their children's subject choice thinking?

As specified in Chapter 2, using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), particularly the mediation framework, this study considered parent–student interactions and the school career counselling process as the contexts for understanding how students' subject choice thinking is developed and shaped. As part of students' sociocultural context, parents are viewed as mediators who, through their cultural tools such as beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation experiences, can influence and promote students' development of their own subject choice thinking (Rogoff, 1990). Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that to study



development, we are not simply concerned with the formulation of suitable theoretical frameworks, but we also need to match theory with appropriate methodologies and methods. Given the methodological situation that comprises ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, I considered a qualitative approach, specifically a case study method. Using a case study method, this study aimed to advance the understanding of the role of parents as mediators from a small sample of participants, which provided rich data in relation to the impact of the parents’ cultural tools on children’s subject choice thinking.

## **4.2 Researcher Practitioner’s Role and the Relationship with Parents**

Several scholars have asserted that in our endeavours to understand the nature of a problem, we are heavily dependent upon our own experiences and authority and their value in a given context (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The questions I address in this study stem from my own recent experiences and liaising with parents as a science and maths teacher and the Head of Science Domain at one of the participating secondary schools in the Western Metropolitan Region (WMR) of Melbourne, Victoria.

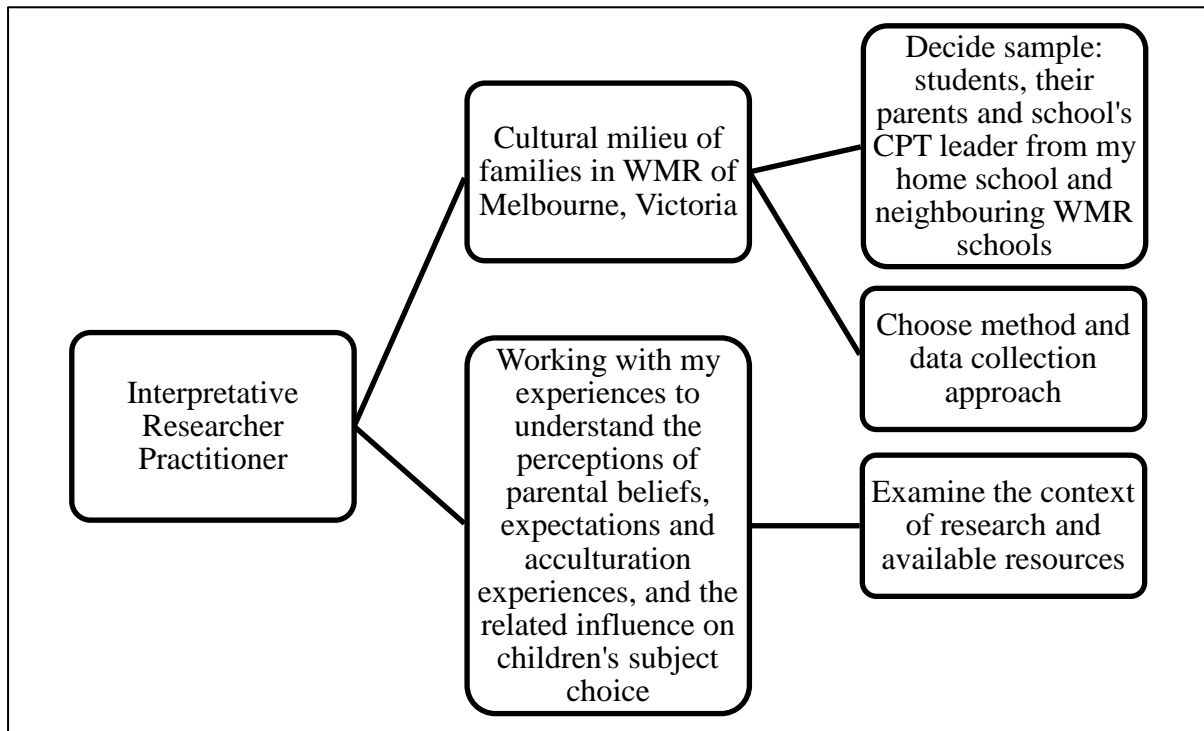
As Wilkinson (2000) concurred, a researcher practitioner assists in evaluating a specific problem or contributing to the learning of a discipline, such as educational research or improving the quality of the practitioner-researcher’s practice (Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007). To explore the notion of the parental mediatory role, I relied heavily on my experiences and reasoning during the path to research. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that I position myself in this study as a ‘researcher practitioner’ (Fox et al., 2007).

One of the most prominent challenges was to find a suitable theoretical framework that aligned with the research questions. Nevertheless, I followed a rigorous methodological path to explore the parental role and their involvement in their children’s subject choice decisions within the context of the school career counselling process. Furthermore, my daily and weekly interactions with parents, the conducting of parent–teacher interviews, and attendance at various school functions such as the Parent and Friends group, Parent Information Night on student careers, and the Year 12 graduation, situated me in the context as a participant observer. I struggled to provide myself with competing explanations about how parents could influence their children’s thinking around subject choices and the related impact on students’ future career decisions. Such firsthand experiences triggered questions and queries at that time, which

were left unattended and unanswered. Consequently, I decided to frame these as the key questions of my research problem and investigate them as a case study.

Another important factor to consider within my role as the researcher practitioner was my involvement as the Head of Science Domain (during my four years tenure at the time) at my home school. In my liaison with the school's student career counselling team and the CPT leader, I was involved in the organisation of science subject descriptions and the advertising of science subject pamphlets for parents. I was also involved in keeping track of data on students enrolled in science subjects. Additionally, I was involved in providing maths subject recommendations to the career counselling team in my role as a Year 9 and Year 10 maths teacher. It is worthwhile to mention here that the CPT leader has a significant role in organising career counselling for students, including interviews with their parents regarding student subject choices. These experiences gave me critical insights into the whole subject selection process at my school. My overall involvement in the school's subject selection process for students was a motivation to investigate why immigrant families in particular could be in the spotlight to investigate the ways in which their communication with their children, the CPT leaders and the school can influence students' subject choices. This could question the parental roles and the implications for their children's subject choices and eventual career decisions. From this perspective, I decided to focus my research problem on immigrant parents and their children to demystify some of the factors, including the ways they understand student subject selection, and how they engage in communicating with their children's subject selection, the CPT leaders and the school. This research thus took a sociocultural point of view in addressing such issues. Additionally, since the nature of this study was exploratory, I adopted an interpretative orientation (Thomas, 2011). This interpretivist paradigm was used as a vehicle for analysing and illustrating immigrant parental influences on children's subject choice outcomes.

Figure 4.1 presents the stages of planning my methodological approach, which aimed to gain a holistic understanding of parental and student perceptions, as well as the third party perspective sought from the school's CPT leaders. It was also critical to explore and review existing research on the topic to keep my bearings up-to-date. A review of the literature helped me to develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic. In the following sections of this chapter, the research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis techniques employed in this study are presented.

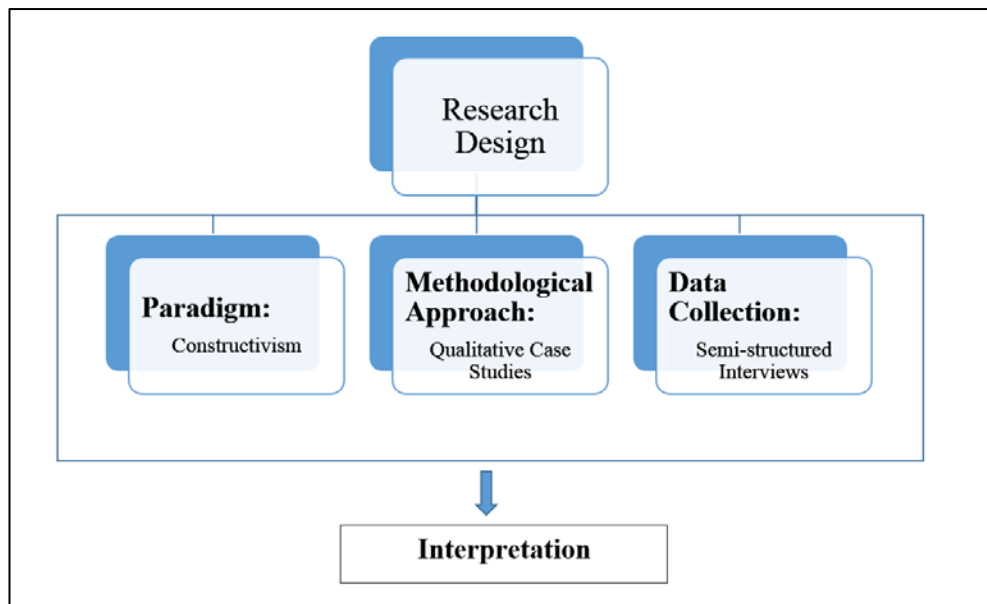


*Figure 4.1.* Stages of planning my methodological approach.

### 4.3 Research Design for Investigating the Parental Role

This study focuses on the importance of a social constructivism paradigm; when people use experience, common sense, evidence, logic and theories to make sense of the world, they are constructing meaning (Merriam, 2009). Figure 4.2 illustrates the essentials of the research design. In a constructivism paradigm, knowledge is everywhere and socially constructed (Thomas, 2013). That is to say, what is perceived by me might be viewed differently by others. Making sense of the world and related events is constructed by each of us in a different way. For me as a researcher practitioner, the main point was to engage in a research approach that would permit the exploration and interpretation of parental influences on their children's subject choice thinking. Hence, this study was also interpretivist in nature. I was interested in looking at what parents and students think and perceive, and how they form their ideas about subject choice and career decisions. To achieve this aim, I needed to attend to every nuance of their behaviour, thinking and perceptions, and consequently make meaning (Thomas, 2013). An interpretivist approach warrants an appropriate methodology of its own and, as a qualitative approach, it emphasises making meaning (Carrington & Scott, 2011). My role as a researcher practitioner was central to interpreting the meanings of participants' experiences through a qualitative case study approach. I used semi-structured interviews as

the method of data collection, and the rationale for using a single approach method is provided in the forthcoming sections of this chapter.



*Figure 4.2.* Research design for investigating parental role in student subject choice.

#### **4.3.1 Constructivism.**

In using a constructivist approach, the aim was to elicit and understand how parents and students constructed their individual and shared meanings around determining subject choices (Charmaz, 2006). Particular to constructivism was the interpretation and construction of meaning of the participants' experiences and views. Additionally, it was at my discretion as the researcher to interpret what was seen and observed in the data or research environment. From a researcher practitioner perspective, I adopted an interpretative stance on the analysis, and focused on aspects that related to the social construction of knowledge, which purported to meanings, perceptions and experiences of both parents and their children (Bryman, 2012). In this position, it was necessary to acknowledge the role of values, bias and experiences within the research process, which is discussed in further detail in the forthcoming sections of this chapter.

#### **4.3.2 Methodological approach.**

Given the qualitative nature of the research focus, the line of inquiry favoured a case study approach, which was particularly useful when looking at the process of how parents influence their children's thinking around subject decisions (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, Yin (2014)

considered that case study approaches are preferred when examining contemporary events, such as what goes on in a school over a period of time, perhaps at a particular year level or in a particular class. Similarly, Creswell (2013) advocated that when a researcher employs a case study approach in their research, they are most likely identifying a single entity to study. It then becomes the researcher's task to identify the case and set the subsequent boundaries. Although, the term 'case' is broadly defined, typical examples of the subject of a case analysis include social communities, persons, or organisations (Flick, 2009). Given that little research has been done on how parents' beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation experiences can shape their children's subject choice thinking, this focus aligned well with employing a case study approach.

In relation to whether the research should take a single or multiple case study approach, Baxter and Jack (2008) contended that unlike in a single case study, in a multiple case study the researcher studies multiple cases to understand the similarities and differences between the cases. Similarly, Vannoni (2014) purported that a multiple case study enables the researcher to holistically point out the influences based on the differences and similarities between cases, which in this study was illustrating immigrant parents' influences on children's subject choices. In addition, Stake (2013) suggested that when a study includes more than one single case, a multiple case study is needed. In line with these ideas, I employed a multiple case study approach to understand and research the ways in which immigrant parents and their children speak of their experiences and perceptions. The focus was on the participants' perspectives and how to interpret their meaning (Padgett, 2008). The aim was to provide insights from the parental point of view to ascertain whether cultural tools, such as parents' beliefs, values and expectations for children's education and familial acculturation experiences, were internalised into children's thinking while making informed subject decisions. Moreover, such perceived influences could be better researched and understood by deeply analysing participants' responses in the forms of words and descriptive data, rather than through numerical data (Bryman, 2012). It was about thinking with an open system perspective and accordingly asking questions from multiple points of view of parents, their children and the school CPT leaders (Longhofer, Hoy, & Floersch, 2013).

In this multiple case study, each case is defined as a 'parent-student' dyad. In total, I considered 11 parent-student cases from three participating Australian schools in the WMR of Melbourne, Victoria. The rationale for considering these multiple parent-student cases was to

reveal whether or not individual cases would share some common and contrasting characteristics that would provide an in-depth understanding of the research questions (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). Besides, I anticipated that by using 11 cases, there was a possibility that these 11 cases would bring in new information, thus enriching and ensuring multiple perspectives of the shared concept of interest (Stake, 2013).

## **4.4 Sampling**

Three secondary schools from the WMR of Melbourne, Victoria took part in this study. Additionally, 11 parents and their 11 children who attended the three participating schools took part in this research. Purposive sampling was used to select the parent–student participants. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013). Using purposive sampling allowed for gathering of in-depth information from a small number of participants, which I termed a ‘parent–student dyad’. The school CPT leaders were called ‘Miscellaneous Participants’.

Moreover, in the context of the students’ subject selection and career counselling process, parents, their children and the school CPT leaders had frequent acquaintances with each other while engaging either in seeking or disseminating career course information, respectively. The reason for selecting both parent and their child was to ascertain whether there was any mutual interchange in the parental and student perceptions of how parents’ beliefs and values, expectations and acculturation experiences influenced students’ thinking around their subject and career pathway decisions. The interviews with the CPT leaders and gaining knowledge of their perceptions were crucial for validating the parent–student perceptions, thus providing reciprocity of benefit for parents, students and school while working together on the research problem (Kervin, Vialle, Howard, Herrington, & Okely, 2015).

### **4.4.1 Demographics of participants.**

Data drawn from the ABS (2011) were used to identify the background and ethnicities of the parent–student participants. The ABS (2011) showed that immigrant families from the Asian and Mediterranean parts of the world were of a dominant spread, and, as such, were the student

enrolments in the WMR schools. For example, the ABS 2011 data outlined that in Taylors Lakes, one of the WMR suburbs, Greeks, Italians, Serbians and Macedonians formed about 25 per cent of the ethnicity. Whereas, Indians, Filipinos and Vietnamese comprised approximately 5 per cent. In the WMR suburb of St. Albans, Indian and Vietnamese ethnicities took the lead with 26 per cent whereas Greeks, Italians and Serbians collectively totalled nearly 9 per cent (ABS, 2011). These data are accurate according to the most recent ABS (2011) data being available, since the recent 2016 census.

The contributing factor of the low Socioeconomic Status (SES) background of WMR schools was also taken into account. The overall plan consisted of recruiting participants from three public schools in the WMR of Victoria, which has a high immigrant population. The three schools were chosen based on information obtained from the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) value for schools, as shown on the *My School* website (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, ACARA, 2014a, 2014b). ICSEA was developed by ACARA and are calculated on a scale, which has a median of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100. The ICSEA values typically range from approximately 500 (representing extremely educationally disadvantaged backgrounds) to around 1300 (representing schools with students with very educationally advantaged backgrounds) (ACARA, 2014a). The participating WMR schools have a low ICSEA value, ranging between 900 and 1000. This contributing factor of the school's ICSEA value was kept controlled for the purpose of this research, given that the focus of the study was on immigrant families and not on the type of schools the immigrants went to. Since this study takes a qualitative approach, it was not thought feasible to include immigrant families who had children enrolled in private or Catholic Independent schools. The focused context for this study is immigrants enrolled in the WMR public and low SES schools. All the participating schools had a designated CPT leader who played a central role in directly communicating with the parents and students during the career counselling and subject selection process. With the assistance of the CPT leaders, the intention was to make the data as representative as possible in terms of confirming the know-how of parental influences on their children's subject choice thought processes.

#### **4.4.2 Parent–student recruitment process.**

The recruitment of parent–student participants was completed in accordance with Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) procedure (see Appendix A).

Permission to conduct research in WMR schools was also sought from the Department of Education and Training in Victoria (see Appendix B). In order to recruit the participants, an advertisement was published in the school's newsletter, and displayed around the career counsellor's office and school library. The advertisement focused on explaining the nature of the study (see Appendix C). Students and their parents responded to advertisements placed in each school with the principal's permission. Explanatory statements for both parents and children (see Appendix D) and consent forms (see Appendices E and F) for this study were then given to the potential parents and students. Both students' and parents' consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. It was clearly mentioned in the explanatory statement and consent forms that interviews with the parents and their children would be conducted separately. Interested parents were then given a questionnaire (refer to Table 4.1) with a view to ascertaining their ethnicity, educational level, country where they went to school and the number of years living in Australia. Additionally, in the explanatory statement, parents and students were informed about what the study sought to achieve and what their involvement would entail. Prospective families interested in the research were then invited to contact me directly via the contact details stated in the advertisement and explanatory statement.

Table 4.1

*Parent questionnaire items*

<b>Background questions</b>						
Ethnicity	_____					
Educational qualification	Up to 10	Yr	Up to 12	Yr	Graduate degree (Please specify _____)	Postgraduate degree (Please specify _____) Other _____ (Please specify)
Employment	Working		Home maker		Business-owner	Other _____ (Please specify)
Language/s spoken at home	_____					
How long has your family been living in Australia	_____ years					



#### 4.4.3 Parent–student profile.

Table 4.2 provides a detailed profile of parents and students.

Table 4.2

*Parent–student profile summary*

Parent Name	Student Name	Ethnicity	Parent's (Mother's) Profession	Parents' (Mother's) Educational Background	Parent Schooling Country	Student Year Level
Jo	Emma	Italian	School accountant	Bachelor's degree	Australia	Year 11
Beth	Lee	Spanish	Teaching aide	Bachelor's degree	Spain	Year 10
Michelina	Nick	Polish	High school English teacher	Master's Degree	Poland	Year 11
Eira	Mira	Serbian	Office	Year 12	Australia	Year 11
Susan	Zenith	Syrian	Homemaker	Year 12	Australia	Year 10
Danielle	Alex	Serbian	Homemaker	Year 12	Serbia	Year 12
Meena	Kul	Indian	Self-employed	Bachelor's degree	India	Year 11
Bibi	Deep	Indian	Factory worker	Year 10	India	Year 10
Lina	Zani	Philippines	Teaching Assistant	Bachelor's degree	Philippines	Year 10
Raji	Pilka	Indian	Beautician/hair dresser	Master's degree	India	Year 10
Ishi	Meher	Bangladesh	Doctor	Medical degree	Bangladesh	Year 12

By means of purposive sampling, this study sought participants from different ethnic backgrounds, but the parents' educational level or English proficiency were not scrutinised. However, parents' educational levels and related past schooling experiences became an important part of the data. Therefore, parents' current jobs and experiences have also been listed in Table 4.2 to shed more light on their perspectives of their own past educational and current career experiences. These profiles played an important role when analysing the results presented in the findings chapter. Moreover, it can be seen from Table 4.2 that parents who came forward to be interviewed were predominantly mothers of the immigrant children. Again, this study did not intend to compare mothers' or fathers' influences on their children's subject choice decisions. As such, a gender balance in the parents was not sought. With only 11 parents, all were mothers.

Student participants were chosen from the upper secondary cohort (Years 10–12), as students choose their electives from Year 10 onwards (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, VCAA, 2014). These subjects are typically chosen a year ahead for the following academic year and progressively for the subsequent years up until the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE, Year 12). In the Australian senior education system, students have a choice of completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) or the Victorian Curriculum of Applied Learning (VCAL). A VCE leads to university based tertiary courses, whereas the VCAL leads to diploma based courses offered by TAFE tertiary institutes. In addition, students have the choice of a variety of mathematics-based subjects that include Foundation Maths, General Maths, Maths Methods, and Specialist Maths; whereas, English is a compulsory subject up to Year 12. Table 4.3 shows the list of subjects chosen by the 11 student participants for their progressive year. Whilst this research had no intention of comparing the aspirations of male and female students, gender balance amongst the chosen student participants was, however, taken into consideration. This ensured equal representation of students of both genders from the participating co-educational schools. In addition, a mixture of students who had chosen a wide variety of subjects was sought.

Table 4.3

*List of student subjects chosen for the progressive year*

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Chosen Subjects</b>
Emma	Year 11	Accelerated Business, Accelerated Maths, English, Psychology, Health and Human Development, Legal Studies
Lee	Year 10	English, Media, Information Technology (IT), Legal studies, VET - Soccer sport, Accelerated Maths
Nick	Year 11	Psychology, English, Literature, IT, Legal Studies, General Maths
Mira	Year 11	English, Chemistry, Biology, Maths Methods, Physical Education (PE), Music
Zenith	Year 10	English, Maths, Forensic Science, Biology, Psychology, Textiles
Alex	Year 12	English, Maths Methods, Specialist Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Physics
Kul	Year 11	Biology, Chemistry, Maths Methods, Year 12 Maths, Politics, English
Deep	Year 10	Fitness, VCE Psychology, Health and Human Development, Personal Finance, English, Maths, History
Zani	Year 10	Maths Methods, Psychology, PE, Visual Communication, Electronics, Advanced English
Pilka	Year 10	English, Advanced Maths, Psychology, VET - Sports and Recreation, French, Drive and Survive
Meher	Year 12	English, Maths Methods, Chemistry, Health and Human Development, Physics, Biology

#### 4.4.4 Career and pathways transition leaders.

Within this group of participants were the three CPT leaders of the three participating schools. Reflecting on my own experiences as the Science Faculty Leader and having been involved in the context of the subject selection process, I was fully aware of the dynamic role and liaison the CPT leaders have with parents and students during subject selection. Since the intention of this study was to understand perceived parental influences on their child's subject choices, it was imperative to seek the responses from this group of participants in order to validate and triangulate parent and student responses. Explanatory statements (see Appendix G) and consent forms (see Appendix H) were provided to the principals of six schools in the WMR of Melbourne, Victoria, of which three principals responded. After seeking permission from the school principals, the CPT leaders in their school were contacted and given the consent form (see Appendix I). The timings for the individual semi-structured interviews were then arranged. Table 4.4 gives an overview of the CPT leaders' profile.

Table 4.4

*Career and pathway transition school leaders' profile*

Item	Designation at school	Gender	Number of years of career counselling experience	Number of years of teaching experience
CPT 1	CPT Leader	Female	15	N/A
CPT 2	CPT Leader and Senior School Assistant Principal	Male	10	30
CPT 3	CPT Leader	Male	9	20

#### 4.5 Interviews

As previously indicated, the data were generated through semi-structured open-ended interviews. The interviews were conducted from February 2015 to May 2015, which is Term 1 of the Victorian school year and after students had selected their subjects for the subsequent year.

Figure 4.3 depicts the timeline when the parent, student and CPT leader interviews were conducted as part of the data collection phase.

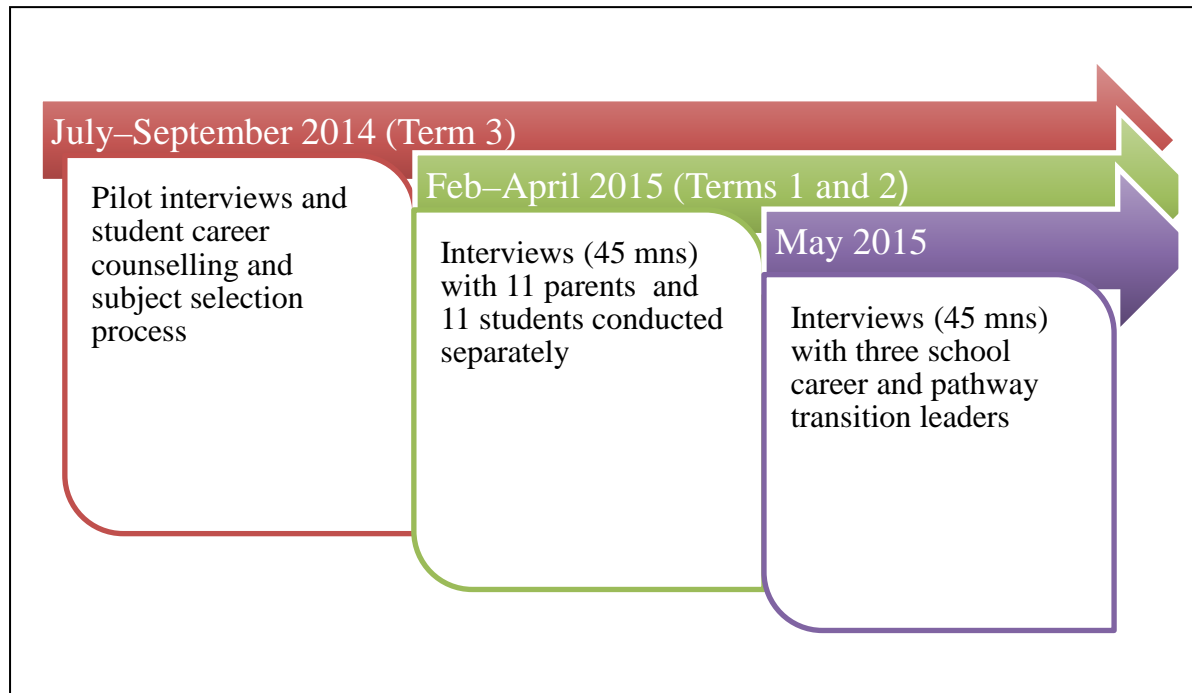


Figure 4.3. Timeline for data collection involving parent, student and CPT leader interviews.

#### 4.5.1 Pilot interviews.

Pilot interviews were conducted in order to gauge the reliability of the interview questions. It was also important to ensure that the data collected fulfilled the research requirements (Yin, 2014). The interviews were conducted with two parents and their two children, each of whom had voluntarily agreed to take part in the pilot study of this research. Thereafter, I critically appraised the applicability of the guiding interview questions. For example, I realised that both parents and students mentioned the critical role played by the CPT leaders during the subject selection process. As such, piloting the questions was informative for contextualising and understanding the implications of the CPT leaders in the process of student subject choice. Additionally, the parents' awareness of what was offered by the CPT leaders was also considered while refining the interview protocol. This process allowed restructuring of the questions to create more targeted questions and the improvement of the interview schedule. This was an illuminating aspect of conducting the pilot study, because trialling the interview questions on a small scale aided to check their viability for answering the research questions (Kervin et al., 2015).

Moreover, in order to elicit both the respondents' general views and their response to more specific concerns, such as their experiences and involvement during the schools' career counselling process, this part of the interview schedule was constructed as a funnel (Smith & Osborn, 2008). With the feedback from the pilot participants, such a funnelling technique was employed in order to specifically address the study's research questions. Instead of having questions only about the participants' general understanding of the school's career counselling process, specific questions were included in the interview schedule. For example, in the parent interviews, the general question included was: "What type of acquaintances have you had with the school during the career counselling process"? An example of a specific question included was: "Can you briefly describe, giving examples, if and how did you communicate with the school's CPT team about your child's available subject choices"? Thus, utilisation of the funnelling technique firstly obtained the participants' views about the career counselling process in general before funnelling them into more specific questions around student subject choice.

#### **4.5.2 Interview schedule.**

A standardised interview format was employed, where pre-determined and open-ended questions were administered followed by clarification and elaboration. The semi structured interview format was based on the study conducted by Bhalla & Weiss (2010) that involved investigating parental influences on students' sports subject participation. In doing so, the theoretical concepts of the study and the research questions were taken into consideration. This was the most important step, for only careful formulation of objectives will eventually produce the right kind of data necessary for satisfactory answers to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2011). The interview questions were also carefully reviewed after taking into consideration the responses and feedback from the two pilot interviews conducted prior to the main data collection. The guiding interview questions and their role in the investigation of the research questions are provided in the Tables 4.5 and 4.6. The effectiveness of these interview questions is discussed in greater length in the findings chapters.

Table 4.5

*Interview protocol addressing research questions 1 and 2*

Research Questions 1 and 2	Data Source	Guiding Interview Questions
1. How do parents' beliefs, values and expectations about education influence their children's subject choice thinking?	Parents	1. What are the influences of everyday family practices, values and beliefs on your child's subject choice? 2. How do your educational expectations influence your child's subject choice? 3. What are the influences of your past experiences of schooling and current careers on your child's subject choice? 4. What are the influences of your migration experiences on your child's subject choice? 5. In what ways were you involved in your child's subject choice decisions?
2. How do familial acculturation experiences influence immigrant children's subject choice thinking?	Students	1. What are your perceptions of your familial everyday practices, values and beliefs? How has that had an influence on subject choice? 2. How do you perceive your parents' educational expectations to have an influence on subject choice? 3. What are your perceptions of how your parents' past experiences of schooling and current careers have had an influence on subject choice? 4. What are the influences of your family's migration experiences on your subject choice decisions? 5. How have your parents been involved with your subject choice decisions?

Table 4.6

*Interview protocol addressing research question 3*

Research Question 3	Data Source	Guiding Interview Questions
What are the perceptions of school career and pathway transition leaders in relation to parental influence in their children's subject choice?	Career and pathways transition leaders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How are parents involved with school during the career counselling process? How does that influence the student's subject choice?</li> <li>2. Can you briefly describe, giving examples, if and how parents communicate with you and/CPT team about their child's available subject choices?</li> <li>3. How do you think parental background, beliefs and educational experiences might influence their child's subject and career pathway choices?</li> <li>4. Overall, what are your beliefs about parental influences on their child's subject and career choices?</li> </ol>

## 4.6 Ethical Considerations

As this research project involved human participants, ethical issues were of significant concern. Since one of the participating schools involved my own school context, an unequal relationship (power relationship) might exist between myself, being the teacher, and the students at the school (Bryman, 2012). As such, students who were directly taught and assessed by me were excluded on the presumption that there might be an unequal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. It was also ensured that participation in this study was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any time they thought they needed to. These logistics of participants' voluntary contribution to this study were clarified in the MUHERC explanatory statements and consent forms.

In addition, it was clearly outlined in the parent and student explanatory statement that participation was not a type of assessment. I also clarified that the participation of the school's CPT leader was voluntary, just as in the case of the students, and that they were not expected to force students to participate. With respect to confidentiality, it was clearly stated



in the consent forms that the original data would be kept in secrecy, and no third party could access it. The issue of anonymity was addressed by assigning a pseudonym for each of the participants.

The issue of confidentiality was addressed by incorporating an explanation within the consent forms that all data would be kept confidential in a storage system at Monash University over a period, and only be accessible to the researchers. To elicit honest and information-rich responses, I maintained eye contact, paraphrased and assured the participants that there were no right or wrong answers (Patton, 2002). I endeavoured every possible care to gain the confidence of the interviewees. Students were also reassured that their interviews, which were conducted separately from their parents, would not be made available to their parents, and vice versa. As such, they were encouraged to be honest in their answers.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my role as the researcher practitioner in the entirety of this research study was not flawless. Using an interpretivist paradigm, my position as an insider was central to the nature of the interpretation (Thomas, 2013). To strengthen the essence of this study as a researcher practitioner, I had to remind myself to be positioned as a foreigner (Robson, 2011). I had to be careful and aware of my own assumptions or cultural biases. I had to remind myself of the ethical responsibilities as a researcher, and to seek an understanding of what is going on by “telling as it is” (Robson, 2011, p. 219). I was ready to realise, appreciate and accept all information I obtained from my participants as they were. In presenting an interpretative research, I had to accept my subjectivity and not be afraid of it (Thomas, 2013). Admittedly, it was a challenge to be non-judgemental and sensitive to participants’ responses. Nevertheless, such issues were overcome as the data collection phase progressed and I realised the value-laden nature of what are to be taken as facts (Robson, 2011).

#### **4.7 Reliability and Validity of Data**

This section discusses how the issues relating to safeguarding the reliability and validity of this research were addressed. While reliability is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own, as validity indicates that the data are authentic, that is “whether we are measuring what we said we are going to measure” (Kervin et al., 2015, p. 22). For a test to be reliable, it also needs to be valid, as this is “vital for interpreting and generalising research” (Kervin et al., 2015, p. 22). Similarly, Patton (2002) stated that validity and reliability are two factors that any qualitative researcher

should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. As expressed in the previous sections, this research followed a qualitative approach employing semi-structured interviews. In my every effort to enhance the content validity of the emerging data, I discussed the intended interview questions with my supervisor and my esteemed school colleagues at the time (Thomas, 2013). I endeavoured to seek their feedback in regard to any ambiguities that they thought could potentially arise whilst interviewing the parents and students. To corroborate the accuracy of the questions, reflection notes from the conducted pilot interviews proved to be very useful, particularly with reorganising the interview questions. In addition, the trial of the interview questions reinforced that I should not lead the interview process and helped me to become a confident researcher interviewer.

In order to maintain the “quality control” (Krueger, 1998, p. 65) of the interviews, the purpose of the interview and my expectations were clarified to the students. Whilst the explanatory statement prepared for the student clearly explained in writing that the interview was not a sort of assessment but my purpose was to understand how parental influences could affect their subject selection. In an assessment-oriented education system, this assurance to the participants was essential, and it was stressed that there was no correct or incorrect answer to the questions asked in the interviews. This verbal communication helped me to maintain a non-judgemental environment for the students during the interview sessions, thus enriching the credibility of the emerging data (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In addition, the findings have been interpreted and reported based on what I have been told, rather than on my own opinions and predispositions (Thomas, 2013). As such, it can be said that the study can be considered valid, credible and useful.

During the interview, I played the role of a moderator. I was aware of the need to keep the respondent focused on a particular topic and to “control the dynamic” within the conversation (Babbie, 2011, p. 344). This was critical for providing honest opportunities for the respondent to participate fully. Most importantly, my task was to carefully listen to the participants and take utmost care to not to share my individual point of view with them, but rather listen carefully to their conversations. Necessary probes and follow-up questions were used to prompt a range of views and experiences from the participants throughout the interviews (Gray, 2009). This allowed me to establish the consistency of measuring what I was

intending to measure and to ensure that their responses were reliable and not affected by my judgements (Kervin et al., 2015).

With respect to the truthfulness of the findings, I had the obligation to represent the realities of the participants and provide assurances in the findings that this obligation was accounted for (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Razavieh, 2010). I also had the task of ensuring that my interpretation of the participants' responses was credible and a "truth value" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 498), meaning that a true picture of the phenomenon of parental influences on student subject choice had been presented. As such, in order to overcome the danger of biased understanding, I used member checking as a tool to enhance and produce valid and reliable data for this study (Cho & Trent, 2006). It also aided in triangulation of the data, which is described in the next section.

#### **4.8 Triangulation of Data**

Cohen et al. (2011) defined triangulation as the use of two or more methods or data sources while studying human behaviour. Similarly, Thomas (2013) described triangulation as corroboration and coming to a conclusion about something being the case. Therefore, only one piece of evidence or data is sometimes not enough. That means, by analogy, triangular techniques can also be employed whilst looking at a problem from more than one standpoint, which is done in an attempt to explain the richness and complexity of interpretation of human behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011). For the purpose of this case study research, the viewpoints of parents and their children were critical to unfold and to elucidate the details of the immigrant parents' sociocultural role as mediators in influencing subject choices. For example, listening to the perspectives from only one side can be biased, and would result in a lack in confidence of the emerging data. Moreover, understanding the multiple data sources of the viewpoints of both parents and students, and at the same time from a third party perspective of the CPT leaders was crucial for providing valuable insights into the problem and improving the chances of consistent findings. This also encouraged me to be more confident in the explanation of my findings. Since my study adopted a singular method approach, I felt triangulation was needed to corroborate and seek alternative kinds of perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation (Thomas, 2013). It was also anticipated that triangulation would address any questions raised about whether the study findings can justifiably be applied to another setting and thus be generalised (Ary et al., 2010). Having explained the significance of triangulation

in this study, I now move on to discuss how I use member checking to establish the completeness of this current interpretative research.

#### **4.8.1 Member checking.**

As indicated previously, triangulation is commonly used to validate studies. However, this may not be the only way to overcome misunderstandings in data interpretation. In order to rectify this and steer away from making imprecise judgements about the data, I used member checking as a tool. Member checking is considered a reflexive mode of knowledge production that establishes rigour by completing triangulation (Cho & Trent, 2006). Additionally, Lincoln and Guba advise researchers that “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (1985, p. 314) is through “member checks”, which involve showing materials such as interview transcripts and research reports to the people on whom the research has been done, so that they can indicate their agreement or disagreement with the way in which the researcher has represented them. Re-examining the findings through the method of member checking allows for more accuracy, which is defined as member validation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Seale, 1999). In line with this reasoning, to seek a reliable source of data information, the participants were offered the opportunity to check the transcript to ensure that what they actually mentioned had been coded and written. This, in turn, aimed to enhance the reliability of the data collected by empowering the participants and re-orienting the focus of the research.

Moreover, I read the interview transcripts twice to ensure no arising themes had been left out or repeated. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) claimed that to achieve validity and reliability in qualitative research, elimination of bias and increasing the researcher’s truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon should be sought. Minimisation of bias was thoughtfully upheld by adhering to the guiding interview protocol. Particularly, no judgements regarding culturally sensitive conversations were made. The interview questions were also kept open ended.

### **4.9 Data Analysis**

The process of qualitative data analysis can be described as involving as much “art” as “science” as a “dance”, in the words of William Miller and Benjamin Crabtree (1999, pp. 138-139). This section describes how I went about the dynamic and crafty interpretation of my data, and the steps and procedures undertaken to identify the various codes, categories and themes

that were used to present and analyse the findings. The goal was to capture the experiences and perceptions of my participants, namely parents, their children and the career leaders who produced the data on their own terms, rather than in terms of predefined measures and hypotheses (Schutt, 2015). To achieve this goal, thematic data analysis was completed in two stages: firstly, the analysis of the interviews with the 11 parent–student dyads, and secondly, analysis of interviews with the three school CPT leaders.

All data were processed using NVivo 11 software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012) as a tool to begin with the initial coding of the transcribed parent–student interview files. At this stage, the coding was tentative and subject to change. All memos and annotations were recorded in the same software program, which formed a part of my journal. During this process of data analysis, it was necessary to go back, refer to the study’s theoretical framework and capture the important concepts. Hence, I also maintained the literature review folders within NVivo11 to make succinct links to the data and research around the theoretical concepts applied in this study. Next, I elaborate the steps undertaken as suggested by Bryman (2012) for thematic data analysis of the parent–student dyads and the CPT leader interviews.

#### **4.9.1 Thematic analysis of parent–student dyads.**

After transcribing and importing the data into NVivo 11 software, the following steps were performed to analyse the parent–student dyads.

1. Link to the study’s theoretical framework: This link was broadly related to the study’s research questions. For example, “Influence of parental beliefs, values and expectations on student subject choice thinking”.
2. Develop specific codes: The codes were generated based on participants’ responses, past literature and mainly addressing research question one and two. Hence there were pre-established codes such as “beliefs”, “values”, “expectations”, “past experiences” “influence” and “subject choice thinking”. Examples of codes derived from parent–student responses were “educational values”, “achieve best”, “get interested in sport”, “respect for education”, “choose maths”, “language barriers” and “go for university course”.
3. Go from codes to categories by examination of similar and contrasting patterns, and mediating relationships between the parent’s and their child’s responses: This allowed

me to conglomerate the data into meaningful categories. For example, repeated codes such as “educational values”, “respect for education”, “strive to be learned” and “cultural value to be educated” were clustered into the category “Respect for education as a cultural value”.

4. Identify categories by a cross-case analysis amongst all the 11 parent–student dyads: I thoroughly inspected all the identified codes and categories that represented segments of an individual parent–student dyad and compared how different or similarly the concept was perceived and discussed by other parent–student dyads. This helped in consolidation of derived codes and categories.
5. Identify themes based on common categories: Categories such as “Respect for education as a cultural value” and “Parental past educational experiences” were mainly about parental beliefs, past schooling experiences and related family practices and thus were clustered into the theme “Influence of parental beliefs and values”.

The above sorting, comparing and clustering of data were completed as an iterative process, taking into consideration the elements of the parental mediatory model (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.1) that included Vygotsky’s mediation and internalisation constructs and the complexities of parent–child interactions and relationships. In this step, I had the task of interpreting whether or not and to what extent the parental role as mediators and the cultural tools of parental beliefs, expectations and acculturation experiences influenced their child’s subject choice thinking. Figure 4.4 illustrates the above steps using an example of a parent–student dyad.

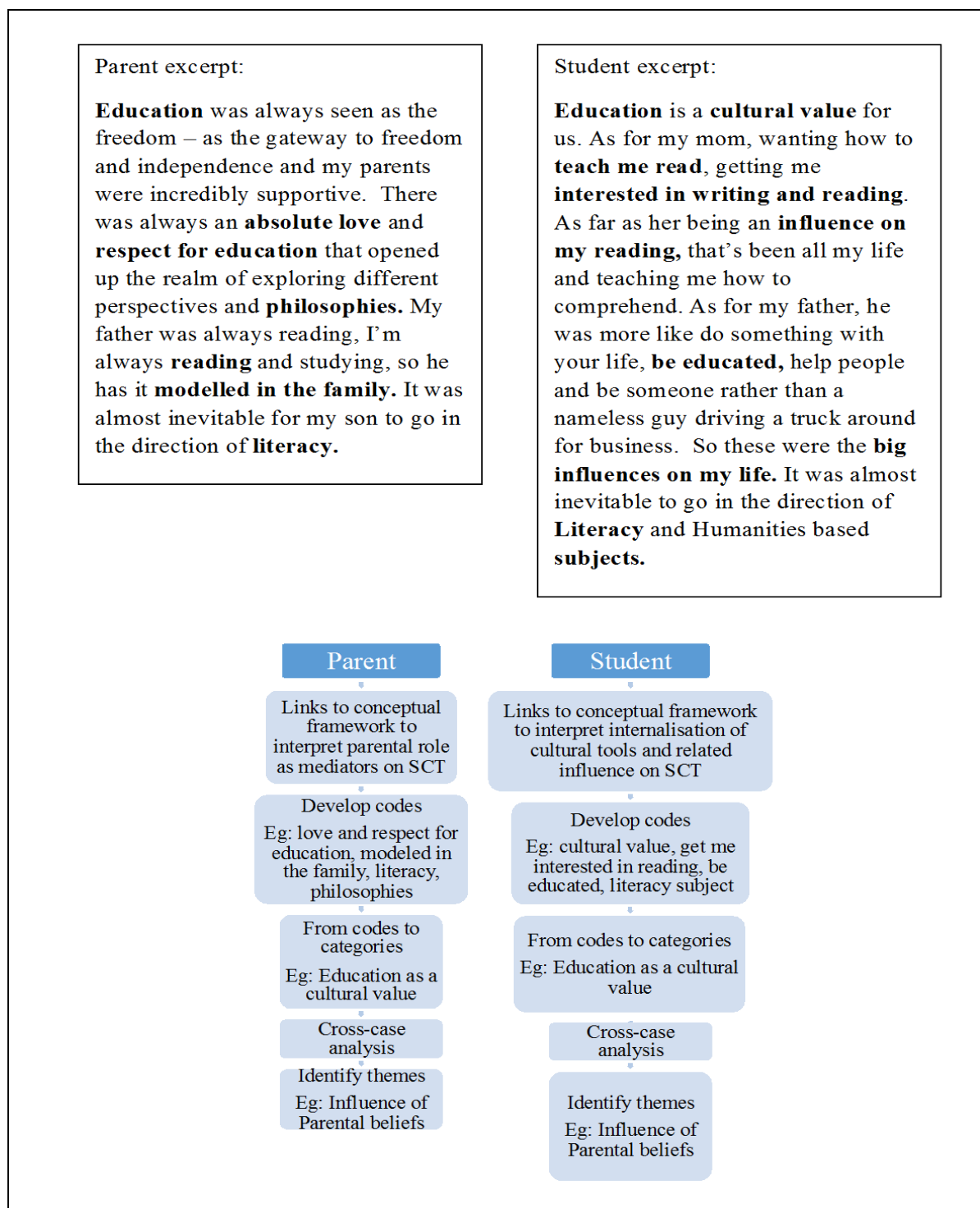


Figure 4.4. Thematic analysis of a parent–student dyad.

#### 4.9.2 Thematic analysis of CPT leader interviews.

The three CPT leader interviews had to be interpreted and analysed from a third party perspective of the parental and student perceptions and the related influences on student subject choice thinking. As one method is not universally applicable, analysis of the CPT leaders' responses involved fewer steps than the parent–student dyads.

1. Develop specific codes: For instance, “barriers”, “struggling”, “teacher recommendations”, “parental high expectations”, “being pushy”, “strive to go for university course”, “have to choose maths” and “achieve high scores”.
2. Go from codes to categories by examination of similar and contrasting patterns and relationships that allowed the data to be clustered into meaningful categories: For example, codes such as “strive to go for university course”, “achieve high scores” and “have to choose maths” were warranted into the category of “High parental aspirations”.
3. Identify themes based on common categories: Perceptions involving parental expectations and high aspirations for their children were clustered into the theme “CPT leader perceptions of parental influence on subject choice thinking”.
4. Understand and interpret the multiple data source: Parents’ and students’ perceptions of influence on subject choice thinking from a third party perspective as seen by the CPT leaders.

Figure 4.5 illustrates an initial concept map that helped to draw out the preliminary codes that contributed to understanding how the CPT leaders viewed parental influence on student subject choice thinking.

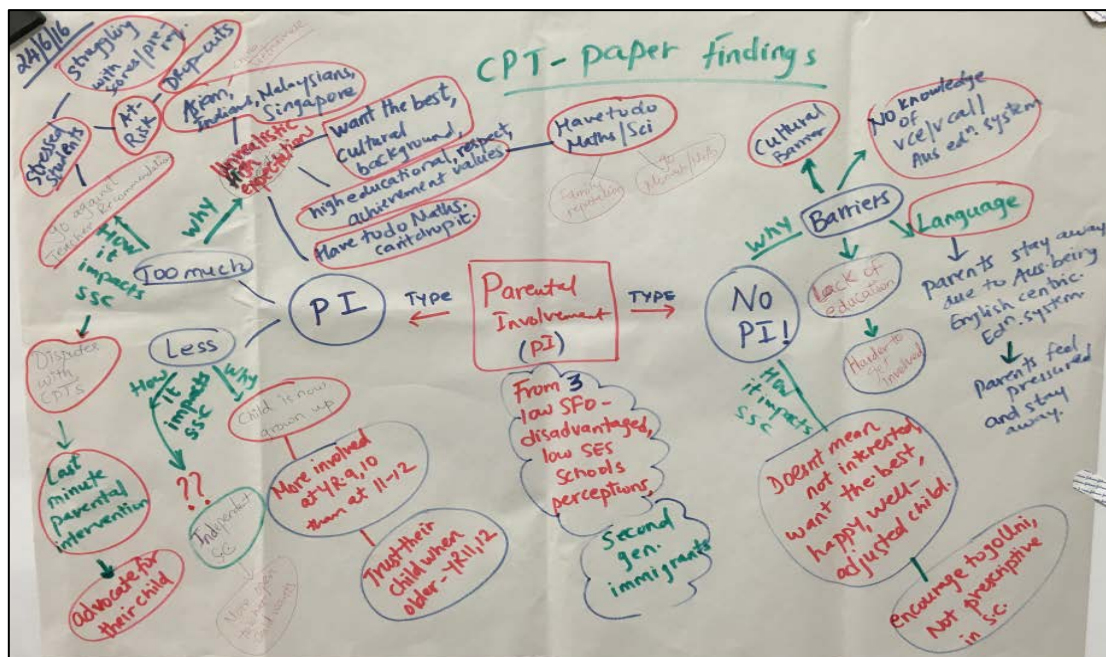


Figure 4.5. Initial concept map to show the parental mediatory role on their children’s subject choice thinking as viewed by the CPT leaders.



#### **4.10 Data Interpretation and Presentation**

Following data analysis, the final section was the write-up stage. This involves final statements that outline the meanings inherent in the participants' experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). While interpreting and finally reporting the results of the study, the aim was not only to unfold the participants' experiences and perceptions of parental beliefs and values, expectations and acculturation processes, but also to report similar and contrasting parental influences on their children's subject choice thinking. This aim elicited a detailed narrative, in my own words, that was in line with my own understanding of the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Taking into account of the full richness of interpretation of the perceptions of parents, students, and the CPT leaders and those in position of influence, the data were presented in the form of narrative passages.

The narrative passages presented in the findings chapters aim to unveil participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences as stories. The interpretation of their stories was done both explicitly and implicitly, to make meaning not only what was spoken, but also of the meaning behind their words, or what remained unspoken (Clandinin, 2007). This involved listening closely to how individuals string their life experiences together to make personal sense of them, and highlighting their perspectives about those who were immediately involved and might have an impact on student subject choice thinking.

#### **4.11 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Design**

Choosing a qualitative case study design allowed for fleshing out participants' beliefs, values, desires and experiences of education alongside their familial acculturation processes. One of the strengths of the research design is in meaning-making of the perceptions of both individuals within the 'parent–student' dyad taken together, rather than interpreting them separately. This combination of information in a parent–student dyad had a higher communicative power to unfold how parental beliefs, values, expectations and related experiences can mediate their children's subject choice and career-making decisions. The emphasis was not only on such parent–student perceptions in isolation, but also on making meaning of how such interactions and experiences taken together could mediate and be internalised by their children. This data analysis strategy placed importance on the experiences of the parent–student dyad as signified by the repetition of words and/or themes within and between data, which was the real focus of the study (Bryman, 2012). Having said that, the current study's proposed theoretical model

(see Figure 3.1) does not include a view of the student having agency in decisions that may affect their own life. The fact that I did not include the students' characteristics and the student's own role in their subject choice decisions can be a limitation and is an area suggested for future research.

Furthermore, despite of copious efforts to actively collect and represent the interview findings with a view to addressing this study's particular research agendas, there were some obvious limitations. This case study was undertaken to explore the perceptions of 11 immigrant parent–student dyads from the WMR public secondary schools with low ICSEA values in Melbourne, Victoria. With respect to generalisability, Thomas (2013) suggested that the extent to which research findings can be applied to other settings depends on the extent to which the sample is representative of the population. Since this case study was a multiple case study and representative of the sample, the results, though important, should be cautiously generalised to students and families from a wider range of schools such as Independent and Catholic schools in Victoria or other ethnicities of similar backgrounds. Despite efforts to capture the multidimensional nature of parental influences and the internalising of cultural tools by their children, I might have neglected some other important dimensions, such as whether the participants were first or second-generation immigrants. These parameters may have implications for their process of acculturation into Australia, the wide scope of parental school involvement, and the numerous aspects of the immigrant parents' and students' lives that could have been examined. Additionally, because of the nature of my study being a qualitative one, I cannot determine a plausible cause and effect, confirm predictions, or directional relations using a qualitative approach. Nonetheless, the core of my research lies in revealing the complex lived experiences of the participants.

## **4.12 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has discussed the methodology and research approach adopted to explore the pertinent research questions, whereby a qualitative case study approach dominated the overall research process. Employing a constructivist paradigm and highlighting my role as a research practitioner, detailed insights into the use of an interpretivist approach to the data analysis were also provided. The aim was to optimise my understanding of the apparent research gap around the phenomenon of immigrant parents' role as mediators in student subject choice. The research strategies discussed produced valuable data, and how they shed light on the parental

role as mediators in influencing students' thinking of subject choice is provided in the subsequent chapters.

## **CHAPTER 5: Findings of Parent–Student Perspectives of Influence on Subject Choice**

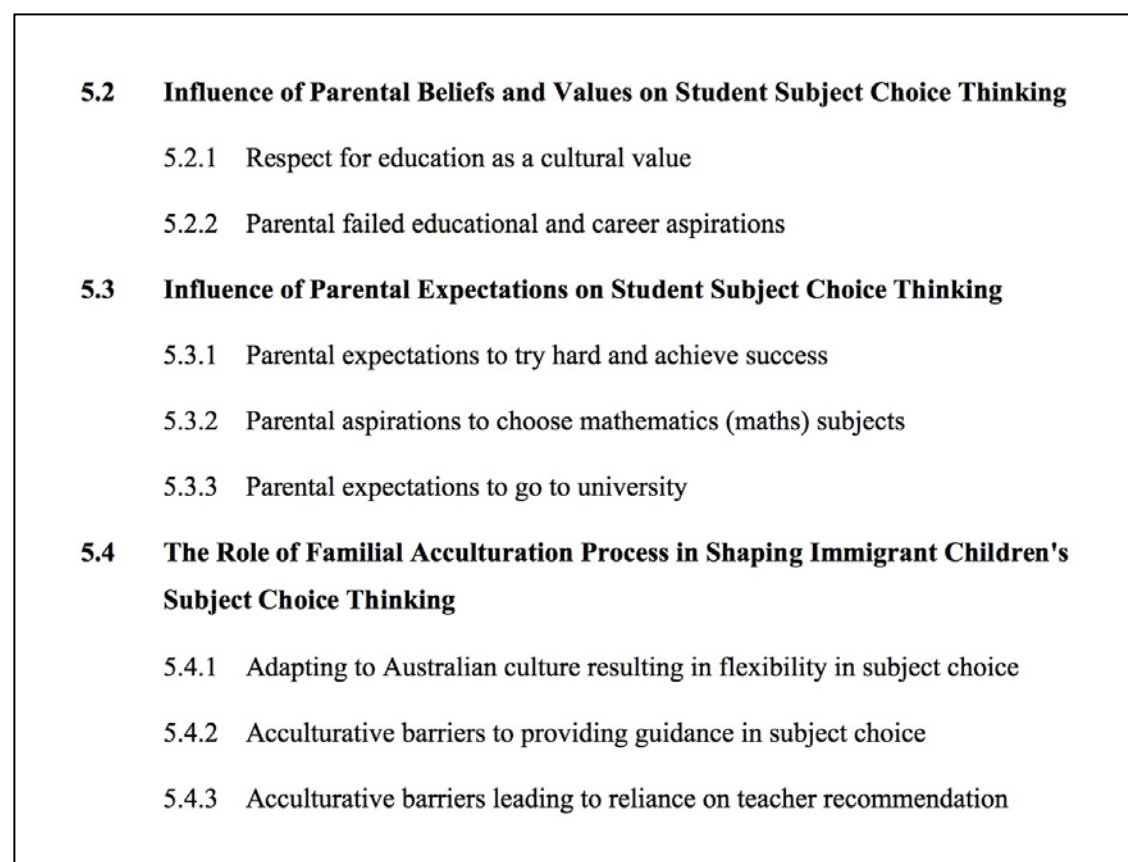
### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter explained and justified the research design employed and the use of a case study approach. This chapter presents the findings from the parent–student interviews. To make meaning of the perceptions of both parents and their children simultaneously in light of the research questions, the ‘parent–student’ dyads were taken together rather than interpreting them separately. These findings are presented thematically (see Figure 5.1) and are examined as:

1. The influence of parental beliefs and values on student subject choice thinking – In this theme, categories of respect for education as a cultural value (PB<sub>1</sub>) and parental failed educational and career aspirations (PB<sub>2</sub>) are elaborated.
2. The influence of parental expectations on student subject choice thinking – In this theme, categories of parental expectations to try hard and achieve success (PE<sub>1</sub>), parental aspirations to choose mathematics (maths) subjects (PE<sub>2</sub>) and parental expectations to go to university (PE<sub>3</sub>) are elaborated.
3. The role of the familial acculturation process in shaping immigrant children’s subject choice thinking – In this theme, categories of adapting to Australian culture resulting in flexibility in subject choice (PA<sub>1</sub>), acculturative barriers to providing guidance in subject choice (PA<sub>2</sub>) and acculturative barriers leading to reliance on teacher recommendation (PA<sub>3</sub>) are discussed.

Taken together, this chapter focuses on answering research questions one and two of this study using the data drawn from 11 parents and their 11 children’s semi-structured interviews. The same set of guiding interview questions (as discussed in Chapter 4, Table 4.5) for both parent and student interview protocols were used as the basis for coding and identifying the themes and their relationships. Figure 5.1 presents the keys themes and related categories that emanated from the parent and student data collation. These themes and the related categories are discussed in the forthcoming sections. The detailed profiles of the parents and their children were provided in Chapter 4 (Table 4.2) whereas the full transcript

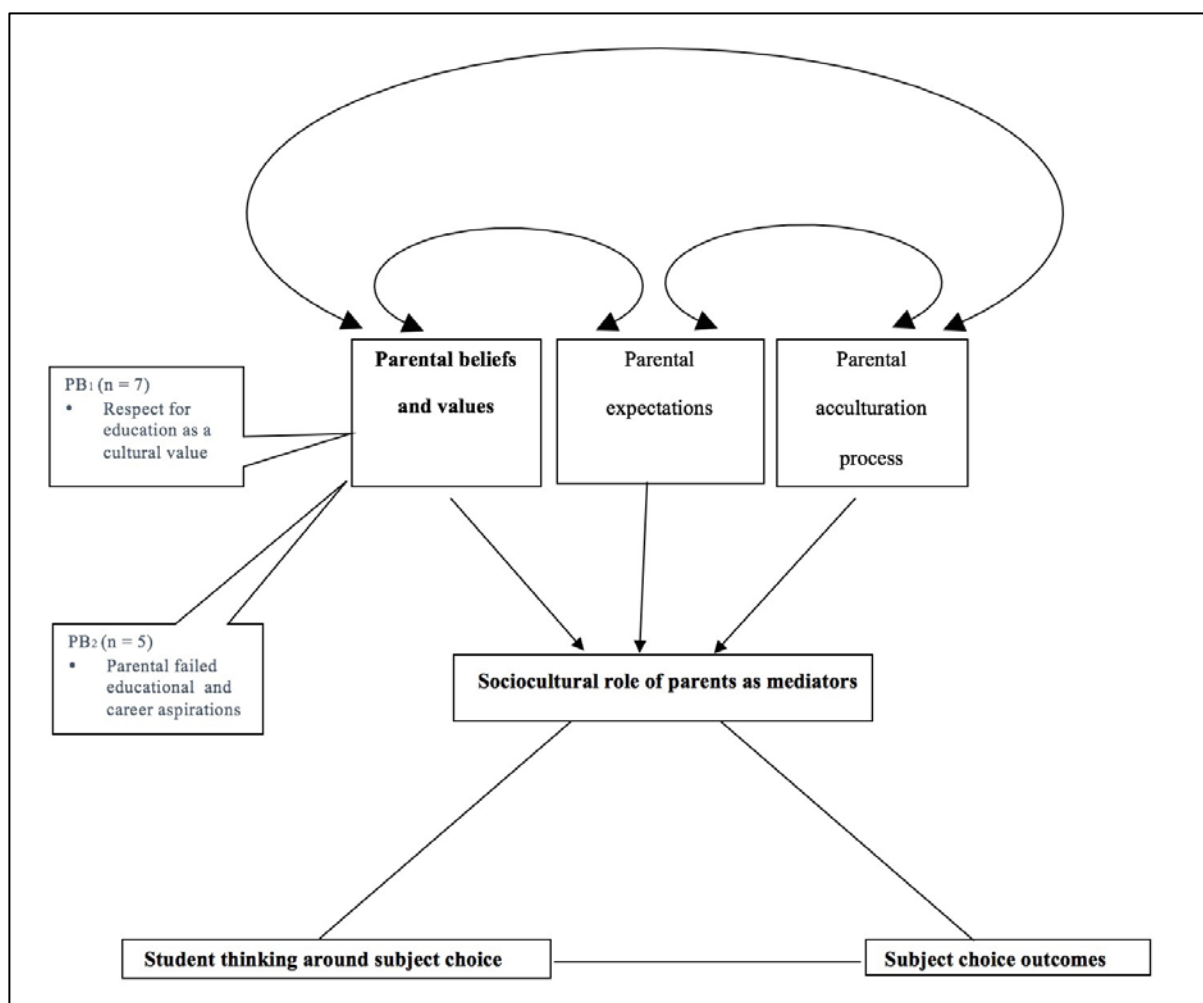
of one of the parent and one of the student interview excerpts are included in Appendix J and K respectively.



*Figure 5.1.* List of themes and related categories from the eleven parent–student interviews.

## **5.2 Influence of Parental Beliefs and Values on Student Subject Choice Thinking**

This study proposed that immigrant parental beliefs and values play an important role in influencing their children's thinking around subject choices. Accordingly, the results showed that such parental beliefs and values were evident through two categories, which include respect for education as a cultural value (PB<sub>1</sub>) and parental failed educational and career aspirations (PB<sub>2</sub>). By inserting these core beliefs, values and practices as categories into the conceptual model of this study, Figure 5.2 presents an overview of the paths between parental beliefs (PB) and the related categories of PB<sub>1</sub> and PB<sub>2</sub> in mediating students' thinking and decisions around subject choices. These categories of parental beliefs (PB) are elaborated in the following sections using the relevant qualitative responses from the interviews.



*Figure 5.2.* Relationship between parental beliefs and values (PB) and the related categories of PB<sub>1</sub> and PB<sub>2</sub> in mediating student subject choice thinking.

### 5.2.1 Respect for education as a cultural value.

Parents in this study believed that education is very important and their children expressed similar beliefs. Seven of the 11 eleven parents in this study expressed this value as their core cultural belief, and their children echoed their sentiment through how they had chosen their subjects. Therefore, in Figure 5.2, category PB<sub>1</sub> is added as an indicator of how parents value education. It was worthwhile to note how parents' own cultural perspectives and philosophies of respecting education had been transposed on to their children. There was a tendency amongst children to agree and reciprocate positively to their parents' cultural values for education.

Michelina's family, who are originally from Czechoslovakia, had moved to Australia in 2004. At the time of the study, her son, Nick, was in Year 11, although he had finished some primary schooling in his home country. Michelina admitted that part of their Eastern European cultural value is to instil the love for education in their children. Michelina's passionate sharing showed she valued and respected education.

*Education was always seen as the gateway to freedom and independence. One of the cultural heritage is an absolute love and respect for education that opens up the realm of free thinking and exploring different perspectives and philosophies. I'm always reading and studying, so he [Nick] has it modelled in the family. It was almost inevitable for Nick to go in the direction of literacy-based subjects.*

Michelina views education as a tool for liberating one's mind to allow for lateral thinking. She reflected on her cultural context in which education is highly regarded and modelled within the family. Her words "gateway to freedom" portrayed that in her home country, education is seen as a means of emancipation from poverty and an underprivileged status. Evidently, she was drawing upon her experiences from the Czech educational context, as she emphasised that education is an instrumental cultural value. Despite migrating to Australia, Michelina's fundamental cultural values towards education seem to remain unchanged.

Nick concurred with his mother's response in saying that the love and respect for education was ingrained in him since childhood:

*Education is a cultural value for us. As for my mum, wanting how to teach me read, getting me interested in writing and reading. As for my father, he was more like do something with your life, be educated, help people and be someone rather than a nameless guy driving a truck around for business. It was almost inevitable to go in the direction of literacy and humanities based subjects.*

As part of his cultural values, Nick was not only provided with learning opportunities for reading and writing, but was drilled with the need to be motivated and become an educated person. For Nick, his father's words seem to be the inspiration to pursue a

respectable career in life rather than become a “nameless [truck driver]”. As such, familial cultural values have shaped Nick’s thinking and inspired him to choose literature as one of his subjects.

A similar cultural value was demonstrated in Bibi’s perceptions. Bibi is originally from India, and moved to Australia almost 30 years ago. All her children were born and brought up in Australia. At the time of the interview, her youngest daughter, Deep, was in Year 10. Bibi commented:

*Coming from India, it is a cultural belief to be educated, study hard and value getting good scores. So for our family, if you study and do well, you will be respected.*

Bibi pressed on her Indian cultural values of studying hard with the ultimate goal of not only becoming educated, but also striving to attain high academic scores. She emphasised how the journey of education and hard work can bring her children respect in the society. It appeared that Bibi still appreciates and continues to instil such Indian cultural beliefs and values in her children even after moving countries. For Bibi, this cultural belief is a process of inculcating high expectations so that Deep should study hard and aim to get a respectable career.

Deep acknowledged that education is a highly sought after Indian cultural value for the family. She commented:

*One of the main aspects in our culture is education that you need to be educated in order to do well or you’ll get nowhere in life. That’s what we always get told. So it is a major influence in our life that you need education. They [parents] want us to do good in Year 12 and get a course of our choice but it should be good and respected.*

Similar to Michelina–Nick, for Bibi–Deep’s family, education was observed to be a necessity to achieve success and respect. From Deep’s expressions, respect for education seem more like a fossilised belief that the next generation is expected to persevere. Deep admitted that this belief is a major influence on her and, as such, she was instilled with the belief that education is the only tool that allows for liberation in thinking and status. Bearing such familial beliefs in mind, Deep had accordingly endeavoured to choose her subjects.



A similar pattern was demonstrated in Lina's perceptions, who is originally from The Philippines. Lina had moved to Australia in 2002 when her daughter, Zani, was almost two years old. At the time of the interview, Zani was in Year 10. Lina shared:

*I guess coming from our culture where education is highly valued, we always emphasise that to our own children that they have to value their education, because education is a levelling tool for everyone. Like, you don't have to be rich but you can be educated, and it can bring you wherever you want to be.*

Lina expressed that she highly values education. This perception stemmed from her cultural values and belief that education is a levelling tool. Lina perceives that education could alleviate the boundaries between the rich and poor and empower individuals to rise within the social stratification. In her eyes, it does not matter whether education provides entrance to a higher social standing, but her beliefs strongly reflect the impression that education can vastly broaden people's opportunities within the society. Such cultural values were transferred in Zani's thinking, as she displayed similar sentiments to her mother. Zani articulated:

*Having education is important to my mum and my dad, because they want us to have good jobs and be able to support ourselves and just being able to do a career in which we can excel.*

Zani shares a common understanding to that of her parents, which in turn ingrained in her the high value of education. She had made a connection with the fact that her parents wished her to get a respectable job and a career of her choice in order for her to be able to support herself in the future and have the capacity to progress in life. Zani advocated these inherited cultural beliefs and acknowledged the significant role education the family placed in achieving success. Despite living in a different cultural environment in Australia for the past 15 years, Lina–Zani's family are still inherently firmly loyal to their original cultural beliefs and values, which were thought to ultimately provide their children with opportunities for being successful.

### 5.2.2 Parental failed educational and career aspirations.

Interestingly, five of the parents in this study had career aspirations that they had always desired during their own schooling days, but were never able to achieve. In line with their cultural beliefs, these parents indicated that it is important for their children to get a proper education that would lead to future lucrative careers. This belief appeared to originate from their own unattained past educational and career aspirations. In Figure 5.2, category PB<sub>2</sub> is added to indicate that there appeared to be a relationship between parents' past educational and career aspirations and children's subject choice thinking. For example, Susan, who is originally from Syria, inspired her daughter, Zenith, to pursue a career in teaching. Susan, who was schooled in Australia, recollected her schooling days:

*I wanted to do teaching after I finished high school but I didn't get in. And now, Zenith said she wanted to do childcare and I was fine with that. I didn't push her to do that. I did give her an idea.*

Evidently, Susan anticipated undertaking a course that would have enabled her to pursue a career in teaching; however, she was unable to secure the scores in order to do so. However, she could see in her daughter, Zenith, a possibility to somehow realise her failed aspirations and, therefore, exerted a significant influence in determining Zenith's future career path.

Zenith, who was in Year 10 at the time of choosing her subjects, yearned and shared a common understanding:

*My mum and I want to do the same. I figured that I'm pretty good with kids and wanted to have a child care centre so, maybe I should become either a childcare worker or a teacher.*

It was clear that Zenith's aim of becoming a childcare worker or a teacher was not shaped in a vacuum. Susan had successfully, albeit intentionally or unintentionally, transferred her individual unrealised aspirations to Zenith. As a result, Zenith had inherited the aspirations desired by her mother. Hence, Susan's failed achievements in realising her own educational and career goals proved to be the precursors for Zenith's thinking of becoming a teacher or following an equivalent career.

In a similar case, Raji (Pilka's mother), who is originally from India, shared her perspectives about her past education and career making experiences in India. Raji lamented:

*I faced so many challenges, because there was no one who could advise us properly. My parents were not educated enough. Now I think sometimes if that time parents advised us maybe I would be a doctor. But that time, I didn't know what subject we need to choose, but definitely I wanted to be in the medical line.*

Raji's past educational experiences were quite challenging and lacked clear guidance from her own parents, hence depriving her of having a successful educational level. As she was unaware of the academic direction that would have led her to a medical profession, Raji vicariously lives her unfulfilled ambitions of becoming a doctor through her own daughter.

Echoing her mother's sentiment, Pilka, who was in Year 10 at the time of choosing her subjects, expressed:

*My parents would be happy if I was a doctor or something good, not like just a dancer. Because I was doing forensic science last year and now I'm doing psychology, so it blends in and they're happy about it. At least I have one nerdy subject, so they're happy.*

Pilka sympathised with her mother's past educational challenges and career aspirations. This had an effect on her thinking, which was guided by the desire to please her mother, and take pursuit of choosing at least some subjects that aligned with the career path her mother hoped to pursue. Obviously, Raji's unfulfilled desires served as precursors to her daughter's choice of psychology and forensic science subjects, which were closely aligned with Raji's own ambitions.

In a similar manner, Jo (Emma's mother), who was born and brought up in Australia, also iterated:

*I did a Bachelor of Commerce, but I really wanted to do law. Being the first generation to go to university, I didn't know how it all worked. Because I didn't get to study law, I'm always trying to influence my kids that that's what*

*they would be good at. It's not a real pressure, but it's something that I have definitely made no secret about. I think I have influenced them [my children] by what I wanted to do and the things that I didn't get to do.*

Jo yearned for Emma to become a lawyer. Her advice to her daughter Emma to opt for legal studies was derived from her own past educational challenges and experiences. She was very upfront about how persuasive she was for Emma to choose legal studies subject, although she knew that Emma is not keen on becoming a lawyer. It was evident that Jo wanted her children to fulfil her missed career ambitions. She was honest in admitting that she had influenced Emma to choose Legal studies subject and had attempted to sway Emma's career path to the one that she herself was unable to experience. Although Jo did not coalesce power and persuasion upon her children, she was didactic in her approach.

Emma, who was in Year 11 at the time of choosing her subjects, resonated her mother's sentiment:

*Actually mum was really keen on me becoming a lawyer, but – and she knows I'm not really interested in it, but she was still happy I chose legal studies. I don't really want to be a lawyer, But, it would make her happy if I was a lawyer or something.*

Despite Emma not particularly favouring legal studies, her awareness of her mother's past aspiration to become a lawyer inherently influenced her decision to select legal studies as a subject. Although Jo did not force this on Emma, it was evident that the importance and emphasis she placed upon a law-related career consequently had a role in Emma's subject selection. Emma was unsure of her career pursuit, yet she acknowledged that becoming a lawyer would definitely please her mother and satisfy her aspirations. This was an indicator of internalised parental aspirations.

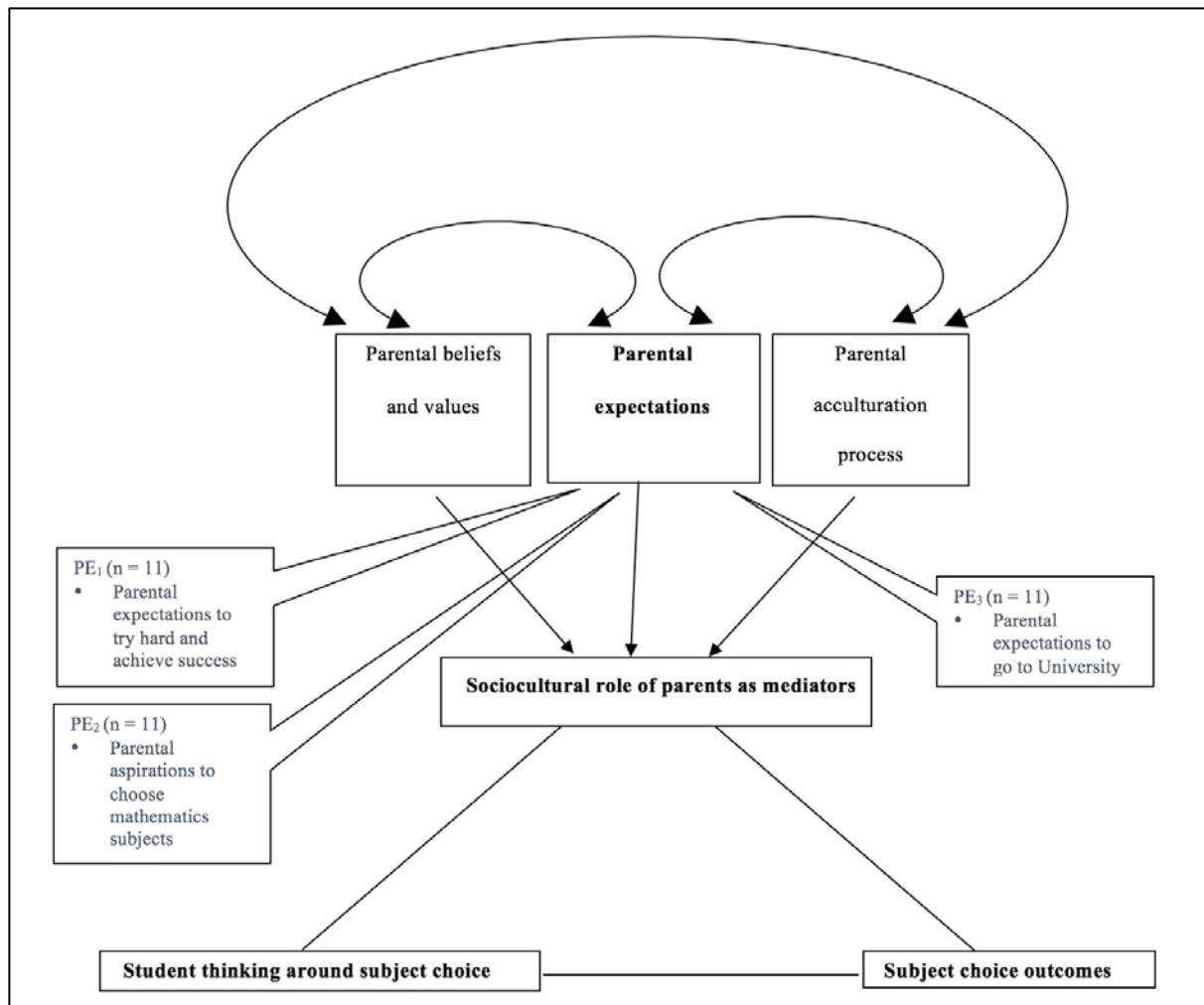
In sum, the findings under this theme demonstrated that respect for education as a cultural value was a recurrent response throughout both the parents' and their children's perceptions. This signals that cultural tools such as the immigrant parents' beliefs and values can have a mediated action and be successfully internalised by their children. Responses suggest that in many ways, through shared experiences and perceptions during parent-child

interactions, parents can act as mediators for conceptualising children's subject choice thinking. Moreover, what parents desire for their children originates from their own failed educational and career aspirations. These elements will be further conversed in the Discussion (Chapter 7) of this thesis. The next theme and related categories provide insights into how parental expectations can also be used as a cultural tool to mediate children's subject and career-related decisions.

### **5.3 Influence of Parental Expectations on Student Subject Choice Thinking**

This study proposed that parental expectations play an important role in influencing their children's thinking around subject choices. Accordingly, the results showed that parental expectations were evident through a number of emerging categories that included parental expectations to try hard and achieve success (PE<sub>1</sub>), parental aspirations to choose mathematics (maths) subjects (PE<sub>2</sub>) and parental expectations to go to university (PE<sub>3</sub>).

By inserting these core expectations as categories into the conceptual model of this study, Figure 5.3 presents an overview of the paths between parental expectations (PE) and the related categories of PE<sub>1</sub>, PE<sub>2</sub> and PE<sub>3</sub> in mediating students' thinking and decisions around subject choices. Figure 5.3 shows these categories of PE as subthemes, which are elaborated on and discussed with relevant data in the following sections.



*Figure 5.3.* Relationship between parental expectations (PE) and the related categories of PE<sub>1</sub>, PE<sub>2</sub> and PE<sub>3</sub> in mediating student subject choice thinking.

### 5.3.1 Parental expectations to try hard and achieve success.

As shown in Figure 5.3, category PE<sub>1</sub>, is the subtheme of parental expectations that reflects how all the 11 parent participants expected their children to always try hard and do well in their chosen subjects. There appeared to be a relationship between such definite parental expectations and parental beliefs and cultural practices relating to working hard for successful achievements. This exemplified how parents instilled in their children values about trying hard to fulfil and perform to the best of their abilities in their chosen subjects.

As Beth, who is originally from Spain, explained, while she desired the best for her son, Lee, she simultaneously also expected him to work hard towards achieving his best. She stated:

*You can only guide him towards like, you're really good in maths, why don't you think of doing that?" But there will never be, "I'm really good at maths but I want to sit at home on my backside playing computer games" there will never be any of that. That is not an option.*

Beth showed passive aggressiveness in expressing her opinions to Lee about subject choices. She did not believe in pushing Lee and steering him towards choosing particular subjects that she desired, but instead made Lee aware of his own potential through which he could perform well and choose accordingly. It seemed she subtly communicated such expectations of achieving the best without needing to exercise an authoritative role, and this was demonstrated to work well between the two. This approach appeared to be influenced by the typical Australian way of not dominantly forcing children in their academic endeavours, but rather being a supportive figure. This may have been the reason why Beth refrained from actively pushing her expectations on to Lee. Yet, she remained clear in communicating her expectations that Lee should value hard work and be focused to achieve his best, regardless of the career path he may ultimately pursue.

Lee echoed his mother's sentiment by saying that:

*They're pretty happy with my choice of subjects. I think they prefer me to do well. Because it's such a big part of life and my family wants me to is just try my best in whatever you [I] do.*

Lee, who was born and brought up in Australia, cherished his parents' approach of encouraging him to 'try your best'. It was evident that his parents believed in having a lot of interest in his future studies instead of directly intervening in his decisions. Lee valued this approach and henceforth was more willing to try hard and achieve his best in his future endeavours.

In another case, Michelina (Nick's mother), who is originally from Czechoslovakia, clarified:

*Yes, there's a lot of interest in what he does for his future. Whatever he has chosen is fantastic, but always work on your strengths and cultivate your strengths.*

Michelina displayed similar perceptions to Beth (Lee's mother) with respect to being open-minded and accepting of her son Nick's subject choice. Whilst, at the same time, she admitted to monitor Nick's performances and encourage him to dutifully build on his strengths.

Nick, who had completed his primary schooling in his home country, was in agreement with his parents and seemed cordial to their expectations. He admitted to being in harmony with their advice and encouragement. He acknowledged:

*Dad and mum encourage me, like, you're good at this, stick to that. I take all their advice on board because I know they just want the best for me.*

It was apparent that Michelina's expectations for Nick aligned with her beliefs of working hard. She always projected to Nick that he should achieve to his maximum potential. Such implied expectations were well perceived and harnessed by Nick, who was accountable for his own future and be engaged in whatever subjects he had chosen with a definite view to excel.

Another parent, Danielle, who is originally from Serbia, commented:

*What we teach our children is to work harder, and also not to be loose and slack about it. They know they have to work for something they want to achieve and when there is an opportunity there.*

Danielle was reflecting upon her personal upbringing and Eastern European cultural values and expectations of striving hard, to care about their own academic achievement and to make use of all available opportunities to secure a good future.



Alex, who was born and brought up in Australia, had common perceptions to his mother:

*The family practice is just trying your best in whatever you do. That's probably what the family puts forth, and they say if you just can't do it, at least you put some effort into it. Their only expectation is that I should succeed in whatever I choose to do.*

Alex, despite having been brought up in Australia, showed a strong adherence to his family's cultural beliefs and practices of doing his best with a definite goal to succeed. Danielle had successfully communicated her culturally valued expectations to Alex. Whether Alex personally favoured such values or not, his parents presented him with no other option but to persevere to achieve his best in his academic endeavours. However, it did not seem that Danielle was being forceful in directing Alex's subject and career choice.

### **5.3.2 Parental aspirations to choose mathematics (maths) subjects.**

As shown in Figure 5.3, category PE<sub>2</sub> is the subtheme that reflects how all the 11 parents expect their children to choose mathematics as one of their subjects.

Bibi (Deep's mother), who had migrated from India, gave importance to her ongoing Indian cultural belief of definitely having maths subject as a necessary pre-requisite for a successful career-related option. Having completed her schooling in India, she believed knowledge of maths is an advantage and that it is perceived to be more essential than studying English. She perceives that it was vital to study maths as a practical life skill, irrespective of one's job. She explained:

*Coming from an Indian background, we have beliefs in you [child] should have a maths subject other than English. I want my children to be aware of the outside world, like handling banks, understanding when the bills come, and handling finances.*

Bibi compared her own Indian educational experiences and attempted to transfer her beliefs about studying maths to her children. It was demonstrated that her Indian educational experiences made her realise the importance of maths and, in turn, she expects her children to

be maths-smart. She expects them to be capable of handling and understanding their own finances. It appeared that not only because of such traditional educational beliefs, but also, perhaps, especially now being in Australia, Bibi believes that her daughter Deep should become independent in her financial undertakings. The necessary mathematical skills recognised by Bibi thus drove the non-negotiable parental expectation that was imposed on Deep to choose a maths subject.

Deep, who was born and schooled in Australia, somewhat understood her parental thinking and rationalised why her parents wanted her to choose maths as one of the core subjects.

*My dad is a taxi driver and his education has not been the best, so he is like worried about us. Basically, handling loans in the future, how you take it, and your taxation. He wants us to learn properly, like in detail. So we can understand for our better future. They value all of my chosen subjects but maths is compulsory. I don't think that is correct because it's not, and that's why it's not compulsory. But they [my parents] just want the subject to be there.*

Deep was aware that her parents' expectations of having maths as a core subject evolved from their own past schooling experiences. The family valued studying maths, which was thought to be a gateway to a successful career. Deep's father expects her to have a detailed understanding of everyday practical maths, which he believes will instil an understanding of life-long financial skills. On the other hand, having been schooled in Australia, Deep has a different perception. She speculated if maths was so important, then it would not be compulsory in Australia, thus her views were conflicting with her parental traditional beliefs and expectations. However, she had come to terms with it because she respected her parental expectations and recognised her parents were more experienced in advising her to choose maths as a compulsory subject. She was subliminally in agreement with her father and felt maths was indeed important. Consequently, in spite of not liking maths very much, she agreed that choosing some sort of maths subject would not be a fruitless option for her career prospects.

In another instance, Beth (Lee's mother), who had her schooling in Spain, shared how her current Australian work-related experiences made her value maths. She was also drawing upon her own educational experiences of studying maths and, henceforth, was in favour of having maths-related skills.

*I got my beautician diploma in Australia but I never put it into practice. Then, I got a job in administration and admin involves a bit of maths as well, looking at some of the accounts. So yes, my maths skills from school came very handy. So for Lee, maths definitely and you [Lee] haven't a choice but to do maths.*

Undoubtedly, Beth's schooling and work-related experiences that revolved around math competency played a crucial role that made her son, Lee, choose a maths subject. However, having been schooled in Australia, Lee was of a different opinion when it came to why he chose maths. He articulated:

*Maths is something at school that I've been really good at. I was always at the top of the class in maths from grade 2 to Year 9. When I was little, mum used to buy these maths problem books and I did them because I used to enjoy doing them. I definitely would see myself going more towards maths pathway than an English pathway. That's why accounting is one of the subjects I have.*

Lee's self-belief that he is good at maths stems from his childhood experiences. He values the mathematical opportunities that Beth provided him from primary schooling. This, in turn, seemed to have sparked his liking towards studying maths. He was immersed unconsciously into this mathematical world by his mother, which made him confident to see maths as a subject in which he could easily excel. After all, it was Beth's past work experiences that made her appreciate and, accordingly, provide Lee with maths-related educational opportunities and resources. Reciprocally, Lee self-rationalised how such an environment provided by the family had influenced him to choose accounting as one of his subjects.

Alternatively, another parent, Danielle who is originally from Serbia, reflected on her educational experiences:

*To me maths is like a core subject. You got to do it. And part of life to do well. Back then, there was no choice, everyone was doing the same maths, no matter, it's hard maths... or what.*

Danielle's expectations of getting her son Alex to study maths emerged from her own Eastern European schooling experiences. To her, there was no avoiding maths, as it was almost a regimented subject. Danielle was comparing her own educational experiences to the Australian education system, where students had the option to drop maths. This, in her eyes, was not something that Alex would be permitted to do. For Alex, regardless of the difficulty level, Danielle had predetermined his decision to select a maths subject.

Alex, who was born and schooled in Australia, had come to terms with his mother's non-negotiable expectation of studying maths. He expressed:

*Obviously your parents, they want you to do well in maths. It's not so much forced, but they want you to do well, because maths is such a big part of life.*

It was indicated how Alex was able to visualise his mother's expectations and agreed that choosing maths is not a pressure game for the family. Danielle's own schooling experiences and educational expectations were successfully communicated as well as interpreted by Alex, which, in turn, allowed him to acknowledge that maths is necessary to have a successful career in life. It seemed children from the Eastern European context respect their parents' wishes and the decisions made for the younger generation. Hence, without any imposition, Alex was in agreement with his mother and accordingly chose maths.

Lina (Zani's mother), who is originally from a Filipino family, has similar views. She regards studying a maths subject as a pathway to a successful career. She articulated:

*What I tell all my kids is just try to make sure that all your subjects that you're taking open doors for you. Don't close doors. That's why I told them at least take Maths Methods because that's one of the pre-requisites.*

For Lina, her past struggles may have framed her perspective of protecting oneself by keeping doors open and having multiple opportunities for the future. She generalised her own belief that studying at least Maths Methods would procure Zani a myriad of career choices. In

essence, Lina was instilling the idea of opening multiple future opportunities by encouraging her children to broaden their range of skills and undertake mathematics at an academic level.

Zani was partially accepting of her mother's expectations of having Maths Methods as one of her subjects. She expressed:

*I think she influenced me to do Methods, like she suggested it. She wanted me to at least try it to see if I'd be okay in that class because she wants me to push my limits. So maybe I did it partly because of that, to make her happy.*

It was evident that Lina strongly desired that Zani should study Maths Methods. She has confidence in Zani's academic capabilities, which motivated Zani to engage in the subject. As such, Lina's belief in Zani's strengths and expectation of doing well in Maths Methods appeared to have a mediated action on Zani's perceptions of choosing Maths Methods. Thus, despite not fully realising the rationale behind choosing Maths Methods, Zani was indoctrinated to choose the subject.

### **5.3.3 Parental expectations to go to university.**

As shown in Figure 5.3, category PE<sub>3</sub> is the subtheme that reflects all 11 parents expecting their children to pursue university course-related studies after completion of high school, and hence they urged their children to choose subjects accordingly.

Michelina expressed her expectations for her son, Nick, to go university, which were again drawn from her own Eastern European upbringing, which led the family to value higher education.

*There was always an expectation from my [Michelina's] parents that it was not going to end with high school no matter what happened, that I would always go on to study. Going to university for studies is a wonderful way to make a living.*

The interactions Michelina had with her own parents triggered her perceptions that university studies are largely instrumental in achieving a better and successful living. Because her parents were supportive of higher education, she desired to carry forward the same tradition and provide guidance to her son. Consequently, Michelina's intergenerational

expectations underscored her own perceptions to better predict Nick's educational preparation process.

Nick, who started primary schooling in Australia, shared his opinions:

*I'm going to not going to lie and say it's all me who wants to go to university. I sat along with dad and he did pressure me a bit, but at the same time, it was good stress. It was good pressure to have and I wouldn't have pushed myself as far as I have if it weren't for that.*

As Nick stated, it was not only his own motivation but also his parents' emphasis to go university for higher education. Interestingly, Nick perceived such high expectations as a "good stress" that worked in his favour to enhance his determination. Evidently, he shares a common understanding and appreciates his parents' educational beliefs and expectations, and realises it is a productive decision that will ultimately be greatly beneficial for his own future.

On the other hand, Lina (Zani's mother), coming from The Philippines, shared her perceptions that were again drawn from her past educational and cultural context.

*I'm not pushing them in any direction. We give them freedom to – as long as they keep their doors open for their university degree. But in The Philippines, parents push their kids to finish university no matter what. If they can afford it, they'll send their kids to university. That's how highly valued it is.*

Coming from a Filipino family, Lina values higher education. She believes that education is a necessity to break out of the chains of poverty. It appeared there was an imposed cultural belief that a university degree is the only successful way to be seen as an educated person. However, it seems that now living in Australia, Lina does not believe in dominating her daughter Zani's educational pursuits. Although she had moderated her approach, Lina simultaneously expected Zani to finish a university degree.

Interestingly, Zani, who was only two years old when she came to Australia, expressed that her parents stressed upon her that she should aspire and strive hard to go university:

*I think from the beginning they wanted me to go to university because its higher education. Then they want me to do the best I can, the highest I can get. It's more of something that you can strive towards, it's like a checkpoint.*

Lina's desires and high cultural expectations undoubtedly functioned as pressure on Zani. Zani had remotely internalised such cultural expectations as seen in her admitting to living up to her mother's hopes and desires. She acknowledges her mother's ultimate goal is to see her pursue a university degree, even though it was not made evident in their interactions. It was implied to Zani that going to university is achieving the "checkpoint" that will measure her worthiness and success in life. Henceforth, Zani was left with no option other than to gratify her parents.

In another instance, Eira (Mira's mother), who is originally from Serbia, shared her educational expectations that were directly associated with her failed aspiration of not going to university.

*I didn't go to university, and as far as my parents went, neither of them went to university either. I think there's a bit more educational expectation your children to go to university and both of my kids are intelligent enough or strive for something more than high school would give them.*

Eira believes in intergenerational progress, as she perceives that every generation should be better progressed than the previous one. The fact that no one in her past generation had pursued university studies further amplified her expectations for Mira to seek a university degree. She indicated it was time for her children to fulfil such an expectation. She also believes that her children are intelligent enough to do so.

Mira was in harmony with her mother's expectations. She agreed:

*Because it's been such a big thing for me and them [parents], I'm sort of the first person that's setting the trend to go to university. I guess they've helped me get to where I am now and now I want to do it.*

Mira is a self-motivated student and has aspired to go to university since childhood. She is aware of being the trendsetter in the family. It was apparent that Eira's failed

aspiration of not being able to go to university and expecting intergenerational progress had mediated her daughter Mira's thinking. This may be the reason why Mira's aspirations are in line with her parents' values and desires for her future educational progress.

In sum, the findings under this theme highlighted how parents used cultural tools such as their expectations, which were partly a result of their past schooling experiences, to influence their children's perceptions of educational progress. Each parent had a common expectation of their child valuing a university degree, studying Maths and, additionally, trying hard to achieve his or her best in the chosen subjects. For children, having conversations with their parents inclusive of parental past educational experiences facilitated towards choosing viable career options and related subjects. These elements of parental expectations and the related implications on the immigrant children's decisions about their subjects and career pathways will be discussed further in the Discussion (Chapter 7) of this thesis. The next theme elaborates on how experiences within a familial acculturation process can affect immigrant parents' beliefs, values and educational expectations for their children and the consequent impact on subject choice.

#### **5.4 The Role of Familial Acculturation Process in Shaping Immigrant Children's Subject Choice Thinking**

This study proposes that familial acculturation processes also play an important role in shaping their children's thinking around subject choices. The findings reported under this theme stood apart from the findings discussed so far. The results showed that the familial acculturation processes were evident through a number of emerging categories in the ways they influenced children's subject and career pathway choices. These categories were: (1) Adapting to the Australian culture resulting in flexibility in subject choice (PA<sub>1</sub>): Parents explained how after moving countries they had changed their perceptions about their children making independent decisions regarding their future educational choices, (2) Acculturative barriers to providing guidance in subject choice (PA<sub>2</sub>): Parents explained the barriers they had experienced during an acculturation process, which hindered parental capacity to provide guidance in subject choices, and (3) Acculturative barriers leading to reliance on teacher recommendation (PA<sub>3</sub>): Parents admitted that because of the barriers experienced and



challenges in understanding the Australian educational system, they were compelled to rely on their children's teachers' recommendation for choice of subjects.

In Figure 5.4, categories PA<sub>1</sub>, PA<sub>2</sub> and PA<sub>3</sub> are added as subthemes to validate the mediatory path between the parental acculturation (PA) process and related influences on student subject choice thinking. These categories are discussed further, along with the responses from the parents and their children.

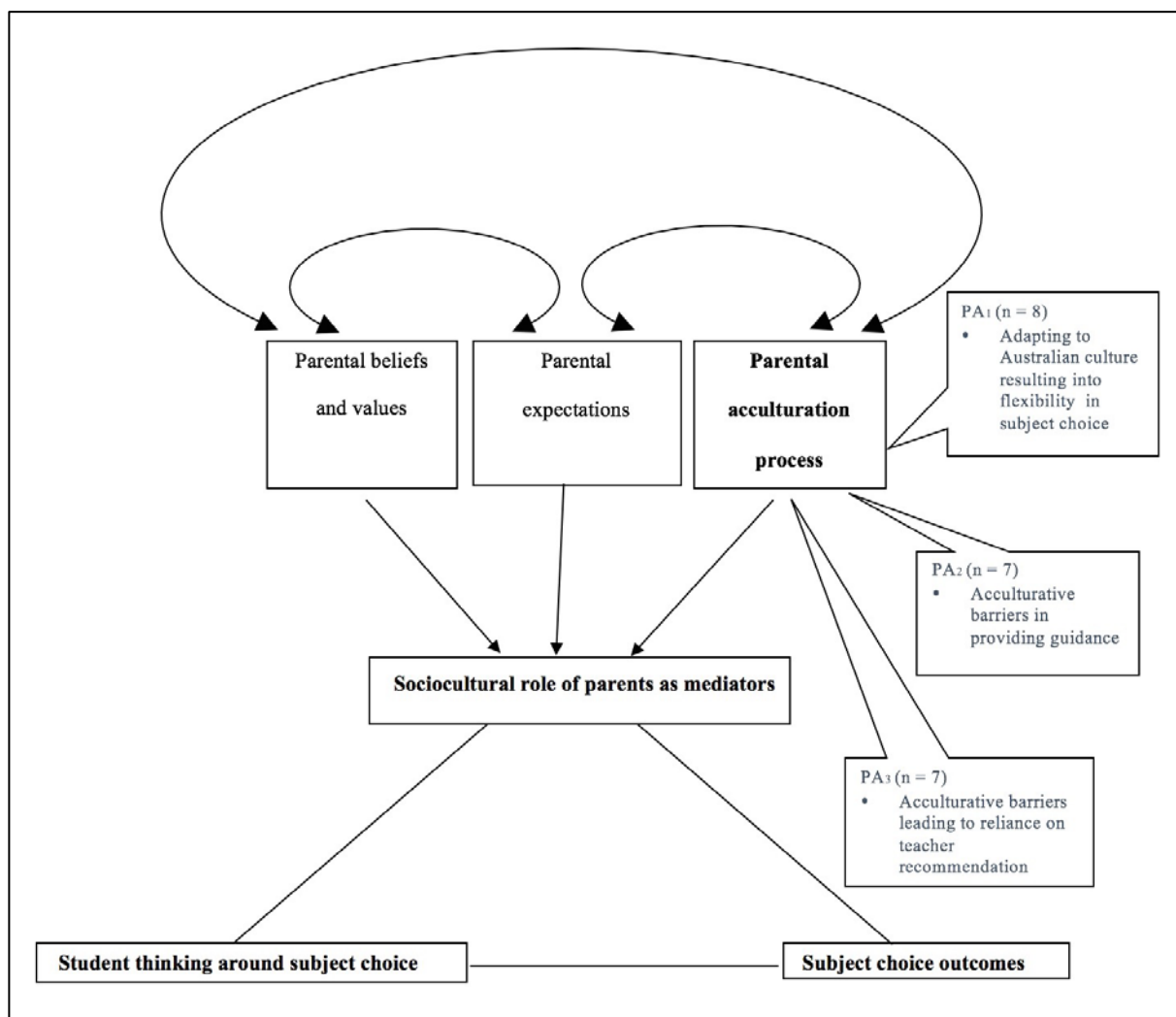


Figure 5.4. Relationship between parental acculturation process (PA) and the related categories of PA<sub>1</sub>, PA<sub>2</sub> and PA<sub>3</sub> in mediating student subject choice thinking.

#### **5.4.1 Adapting to Australian culture resulting in flexibility in subject choice.**

This subtheme (Figure 5.4, category PA<sub>1</sub>) highlighted how parental perceptions of their child's educational outcomes had changed after moving countries. Despite the influence of family values, practices and expectations as were evident in the previously discussed themes and categories, student subject choice seemed to be a democratic process. There was a consensus amongst the eight immigrant parents that after moving countries, they preferred their children to be autonomous so that they can make their own choices on the subjects and eventual career pathways.

Originally from Bangladesh, Ishi's family migrated to Australia in 2004. Ishi's son, Meher, had finished Kindergarten in Bangladesh and started schooling in Australia when he was in Grade 1. To Ishi, Australian culture is more open than in Bangladeshi culture. She perceives the Australian education system as less rigid and more easy-going in terms of giving her children the opportunities to think and decide independently. She felt that in Bangladesh, most parents made decisions for their children's education and the opportunities they have. Ishi clarified:

*Like Australian culture, they are very open. You discuss everything with your kid, which I do, is to guide them. It will not be like in Bangladesh – the thing is you can push your kids up to a certain stage but not after that. It is not only my choices, after some time, they should be able take their decisions and they need to follow their choices also. But as parents the responsibility I believe is to guide their kids.*

In adjusting to the new Australian culture, Ishi acknowledges that it is not like Bangladesh, where parents believe in exercising power over their children's academic decisions. Whereas now, she believes in not being overly strict about imposing her decisions of subject and career choices onto Meher. In fact, she seemed to be supportive and amicable about Meher's choice of subjects. Yet, she admitted to maintaining her Bangladeshi cultural belief of providing guidance to Meher, and recognises that as parents, it is her duty to guide Meher in making his subject choice decisions.

Meher's response reverberated his mother's sentiment in the way that his choice of subjects was not pushed upon him, although the case would have been different if the family was in Bangladesh. He articulated:

*Coming from Bangladesh, she always wanted me to do medicine or something, but over time she became more accepting like do whatever you want. We just talk about what's the best for the future. What I'm going to be happy with.*

Meher admitted that once upon a time, his mother did enforce the inherited cultural belief of wanting him to pursue medicine and aim to become a doctor. However, over a period of 12 years living in Australia, Ishi seems to have become more accepting of Meher's decisions. She now believes in allowing for flexibility in Meher's post-secondary options. It seemed Ishi's process of acculturation into the Australian context was only in the beginning stages and this was mainly driven by Meher. The fact that Meher admitted the family indulged in making career decisions that would make him happy and satisfied showed how Ishi had become adjusted to Meher's decisions.

In the case of another parent, Raji (Pilka's mother), who had moved from India to Australia in 2007, shared her views about the Australian educational system and compared it to the Indian ways:

*When we came here Pilka was in Year 4, was very good in studies, and now she's more in activities and sports because there was no homework here. In India, there is lot of homework and kids are always pushed in studies. Like her grandparents always want Pilka to be a doctor or something in the medical stream. But definitely right now, we just advise her with what we are thinking is good. And it is her decision, not our decision to choose sports and recreation subjects.*

It was apparent that Raji's family roots were in India and thus were her beliefs about education. In spite of living in Australia for the past 10 years, she still compared the Australian education system to her experiences with the Indian education system, particularly in the varying levels of homework given and the rigour of academic pressure in Indian schools. The family also demonstrated close connectedness in terms of talking to grandparents, who keep a regular check on Pilka's educational decisions and wish for Pilka to

become a doctor. Yet, given the present situation of having lived in Australia, Raji seems to accept Pilka's choice of sports subjects.

Pilka shares a common understanding with her mother, although her words showed that she was quite far away from faithfully practising her familial beliefs about education:

*Mostly Indian parents say that you should be smart, engineer, doctor, maths, that's life, you can't do anything further. I guess that influenced me before, but now I'm making my choices, I just can't cope with being nerdy.*

For Pilka, having finished half of her primary schooling in India, showed an understanding of traditional educational beliefs of pursuing highly aspired careers such as being a doctor or an engineer. Yet, after a few years of schooling in Australia, she admits that she could not cope with being overly “nerdy” and conforming to select a few prescribed pathways merely because they aligned with her parents' Indian cultural and educational expectations. Perhaps she is also trying to integrate into the Australian culture and fears peer pressure and being called a “nerd”. Hence, this could have been the driving force behind making her own subject choice and career decisions, independent of her mothers' cultural beliefs and values for education. This perhaps signalled how, for Raji and Pilka, changes in the sociocultural circumstances after moving countries affected Pilka's internalisation of her parents' educational beliefs and expectations. Despite the mother trying to encourage her daughter, Pilka, to choose subjects according to her own traditional beliefs and expectations, her perceptions had limited or no influence on Pilka's decisions of subjects.

Similarly, Michelina (Nick's mother), who moved to Australia in 2004, expressed how her past Czechoslovakian educational context was very strict and academic driven. Originating from an Eastern European context, Michelina recognised the importance of science and maths-based subjects and curriculum studies. She admitted that her current Australian experiences made her realise that being strict was not likely to be a healthy option for her son Nick's educational success. It appears she now believes in providing the best opportunities for Nick and letting him explore his own subject options, and instilling within him autonomy towards guiding his academics. Nonetheless, she displays lot of interest in her

son's academic endeavours. As seen through Michelina's words below, she is supportive of Nick's subject and career decisions.

*During my school days back in Czechoslovakia it was very, regimented. Very strict. Math-driven, science-driven curriculum, Eastern European at the expense of humanities and languages. But here in Australia, Nick is absolutely free to pursue whatever he wants. I don't push him. We're leaving it open and letting him explore. As long as the opportunities are there. And so I'll support him in whatever endeavour.*

Michelina's acculturation into the Australian educational context had progressed well enough. There was a visible cultural shift towards the mainstream society with respect to her thinking of allowing flexibility in subject choices. As long as there are the right opportunities for Nick to explore and pursue, she is quite content and agrees to support her son in his chosen subjects. At the same time, she also believes in Nick's academic capabilities, which perhaps made it smoother for Nick to make independent subject choices. Such an inclination to allow for autonomy in subject choice is an indication of Michelina's adaptation to the Australian norms and values.

Nick was 10 years old when his family moved to Australia. He had finished the majority of his primary schooling in Poland. He seemed to be in agreement with his parents views:

*We did have long conversations especially with Dad –but no one didn't like ever say you have to do this because I want you to be a doctor, I want you to be a lawyer or an architect. That was about it. There was no heavy-handed pick this stuff, which is the key point of it.*

Through his positive interactions with his father, Nick professed that his parents want the best for him and do not want to steer him in any particular career pathway, despite coming from a regimented Eastern European background. Nick appreciates that his parents do not exercise force or pressure him to choose "heavy-handed" subjects. Such an independence and flexibility in his subject choice led Nick to realise and henceforth strive to work towards the opportunities provided in Australia. Michelina–Nick's mutual understanding of allowing Nick to experiment with his academic choices enabled Nick to

have a greater personal autonomy in his subject selection. Consequently, this demonstrates a shift away from his traditional parental cultural values.

In another instance, where Bibi (Deep's mother), who had migrated from India almost 30 years ago, admitted how limiting and difficult her own past educational experiences had been. Bibi expressed:

*Apparently, India is very different from here. Indian education is very tough. The homework here [in Australia] is a piece of cake in front of the homework that we used to get. So we still used to have the pressure to my older daughter like she should study and do well. Now we've got a bit more lenient after coming to Australia. Over the years, we have realised, at the end of the day, it's not about the scores that they [my children] get in VCE [Year 12], like there are other ways of achieving what you want to achieve. Like you don't have to get a 90+ ATAR [Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank], to get a job in the future, or to get a degree.*

Initially, Bibi reflected on her Indian schooling experiences in saying that it was very challenging because her parents were very pushy to get their children to study hard and aim to get higher scores. From her utterances, it was suggested that Bibi does not want her children's education to be exposed to such a strict mentality that she had experienced in India. She confessed that getting an ATAR score was not the only aim in life for her younger daughter, Deep, although she had maintained strictness and assertiveness for her older daughter. It appeared that having lived in Australia for about 30 years, Bibi has become more accepting over time, showing evidence of her family's acculturation into the Australian educational context. She appeared more relaxed now as opposed to back then, when the family had migrated to Australia. She has begun to realise that Australia was full of opportunities and that her children's future is certain in terms of job opportunities, and independent of Deep's final Year 12 exam scores.

Furthermore, in parallel with her mother's acculturation experiences, Deep indicated how her parents' attitudes had changed after moving countries. In the Indian context, decisions were made for the children. However, now being in Australia, Deep admitted that

her parents have become more accommodating and are content with her choice of nursing career-related subjects rather than engineering career-based subjects. Deep shared:

*Before decisions used to be made for us, but now, I think my parents have learned that this is a country where you can't force your decision upon your kids. You have to let them make their own decisions. They'll give their opinion but at the end of the day, they'll say, do whatever you think is best for you. Dad was like, "Why don't you try engineering. Apparently there's a lot of prospects for engineering in Australia". And I [Deep] am like "No, I'm not doing engineering. I'm doing nursing". And my dad said, "Okay, whatever".*

It was apparent in Deep's acknowledgement that her parents strongly realise that Australia is a country where decisions cannot be enforced upon children. This suggests that her parents have an inclination towards adopting the host country's cultural norms and practices. As a parent, one can only offer opinions and ultimately aim to be accepting of their children's decisions. For this reason, Deep could decide her subjects and career pathway independently without her parents' intrusion, unlike the Indian way. Now that the family has been settled in Australia for a long period, she could easily tell her father that she wished to pursue nursing instead of engineering without having further debates with them. This demonstrated Deep's independence in her subject selection.

#### **5.4.2 Acculturative barriers in providing guidance in subject choice.**

Of noteworthy, seven parental responses exposed the barriers and challenges (Figure 5.4, category PA<sub>2</sub>) they experienced during the acculturation process, which hindered parental capacity to provide guidance in subject choices. This finding could be a more plausible reason for the previously discussed parental perceptions of becoming flexible about their children subject choices after moving countries.

Beth (Lee's mother), who had moved from Spain 30 years ago and had the majority of her schooling in Spanish language, uttered:

*Our biggest challenge, was when we migrated to Australia, not knowing the language. We came to Australia without a word of English, and the structure*

*of studies is totally different. All my schooling, my previous schooling had been done in Spain, in Spanish.*

To Beth, her most prominent challenge when migrating to Australia was her non-English speaking background. Because her schooling was different to the Australian educational system, she felt less informed about Lee's education. It seemed that despite of living in Australia for a large number of years (30 years), Beth was still reflecting back on her struggles and challenges of understanding the structure of the Australian educational system.

Lee expressed a similar predicament about his mother's non-English speaking competency:

*My parents had a hard life settling here in Australia and struggle speaking English to help me make decisions. They did not study here so they cannot advise me...It's my decision to choose these subjects.*

Lee admitted that because his mother's own prior educational experiences were in Spanish, it made it stressful for Beth to provide such guidance. Beth's lack of English competency and confidence in understanding the Australian education system resulted in abstaining her from guiding Lee in choosing his subjects. Due to such an acculturative stress period for his parents, Lee's subject choice process was independent of parental direction. It appears that during the acculturation process, factors such as the length of stay of the parents and the time to become acquainted with the Australian education system had not resolved the issues around the parents' language barriers. This consequently affected the parents' capacity to mediate student subject choice, just as in the case of Beth-Lee.

Similarly, Bibi (Deep's mother), who had migrated from India, highlighted that the quality and quantity of her interactions in relation to subject choice guidance were significantly compromised due to obstacles such as not knowing the host country's language and having a limited understanding of the new Australian educational context. She lamented:

*At the start, it was very hard as our English wasn't as well and it was a massive change from India to here. And slowly, we just adapted to the culture over here, and started working, starting picking up on the language. We just ask how's everything going, good, but other than that, it's her decision – what she thinks she can do well in, do that subject.*



Bibi, the same as Beth, had a negative experience with one aspect of her acculturation. Her English language problems not only made it difficult to find jobs, but also limited the opportunities for quality interactions that Bibi could have had with her children. Since her schooling experiences were in a different language, it was significantly challenging to become fluent in English while settling in Australia. This perhaps accounted for Bibi being under some sort of acculturative stress and, hence, not being heavily opinionated about Deep's subject decisions. Although, she still believes in continuing to monitor Deep's academic progress and thus maintains a supportive role in her academic choices.

Deep acknowledged how her parents' non-English background affected the ways she could be supported. She articulated:

*My schooling, I don't really talk to them. I'm making my own decisions, but if I do, I'll obviously ask my sisters, especially my older ones because they've been through this and they can probably give me a right answer to what I'm looking for. Because I don't think the parents would be because their education was different from ours, because they're from India, so their education system was different.*

Deep's admittance demonstrates that Bibi's lack of knowledge of the Australian education system appears to have hindered her mother's sociocultural and educational competence to provide guidance in subject choices. This implies that Deep was left with the option to make independent subject decisions, although she relied on her older sisters' support, as they had been schooled in an Australian educational context and, hence, were more familiar with the system. Having been schooled in India, Bibi relied only on her own Indian perceptions of education. Consequently, Deep felt it was pointless engaging in a conversation with her parents and thus chose to discuss with her older sister or, rather, make independent decisions.

Repeating the same pattern of acculturative barriers, Raji (Pilka's mother), who had also recently migrated from India, lamented her lack of knowledge of the school career counselling system and limited understanding of the language, the Australian accent, and the overall new educational context.

*We never met any career counsellor in school. We don't have much knowledge what the education system here is in Australia. All we wanted was more options for Pilka in the future and get some better options at university. For us it was a very struggling time too. And the studying part is totally different from there [India]. Maybe the language problem as well as sometime the accent is totally different.*

Such responses indicate that due to acculturative stressors, such as significant language and accent problems, struggling to find a job and a lack of understanding about the Australian education system, deterred Raji from guiding Pilka in her education. Moreover, Raji was unaware of the school's career counselling system and, hence, did not receive advice and consultation regarding Pilka's future options. Consequently, she was forced to rely only on her Indian educational beliefs and expected that Pilka should choose subjects that will procure her a variety of university course options.

Pilka echoed her mother's sentiments:

*All the subject choices, I made them by myself. I don't really talk to them because I'm pretty sure they don't know how the system works here. I just got the information from school and then we discussed.*

Raji's views were confirmed by Pilka, as she stated that she was left with the option of seeking advice from school personnel such as the career counsellors or the teachers. Although, Pilka admitted that because it is an Indian cultural obligation to discuss with the family, she brought the career counselling information home. Yet, ultimately, she made her own subject decisions.

#### **5.4.3 Acculturative barriers leading to reliance on teacher recommendation.**

Due to the acculturation barriers discussed in the previous category, all those seven parents were left with no other option but to rely on teachers' recommendations for subject choice guidance. It did not come as a surprise that these seven parents who had experienced barriers and challenges admitted to relying on teachers' recommendation for their children's choice of subjects. Category PA<sub>3</sub> is added as a subtheme in Figure 5.4 and discussed below.

Alex's mother, Danielle, who had been schooled in Serbia, was unaware of the Australian senior schooling subjects. Danielle illustrated her situation of being dependent on the career counsellor as well as Alex's subject teachers to advise him regarding subject choice options. Danielle shared:

*I didn't really put much input on what Alex was choosing. They have a career counsellor at school and some professional people and his teachers always have the results, how the kids perform in what subjects they like, and I think they're weighed by that.*

It is evident that Danielle did not have a great input and instead trusted the suggestions provided by Alex's teachers. She perceived that his teachers were the best informed to know Alex's capabilities and, based on his academic scores, teachers could guide him more competently than she could.

Alex agreed that his parents were not directly involved in any kind of subject choice decisions for him.

*The career counselling procedure helped me in the questions you want to be answered about the course if you don't know. No one made the choices for me. It was just a question about which maths to choose and I asked my teachers. My teachers always gave recommendations in doing what you want to do later, and doing what you're good at.*

It appeared that the fact Alex's parents did not school in an Australian education system, their lack of awareness of the current educational context served as an interactive loop to solely rely on his teachers' subject recommendations. When in doubt, Alex stated he relied on the career counsellor and his teachers' suggestions when choosing the type of maths subject. He presumed his teachers were the best judge to know his strengths and weaknesses in relation to his scores and academic excellence. It is evident that in such a case where Danielle was not in a position to provide advice to her son, teachers' recommendations for subject choice were a better and more reliable option for the family.

In contrast, Raji, who had expectations of her daughter, Pilka, to study high level maths, was in conflict with the teachers' recommendations. Again, having not been schooled in Australia appeared to be a deterrent in understanding available subject choices and implications for Pilka's related career pathways. Raji expressed:

*We were concerned about maths because school advised Pilka to choose Prep Maths, but I think the Prep Maths she can't do in the university or something, I don't know. Then I asked advice from my friend who is a school teacher and she said to provide her [Pilka] help in maths, and then Pilka got to choose Advanced Maths.*

Raji was obviously perplexed about what other maths subject choices were available for Pilka instead of Prep Maths, as she was unhappy about Pilka's teachers recommending that she choose Prep Maths (lower-level maths). Hence, she confounded to seek advice from some of her teacher friends. Raji was determined to get Pilka to choose higher level maths. This was perhaps again reflective of her traditional Indian outlook of studying maths for a successful future. She believed that Pilka's future would be brighter if she were to pursue the high level maths subject, hence the determined effort to seek alternate opinions from her teacher friend.

Interestingly, in contrast to her mother's perceptions, Pilka felt it was futile to have subject choice conversations with her parents, as they were unaware of the available subjects and career pathway options.

*Because the system's really different here, so there's no point discussing it with them [my parents]. I ended up choosing the sports subjects too other than Maths A because we have to get recommended for the VET [Vocational Education and Training] course and my teacher recommended me because my scores were good and even the practice classes and the theory classes, I was good at both. So the teacher recommended me according to it.*

For Pilka, it was important to choose subjects based on her teachers' suggestions and the subjects that she believed she could excel in. She was also reluctant to get her parents involved in her decisions, although her mother was still keen to look for advice and alternate options to secure Pilka's future. It was evident that Pilka was fully aware that her mother was

not directly able to advise her – whether it was the type of maths or any other subject. Hence, it was more productive to make her own decisions after seeking useful and relevant advice from her teachers. Nevertheless, she did choose Maths A instead of Prep Maths. It was indicative that she appreciated her mother's efforts to seek guidance in terms of making informed maths subject decisions. This can thus be considered as an influence of Indian cultural beliefs or respecting parental efforts in predicting their children's educational outcomes. This was clearly reflected in Pilka's subject choice thinking.

Meena shared that her experiences were limited while being involved in her daughter, Kul's, career counselling session:

*We only talked about Kul's part-time job, and the career counsellor said as long as she [Kul] can keep up with the subjects, we didn't talk anything about subjects [Translated from Indian to English].*

Again, having been schooled in India and with no English communication skills, Meena made a minimal contribution to query with the career counsellor, other than asking about Kul's well-being and if she would be able to cope with her chosen subjects along with part-time work.

Kul agreed that she had sought advice from her subject teachers. She shared:

*If I talk to them [teachers] about it, they do encourage me how I can get that ATAR score [Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank], I can get into that career. And my dad came along during career counselling to discuss the subjects with the teachers. At that time they just talked about if it was alright to do those subjects at this level and will she be able to handle everything.*

It was apparent that for Kul's parents, there was heavy reliance on teacher suggestions because of a lack of knowledge of the available senior subject choices. Kul recognised this as an obstacle and, hence, was more open in discussing her future career-related options with her teachers. Moreover, Kul felt encouraged because of her supportive teachers, who guided her in the right direction. When Kul's father came along to the career counselling session, his goal was only to enquire about Kul's well-being. It was evident that Kul's parents trusted her with the subjects she had chosen in consultation with her teachers, yet, were still concerned

about whether she would be able to maintain a balance between part-time work and pursuing her academic choices.

In sum, the results under this theme suggested that both the immigrant parents and their children seemed to have a general preference for being acculturated into the present Australian culture. Parental perceptions of being flexible and open to their child's academic choices appeared to be a result of psychological and cultural change in adapting to their environment in Australia, which, in turn, seems to have resulted in a flexible view of student choices. Despite the parents' efforts to be acquainted with the Australian norms, opportunities and the educational system whilst also trying to maintain their original beliefs, values and expectations, the integration of these parents did not come without challenges. Many of the parents in this study shared how they overcame hurdles to become more acculturated with the Australian education system. It was evident from the parents' dilemma that they had to significantly compromise to provide guidance to their children due to barriers such as not knowing the host country's language and limited understanding of the new educational context. Hence, there was a reliance on teachers' recommendations and, in some cases, seeking information from the school's career counsellor for subject selection. Teachers and career counsellors were seen to be caring and understanding of student abilities and had provided advice accordingly. However, the barriers perceived by the immigrant families affected parent-child interactions and the discussions they could have had around subject choice decisions. Consequently, the quality of educational experiences and opportunities that parents provided to their children was limited. Such issues around familial acculturation processes that impact on parents' mediation of cultural tools and the related implications on immigrant children's decision-making capacities is discussed further in the Discussion (Chapter 7) of this thesis.

## **5.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided evidence of parental role as mediators, which was perceived as being providers, interpreters and models of their values, beliefs, expectations and acculturation experiences. Children tended to internalise such values and expectations held by parents into their thinking, which made the children actually work towards trying hard and doing the best they can in their choice of subjects.

The next chapter reports the findings from the interviews of three school career and pathway transition leaders, which revealed their perceptions of parental influence on student subject choice thinking. The next chapter sets out to highlight all the findings in relation to this study's third research question.

## **CHAPTER 6: Findings of School's Career and Pathways Transition Leaders' Perspectives of Parental Influence on Student Subject Choice**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings on the perspectives of school CPT leaders regarding immigrant parental involvement and related influence on their children's senior subject choices (Years 10–12). The role of the CPT leaders in the context of the school career counselling process is to liaise with the senior subject teachers to seek recommendations for their students' choice of subjects. In particular, the school has a formal recommendation process for mathematics-based subjects, whereby the teachers recommend on what subjects their students are capable of successfully completing to attain a good Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) score. Most importantly, the CPT leader plays a critical role in organising career counselling for students and face-to-face interviews and sit-down meetings with parents regarding their children's subject choices.

As the prior chapter explored the immigrant parent–student perceptions of influence on children's subject choices, this chapter focuses on answering research question three of this study, and illuminates the third party perspectives of parental influence on student subject and career pathway choice as viewed by the CPT leaders. Based on the data drawn from three semi-structured interviews, Figure 6.1 presents the key themes and the related categories that emanated from the collation of the CPT leader data. These themes and the related categories are discussed in the forthcoming sections.



## **6.2 High Parental Aspirations**

6.2.1 CPT leader perceptions of parental beliefs and values regarding mathematics-based subjects.

6.2.2 CPT leader views of unrealistic parental expectations.

6.2.3 Students 'at risk' of non-completion of chosen subjects.

## **6.3 CPT Leader Perceptions of Factors Limiting Parental Involvement (PI)**

6.3.1 Barriers as a 'marker' of limiting parental involvement.

6.3.2 Difficulties for CPT leaders to liaise with immigrant parents and students.

*Figure 6.1.* List of themes and related categories from the three CPT leader interviews.

The detailed profile of the CPT leaders was provided in Chapter 4 (Table 4.4) and the full transcript excerpt of one of the CPT leader interviews is included in Appendix L. The guiding interview questions (as discussed in Chapter 4, Table 4.6) for the CPT leader interview protocol were used as the basis for coding and the identification of themes and their relationships. When considered and interpreted, the representative quotations formulated the subthemes that are herewith elaborated on and discussed. The quotes are labelled as CPT (1–3) unpack the CPT leader perceptions of parental involvement and related influence that impacts on children's choice of subjects and probable career pathway decisions.

## **6.2 High Parental Aspirations**

Data under this theme revealed the perceptions of CPT's in relation to immigrant parental involvement and related influence on their children's subject choice. This theme elicited how CPT leaders are critical of parents having high aspirations that translate into unrealistic expectations of their children. In consequence, the CPT leaders expressed underlying concerns in relation to parents subjecting their children to stress when choosing their subjects. Henceforth, such students were perceived to be 'at risk' of being unsuccessful in completing that enforced subject choice. These CPT leader perceptions are herewith categorised under

three subthemes: parental beliefs and values regarding mathematics-based subjects, unrealistic parental expectations and students ‘at risk’ of non-completion of chosen subjects.

### **6.2.1 CPT leader perceptions of parental beliefs and values regarding mathematics-based subjects.**

The CPT leaders pointed out how pivotal parental beliefs and values are in influencing their children’s decisions about maths subject choice. CPT 1 concurred:

*It’s not uncommon that the parents have a big influence on what the kids are picking. There’s some sort of myth that circulates sometimes in families I would say from certain backgrounds. For example, students with strong creative interests, photography, design, who were very strongly discouraged from pursuing those types of or related occupations by parents because they weren’t seen to be ones that would provide a stable income and a secure future. So it’s quite difficult combatting those beliefs because they’re never really necessarily spoken out loud.*

CPT 1 recognised that one of the prominent parental beliefs that seems to have influenced student subject choice is the intergenerational dissemination of pursuing maths-related careers. It seems CPT 1 perceived that immigrant parents from certain backgrounds hold a belief that a maths subject choice would harvest a secure future and financial success for their children. As such, parental beliefs encompass high aspirations for their children to select maths subjects, despite their children demonstrating otherwise creative interests. CPT 1 considered this circulating parental belief as a struggling encounter while combatting with such parental high aspirations that reflected the parents’ traditional beliefs and values. This was perceived to be more challenging since the immigrant parents tend to keep such beliefs behind the scenes and prefer not to discuss them with the CPT leaders during their face-to-face dealings in the children’s subject counselling process.

As CPT 2 mentioned:

*I think we get that sometimes more with Indian, Pakistani families where they want their kids to do Maths Methods [high level Maths]. There’s probably the most parent dissatisfaction that you would have – they unhappy with their child’s choices or why were they given that subject. A lot of the times those*

*conversations are around their maths and that's because I think parents believe that maths of all subjects that exist, have the bearing on what they're able to do at the end of Year 12. So where there are disputes, most of them would be centred around maths that had been recommended for by their teachers.*

CPT 2's views were consistent with those of CPT 1, where they both found that most immigrants parents tended to have high aspirations for choosing a high level maths subject for their children. It seemed the bigger picture highlighted by CPT 2 was in the area of lack of parental knowledge regarding how the teacher recommendation process worked, which results in subject allocations reflecting students' strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, parental beliefs that were regimented towards a high level maths subject selection demonstrated a lack of parental awareness of the available subject choices and career pathways offered other than maths. The glaring issue of combatting the traditional myths and beliefs around maths subject selection, which seems to circulate within families of certain cultural backgrounds, was central to CPT perceptions.

*We have a lot of Chinese students from China, from Singapore, from Malaysia, and yes, they were very strongly interested in the business area. A lot of them saw commerce as being a pathway to success; that very much for them that commerce meant a high performing or high paying jobs and they were all very, very focused on maths based subjects and going to university.*

CPT 3 loudly resonated the voices of the other two CPTs with respect to parents' belief that studying maths is an irrevocable subject choice for their children. In particular, CPT 3 highlighted the traditional beliefs and values held by certain immigrant parents from Chinese backgrounds residing in Southeast Asian countries and China. These immigrant parents were perceived to have a strong expectation that their children would focus on maths subjects and gain access to university. The quiet desperation resonated in CPT 3's perceptions and magnified the issues around how such parental beliefs and high aspirations significantly impact on children's successful academic outcomes, and in turn, affecting their future educational options after Year 12. Moreover, CPT 3 did not accept parents' judgement that studying maths-based subjects is the sole pathway for their children to secure successful occupational opportunities.

In sum, the CPT leaders were concerned about parental knowledge deficiency regarding the various types of maths subjects and related career pathways available to their children. Additionally, parental ignorance of the subject teachers' recommendation procedures, particularly for maths subjects, presented serious implications for their children's ATAR score, which again was a conspicuous concern for the CPTs. Consequently, the CPTs speculated whether such an unfamiliarity with subject choices might be because of parental traditional beliefs and high aspirations towards pursuing maths-related subjects and careers. This appeared to have been derived from the parents' own cultural milieu. The next subtheme continues to delve further into CPT leaders' perceptions of parental beliefs that translate into unrealistic parental expectations.

### **6.2.2 CPT leaders' views of unrealistic parental expectations.**

In particular, CPT leaders perceived parental hopes and desires for their children to choose higher mathematics subjects such as Specialist Maths or Maths Methods rather than Foundation Maths to be unrealistic. The CPTs identified the reason why parents hold such high aspirations, is that they want their children to have access to different career options, given the uptake of a high level maths subject. Moreover, even though the subject teacher had recommended the student to choose otherwise, parents still considered higher maths to be of more value for future careers prospects and advocated for their child to choose such high level maths subjects. CPT 1 expressed her opinions:

*Where there is a dispute between the student and parents is often about the maths because the student will often say I want to drop down to this [Foundation] maths and the parents say I don't care whether the teacher has recommended for that [lower] maths. I want him to do this [higher] maths.*

It can be deduced from such concerns how unrealistic parental expectations are when persuading their children to opt for a high level maths subject, despite children's aptitude. CPT 1 comprehended such high parental aspirations as unmeasured ambitions these parents seem to have for their children, which compels children to compulsorily choose higher maths. This demonstrates the obliviousness of parents to the impact this may have on children's future educational outcomes. The CPT leaders viewed this as an issue, where parents seemed not to be in consensus with their children's subject choice, or with the subject teachers' maths recommendations.

Similarly, CPT 2, an assistant principal of the senior school, highlighted:

*Asian families have high expectations, but sometimes their expectations aren't realistic. It's not necessarily about wanting the best for their kid. It's almost a family pride thing that there's university at the end. Interactions that I have with parents are at the pointy end when the parent still believes my child must have this opportunity even though it might not be supplying to the strengths.*

CPT 2 sensed that immigrant parents typically had higher expectations for their children. Parents tended to hinge on their cultural values and beliefs of wanting the best for their children, and yet they appeared to be the least worried or informed about the implications and limitations on their children's career options because of such enforced expectations. The example of Asian families clearly delineated how CPT 2 viewed parental high aspirations that stem from their traditional beliefs and desires to see a pathway for their children leading to university course options. Despite having conversations with parents regarding the suitability of children's maths subject choice, CPT 2 identified how during such conversations, unrealistic parental expectations were considered to be a limitation to viable career pathway outcomes.

CPT 3 supported the views expressed by both CPT 1 and CPT 2 and acknowledged similar issues around parents' unrealistic expectations, which seemed connected to parents' cultural background and related beliefs and expectations.

*Asian families would generally have higher expectations. But it can be negative too because often they have unrealistic expectations of the kids [children] to do Methods [higher maths] and physics but we know they're not capable of doing that.*

CPT 3 reported that although parents from certain cultural backgrounds, such as Asians, generally tended to have higher expectations, these expectations were seen to have a detrimental impact on children's academic outcomes. This is precisely where the CPTs mentioned their role was crucial for making parents realise and be aware of the reality behind their children's capabilities of being successful in their chosen subjects. CPT 3 acknowledged that the lack of such parental knowledge of their children's subject and available career pathway choice is a limitation, when combatting with unrealistic parental expectations.

Additionally, CPT leader perceptions also implied another detrimental effect of high parental aspirations, as they seemed to be linked with students being ‘at risk’ of not completing their chosen subjects. The CPT leaders speculated that although the subject teachers appear to know their students’ capabilities and made subject recommendations accordingly, parents do not necessarily understand this. They continue to wish for high level maths subject choices, thus, showing evidence of how they are adamant about transferring their own pattern of thinking and related expectations onto their children. This leads to the next subtheme of students being perceived ‘at risk’ and struggling to do well in the subjects, that they were enforced to pursue by their parents.

### **6.2.3 Students ‘at risk’ of non-completion of chosen subjects.**

The CPT leaders recognised unrealistic parental expectations as a critical factor that places students at risk of non-completion of their chosen subjects. CPT 1 was critical of parents and stated:

*Parental expectations are sometimes inappropriate and damaging for Vietnamese [Asian] student’s performance. We know they’re not capable of doing that, that they’re going to struggle, and sometimes they [parents] insist, so all we [CPTs] have to do is counsel. If they [parents] insist then, we put them in it and in Year 11, we will have them back because their kids would be failing.*

As evident from CPT 1’s perceptions of impracticable parental expectations, she perpetuated concerns about how parental hopes and desires were not seen as meaningful or practicable for the student’s future performance and subject interest. Due to strong parental expectations, counselling such parents and making them aware of the negative outcomes for their children was seen as one way of dealing with such combative situations. However, if parents still advocated for that subject, CPT 1 admitted placing the student in the desired subject. Conversely, since the student might be failing the ‘forced upon’ subject, CPT 1 admitted to holding back such students and not progressing them in the subsequent year.

CPT 2 resonated similar concerns that appeared to stem from unrealistic parental expectations.

*We have kids who get very stressed because those parents' expectations don't match with their ability. They're working their hardest, but, there is sometimes that tension between kid's welfare and the parents' unrealistic expectations. So we end up spending a lot of time monitoring kid's progress and contacting parents.*

Unreasonable parental expectations were viewed as stressors on their children. There seems to be a discordance between parental expectations and a student's abilities that jeopardised both the student's welfare and their ability to perform to the expected achievement standards. According to CPT 2, although parents believed that they have the right intention of wanting their children to be successful, in fact, parents aspired for something different for their children. This was not in harmony with the students' capabilities in that subject. It did not come as a surprise that in such cases, CPT 2 also flagged student welfare issues.

CPT 3 indicated how parental control and advocacy of their own high aspirations and unrealistic expectations seemed to negatively impact on children's final Year 12 scores.

*The critical factor because although aspirationally the parents might want them to be a doctor, for example, but their exam might be below 30% in a mid-year exam, and that would indicate they would struggle to meet the ATAR [Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank] requirements.*

CPT 3 witnessed instances where parents, in their interactions with the career counsellors, advocated for highly sought after subjects and desired career pathways such as the medical profession, for their children. As such, CPT 3 witnessed students to be vulnerable to failing in such enforced subjects, which was seen as a serious indicator of non-completion of Year 12. Moreover, having to deal with unrealistic parental expectations when the student is classified by the teacher of being 'at-risk' of failing their subject is an alarming concern raised by CPT 3.

In sum, high parental aspirations inclusive of unrealistic expectations were seen as a marker of unproductive parental involvement, which had an overall negative impact on children's future educational pathways. Moreover, the repercussions of such high parental aspirations and unrealistic expectations also seemed to affect the emotional well-being of

students. Parental knowledge of the available mathematics subjects, understanding of the subject teachers' recommendation and information from the career counselling team were seen to be critical by the CPT leaders. The next theme recognises how CPT leaders perceived the acculturative barriers faced by immigrant families, which appeared to deter parental involvement in children's subject choice.

### **6.3 CPT Leaders' Perceptions of Factors Limiting Parental Involvement (PI)**

The second broad theme showed how the CPT leaders recognise some factors that act as barriers to immigrant parents' involvement in their children's subject choices and their interaction with the school's career counselling process. These barriers are examined in the first subtheme as immigrant parents' lack of proper education and related educational experiences along with a deficiency of English language competency, which act as factors that limit parental involvement. Secondly, factors around difficulties that the CPT leaders experience in liaising and connecting with immigrant parents and students within the strategies employed in the schools' career counselling process.

#### **6.3.1 Barriers as a 'marker' of limiting parental involvement.**

There are the two important 'markers' identified in limiting immigrant parents' involvement and interactions with the school. The CPT leaders reported that occasionally they counselled students whose parents had no tertiary qualifications and henceforth reflected lack of parental knowledge of the Australian education system. As such, parental past and current educational experiences appeared to interfere with their involvement in children's subject choice and career decision-making process.

In examining CPT 1's perceptions, it appeared that one of the barriers to PI included that the immigrant parents were not aware of how and what subjects children could choose in the Australian educational system, as well as the available career pathways and university options.

*The barriers are mainly for parents who perhaps weren't schooled here or who don't necessarily understand what VCE or VCAL are in terms of how*



*they work and what they lead to, what pathways they each allow in the education sector here in Australia. I think probably it could be a language barrier sometimes, it could be in some ways almost a fear of the authority in that the school stands for.*

In particular, one major factor was addressed in relation to such parents not understanding the VCE and VCAL pathways available to students, thereby affecting parents' ability to provide fruitful subject choice advice. Moreover, there was also the recognition of parents' non-English speaking background, which appeared to inhibit parents from stepping forward and seeking career counselling advice from the CPTs or their children's subject teachers. The CPTs comprehended that for immigrant parents coming from a very distinct educational background, where expectations for parental involvement in their children's education was seen to be different from their country of origin. Coming to Australia and experiencing English language deficiency issues appeared to have created multiple barriers for them including limited communication with the school and not being able to get accustomed to the different norms, expectations and available opportunities for their children. Nevertheless, CPT 1 wished for the immigrant parents to partake a more proactive role in getting involved in their children's educational decisions.

Parallel to CPT 1, CPT 2 mentioned similar factors that result in limited parental involvement, which resulted in less parental influence on children's subject choice. CPT 2 lamented:

*In terms of parents that stay away might be language barrier as well. Because they are already intimidated. I guess by school and teachers and principals a little bit more because of their lack of education. In fact, most of the course advisors here, the course counsellors would say that they're disappointed that the student doesn't seem to have opened the handbook, or discussed options with parents and rely a lot on the course counsellor for recommendations.*

CPT 2 anticipated the reasons why it was challenging to involve parents. This seemed to be rooted in two issues situated on a common continuum. Lack of parental knowledge and skills in English, as well as limited educational experiences regarding the current Australian education context, made the parents feel intimidated about being involved. CPT 2 speculated

that perhaps for some immigrant parents, it might not be a cultural norm to discuss, get involved or get interested in what their children are doing at school. Consequently, this compelled the students to rely solely on the career counsellors and subject teachers' recommendations. The CPT leaders perceived this to be inadequate for constructing students' abilities to make their subject and career pathway decisions. CPT 3 made similar comments about these two factors:

*I think in part that [less parental involvement] reflects the educational background of parents. I sometimes will get quite laborious conversations between us and an interpreter when it's a really – everyone's got to be patient and it takes a long time, so maybe parents from non-English backgrounds step away from being put under that sort of pressure.*

CPT 3 perceived that the aspect of the parental non-English speaking background significantly discouraged parents from proactively liaising with career counsellors and subject teachers at school. As a result, due to perceived lack of understanding of the Australian education system and available tertiary pathways, parents were seen to be incapacitated to transfer their knowledge and skills on to their children and mediate children's subject choice thinking. CPT 3's example of conducting laborious conversations with parents and an interpreter illustrated the extent of this issue.

In sum, the CPT leaders highlighted the barriers and challenges that deterred the immigrant parents from stepping forward to communicate with the career counsellors and subject teachers. Lack of knowledge of the Australian schooling system, particularly with regard to the available subjects and career pathways for their children, were recognised as hindrances to parental liaison with the school career counsellors and teachers. Additionally, CPT leaders admitted the challenges in combatting such issues while counselling parents and students. In view of addressing these issues, the CPT leaders described the strategies used by the school to provide parental awareness of children's subject selection processes and the available subjects and career pathway choices. Despite strategies to seek parental involvement during student subject selection process, the CPT leaders further explained the factors that deterred parental involvement. This is elaborated in the next subtheme of difficulties that the CPT leaders experienced in liaising with immigrant parents and students.

### **6.3.2 Difficulties for CPT leaders to liaise with immigrant parents and students.**

In their attempts to communicate with parents during the student subject and career counselling process, the CPT leaders revealed some of the strategies employed by the school. CPT 1 suggested:

*Lot of our information is very English-centric and it's also quite verbose, so I think at parent information nights that seems to be our way of communicating parents what we need them to know. I think there are probably ways that we could engage with some of those communities a lot better than we do. Really a way of providing support to parents to have career conversations with their young people and to feel more confident in terms of the information that they're sharing or resources that they're bringing to that conversation. And to my knowledge, we've never delivered any of those types of programs to our parent groups.*

CPT 1 described how the school's approach to get parents involved in the student subject counselling process was simply in the form of invitations to career information nights. It seems that this strategy is a plausible way to inform parents, give them more insight and bring an awareness about the importance of career pathway choices. CPT 1 speculated whether providing the students with materials such as the course handbook to take home and encouraging them to read such information along with parents might not be sufficient. Moreover, due to the nature of such information being communicated in English, it might not be a productive strategy as this could be an inhibiting factor for immigrant parents who cannot read the information and more likely to be intimidated and, thus, result in them being less involved. Hence, there is a need to invite parents to face-to-face information nights. In essence, CPT 1 was critical of the role schools have in such situations, and wished that there could be more workable strategies towards this end. Support for immigrant families with a lack of English language proficiency is crucial, alongside staff preparedness and training to deal with specific cases. Additionally, this was questioned and discussed by CPT 2, who doubted if the school was equipping immigrant parents with adequate career pathway information.

CPT 2 acknowledged the need to overcome the barriers that appear to create a communication gap between schools and immigrant parents by creating outreach

opportunities for such parents. Such an initiative was anticipated to create more opportunities for immigrant students to achieve better decision-making in their subject choices, particularly for maths-based subjects, and improvement of their educational outcomes.

*I think there is a recognition that if we have any flaws in our process, it's definitely in the maths recommendations area that we need to look at ways of delivering that component better. The number of contentious cases and disputes and probably unhappiness on the part of the student and the parent is in terms of the maths that they've been assigned.*

Similar to CPT 1, CPT2 expressed an overarching sense that the schools' efforts were not adequate. The idea of creating and implementing better opportunities for parents to feel confident in being involved resonated throughout CPT 2's perceptions. More emphasis was laid on improving the teachers' maths subject recommendation process with a view to combatting parental and student unhappiness about the allocated maths subject. Thus, it was apparent that CPT 2 recognised how fostering sustainable student's career pathway outcomes is connected to parents' beliefs, values and unrealistic expectations, which presently appear to interfere with students' viable academic choices.

CPT 3's perceptions reverberated the other two CPT leaders' concerns about how the school should consider parental knowledge and ability to support their children's subject decisions.

*We have a process where teachers will recommend or not recommend students for their subjects based on their performance that year, and so there's a lot of information that feeds into the decision and the advice, because we want students playing to their strengths. If they [students] make a poor selection, either with the prerequisite selections or with ability and parental expectations, they're out of step with each other, they will got to look at their performance and then how that sets them up into Year 11 and 12.*

It is clear that CPT 3 wished for the immigrant parents to trust and acknowledge teachers' recommended subjects, irrespective of their high aspirations and/or lack of ability to provide guidance. Poor subject choices at Year 10 were seen to provoke negative educational outcomes for students, such as being at-risk and setting up students with a prospective career

pathway that may lead to undesirable consequences. As such, CPT 3 was being mindful of the complex nature of immigrant parental beliefs, values and expectations, inclusive of the barriers faced during the familial acculturation process.

## **6.4 Chapter Summary**

In sum, the CPT leaders considered that immigrant parents' high aspirations are a significant influence that mediates children's subject choice thinking. The CPTs perceived that unrealistic parental expectations could be inferred as parents exercising pressure, and, consequently, wanting their children to fulfil their own aspirations of completing a higher mathematics subject. This was recognised as having a negative impact on students' future educational outcomes. CPT leader perceptions included some aspects of parents having a positive influence on student subject choice thinking, but, there were also some restrictive messages regarding students' sustainable educational and future career pursuits. Parental beliefs, values and expectations seemed substantially central to children's subject decisions, prior and during acculturation into the Australian educational context. The CPT leaders' views were that, although students relied heavily on their families for subject choice guidance, they also felt constrained and conflicted when forced to choose between parental desires and aspirations and the career counsellors'/teachers' judgments of subject choice. Evidently, there were mediatory parental influences inclusive of the issues and related implications around children's viable educational outcomes that emerged across the 11 parent–student cases and the three CPT leader interviews. These are presented for discussion purposes in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 7: Lessons Learned from Parent, Children and CPT Leader Perceptions to Influence Student Subject Choice Thinking**

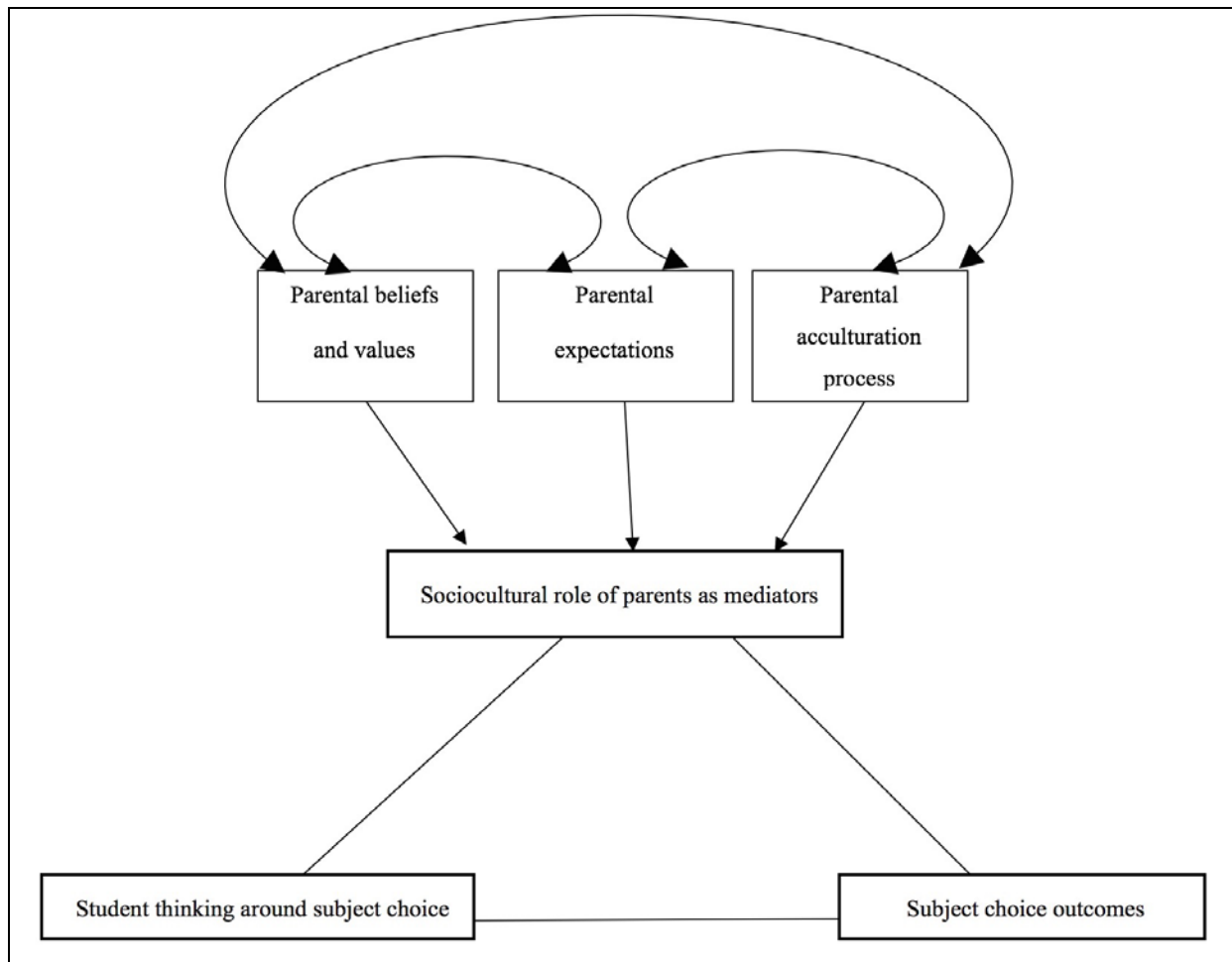
### **7.1 Introduction**

The current study's findings have revealed key insights in relation to how parents can act as influencers in shaping immigrant children's subject choices and career pathway decisions in Australia. The factors around parental beliefs, values, and expectations for their children's future educational prospects including familial acculturation experiences were found to be noteworthy parameters in mediating children's subject choice thinking. Given that this study is premised on the recent call for taking into account the significant figures in students' career counselling, primarily including – parents, teachers and the career counsellors, these more experienced influential individuals need to be considered to better support students in making career decisions (National Career Development Strategy, NCDS, 2011). In the face of high school subject choices and eventual career pathway decisions, a significant role in students' career decisions is informally channelled by parents. In the more formal process, there is the involvement of the school personnel with teachers and career counsellors (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, DEEWR, 2011a). Of significance, the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (2012) emphasises the shared responsibility of schools and parents to support students to maximise their subject choice thinking and career development opportunities (MCEETYA, 2012). Besides, the different issues and the ways career counselling for students have been discussed and debated in policies, there are currently gaps in building further understanding how immigrant parents' beliefs, values, expectations and the familial acculturation experience influence their children's subject choice decisions at school. So far, there is equally very less known about how the issues mentioned impact on immigrant parents' interactions and communication with the school, teachers and the CPT leaders concerning children's subject choices and career counselling. The forthcoming sections of this chapter present a critical discussion of the findings in conjunction with the study's conceptual model and the research questions. The last section presents the study's extended model, discusses the implications and provides recommendations for future research.

## **7.2 Validation of the Conceptual Parental Mediatory Model**

In addressing the sociocultural role of parents, firstly, this research explored how immigrant parents act as mediators, in particular, through the use of the cultural tools such as parental beliefs, values and expectations, to influence their children's subject choices in a senior secondary schooling context in Australia. Secondly, the study investigated the role of the familial acculturation process in shaping children's thinking regarding their subject choice and eventual career pathway decisions. Thirdly, this study also examined the perspectives of schools' Career and Pathway Transition (CPT) leaders on how they viewed parents' role in influencing their children's subject choices. While, there were three questions that framed this study, the findings were analysed using an adapted model of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (see Figure 7.1). This parental mediatory model informed the influential links between immigrant parents' mediation of cultural tools (beliefs, values, expectations and their experiences within the familial acculturation process) and the internalisation of such cultural tools by their children.

The findings highlighted how the immigrant parents' beliefs and expectations formed the core of how parents communicated with their children about the value of education. Moreover, what parents expected stemmed from their own failed educational and career aspirations. Parental beliefs and expectations were shown to be internalised by their children as the children's own processes and thoughts on the choice of subjects, which were reflective of their parents' beliefs and values for education. With respect to the familial acculturation process and related experiences, changes in sociocultural practices after moving countries had changed parents' own patterns of thinking and, in turn, using their cultural tools to have a mediated action on children's thinking of subject choice. Parental thinking had become more accommodating to their children's subject choices. As such, parents' inclination towards adopting Australian cultural norms and practices within an acculturation process allowed for flexibility in children's subject choice decisions. Such changes also seemed to alter children's internalisation of cultural tools, because of the changing circumstances, and made the children to act and decide about their own future. In some immigrant families, the barriers of limited English competency and understanding of the Australian educational context affected parent-child interactions and the discussions they could have had around making subject choice decisions. Consequently, the quality of educational experiences within an acculturation process had a limited mediated action on children's thinking of subject choice.



*Figure 7.1.* Conceptual parental mediatory model in influencing student subject choice within a sociocultural context.

Describing the role of parents as mediators in their children's subject choice decisions and their involvement with the school towards this end gives a holistic understanding of Vygotsky's (1978) mediation and internalisation theory in understanding cultural tools such as parental beliefs, values, expectations and familial acculturation experiences, within the domain of secondary school subject choices. The perspectives of the CPT leaders highlighted that the children's subject choice decisions were definitely a more formal and informed process involving the school career counsellors and teachers' advice, alongside communication with the parents. The findings from this study show that parental beliefs, values and expectations can indirectly mediate their children's own decisions around subject choice, despite the challenges experienced during their acculturation process. Such findings extend the body of literature in relation to the role immigrant parents play as mediators in the education of their children (e.g., Dey & Sitharthan, 2016; Gilby, 2012; Poulsen, 2009). More



importantly, the findings show that the mediatory framework that this study is based upon explains and extends the impact that parent–child interactions, parent–career counsellor interactions and student–career counsellor/teacher interactions can have on students’ educational decisions. This extended theoretical framework is explained in the concluding section of this chapter. The next section is organised around discussing the lessons learned from the current study’s findings.

### **7.3 Lessons Learned from the Parent, Children and CPT Perceptions of Influences on Subject Choice Thinking**

The previous findings chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) interpreted data from a cross-case analysis of 11 parents and their 11 children’s interviews, alongside the data drawn from three CPT leader interviews. These findings are triangulated and presented as five lessons learned from the emerging views and issues, which form a critical discussion of the study’s findings. The following two lessons recognise the significant role of the mediatory framework and worth of discussing how immigrant parents in their interactions use their cultural tools to influence their children’s future educational decisions.

#### **7.3.1 Lesson 1: Immigrant parents’ mediated cultural tools and past educational experiences influencing children’s subject choice and career pathway decisions.**

Lesson 1 highlights how mediated cultural tools including parents’ past educational experiences, have been recurrent and emerging influential factors in shaping children’s subject choice decisions. Parental beliefs such as valuing and respecting education are transmitted onto their children through various familial practices and everyday interactions. Parents valued endeavouring towards academic success, which is also passed down to their children, and, in turn, creates expectations for them to care and strive for successful educational outcomes. Such findings resonate with what Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) flagged in how parental beliefs, values and expectations affect student achievement by fostering greater parental involvement in children’s academic activities. Similarly, S. Phillipson and Phillipson’s (2007, 2012) quantitative studies demonstrated parental capacities as being the more experienced partner, who convey their ideas and ways of thinking to their children. The role of parental beliefs and values were reported to mediate children’s academic

achievement-related beliefs and aspirations. Of relevance to the current study is the evidence suggesting the powerful role of parental beliefs, values and expectations as mediators in the context of immigrant children's subject and career pathway decisions. Given that children admitted to choosing subjects in which they could excel, achieve decent scores in Year 12 and secure respectable future career options demonstrates how the parental mediatory framework (Figure 7.1) positively shapes children's thinking around making subject choice.

Research conducted to date has only acknowledged that parental beliefs and values should be considered in any examination of student career choices or a student's later academic achievement (Archer et al., 2012; Boon, 2012; Galliot & Graham, 2014, 2015). For example, Melhuish et al. (2008) contended that children internalise implicitly parental beliefs and expectations through their home learning environments, which may impact on children's academic achievement and later educational outcomes. Such contentions were also supported by studies conducted by Bhalla and Weiss (2010) and by Archer et al. (2012) in the field of adolescents' beliefs and achievement in sports and science-related subjects, respectively. Although, these studies may all help to explain that the parental role as mediator exists, however, the evidence is sparse, particularly in relation to immigrant students making secondary school subject decisions in the Australian context. I argue that in this current study, cultural tools, such as parental beliefs, values and expectations work as a mediation platform for immigrant parents to influence children's thinking of subject and career pathway choices. By using a clear view of parent-student dyads to narrate the interactions between parent and child, the thesis articulates the mediation and internalisation of the parental beliefs, values and expectations platform from which children make their subject selection.

Parents' past educational experiences can influence the beliefs, values and expectations they have for their own children, which, in turn, has implications for their children's educational and career achievements (Wilder, 2013). Specifically, parental experiences of their own schooling can often offer important insights into children's preparation for school (Miller, 2015). Findings from this study consolidates arguments raised in previous studies, where responses from the parents and their children aligned in the ways parental advice on subject choice can rely heavily on their past educational challenges and experiences. Similarly, Miller (2015) posited that parents' positive or negative memories of

their own schooling influence parental views about their children's future academic outcomes. Another study conducted by Rätty (2007) concurred that those parents with negative schooling experiences may have a negative disposition towards schools and consequently struggle in providing encouragement and enthusiasm to their children. In contrast, the current study argues that it is not only the past schooling experiences of parents but also their unattained educational aspirations can provide a positive roadmap to their children. When, parents, through their interactions, make children feel supported and primed for, they can act as a catalyst for intergenerational progress. Retrospectively, children, when empathising with their parents' challenges and unachieved career aspirations, consequently wish to fulfil their parents' ambitions. Therefore, parental beliefs of their own unattained educational goals can have an indirect and rich effect on their children's subject choice thinking. In this way, the current study highlights a new angle by investigating parental beliefs and values for their children's future educational trajectories that can stem from parental prior educational beliefs and failed career ambitions. In addition, these parental beliefs, when well perceived by children, can provoke them to choose subjects in accordance with a positively mediated career pathway.

To give confidence to whether the parent-child mediation process truly exists, the current study is one of the first to utilise the perceptions of the CPT leaders to validate the influential role that parents play in facilitating their children's thinking about valuing education and meeting parental expectations in secondary subject choices. Such confirmation by the CPT leader reinforces how parents' mediatory role envisages children's subject choice thinking and eventual career pathway decisions. Student subject and career pathway choice can be consciously or unconsciously mediated by parents' beliefs and values, which build students' capacities through sociocultural practices endorsed at home as well as at school. Thus, the CPT leaders' observation recorded in this study are a novel way to confidently infer the mediatory processes within parent-child interactions, and extending Wertsch's triangle (Wertsch, 1985). As such, the mediating relationships between the cultural tools and the related impact on student subject choices cannot be neglected in sociocultural studies pertaining to students' post-secondary educational outcomes, and this study has shown that both home and school contexts are pertinent for cultural tools to take effect.

From Lesson 1, it can be contended that parents act as transmitters of their familial beliefs through their everyday practices, and these actions have far-reaching effects on the thoughts of children, and thus, influence subject choice thinking. There are the several discussed factors about the immigrant parents' role as mediators that should be considered in the context of parental influence on children's subject and career choice thinking development, options and involvement. The current study builds an argument about the student's subject choice process being a fluid process, in which parents and school personnel, when mindful of both parents' current and past educational experiences, can act as an analogous product in children's subject choice thinking and career making decisions. This study contributes to new knowledge in the field, as it investigates an issue that has so far been under researched, whereby it importantly informs how immigrant children's educational trajectories stem from the discussed factors. The next lesson learned focuses on one such factor around mediated parental expectations.

### **7.3.2 Lesson 2: The critical role of high parental expectations as mediators of student subject choice.**

Lesson 2 of this study emphasises on how immigrant parental expectations work as mediators of children's subject choice decisions. The interview data showed that high parental expectations not only have a positive impact on students' thinking about making subject choice decisions, but can also be unfavourable in producing viable future educational outcomes. Although parental expectations formed the core of how immigrant parents convey their wishes or goals that they have formed regarding their children's future educational achievement, such expectations can also be unrealistic. For example, in Raji–Pilka's case, through Raji's statement "Prep Maths she can't do in the university, she needs to choose Advanced Maths", it can be seen that Raji (parent) had firm expectations concerning her daughter, Pilka's, choice of high level maths subjects. Such preferences were well perceived by Pilka and reflected in her choice of the Year 10 Advanced Maths subject. Ule et al. (2015) provided evidence of how parental educational aspirations and future plans for their children have substantial influence on children's academic trajectories. Because children in their study regard parents as trustworthy and their primary advisors who will always consider their best interests, they reciprocated positively to parents' high expectations. While Ule et al. (2015) did not examine the influence of parental educational expectations on students' secondary subject choice, their work acknowledged the influential role of parental involvement in

children's educational decisions. To make sense of students' thinking around making subject choice and post-secondary study options, it is important to reiterate that the parent-child relationships as mediators makes the current study unique. The parental mediation-internalisation structure as evident in the parent-student dyads provides exclusive insights into how immigrant students form their thinking regarding secondary subject choices.

In contrast, high parental expectations and aspirations were coined as unrealistic by the CPT leaders, who favoured working with students' strengths rather than forcing them to achieve above their capabilities. The CPT leaders confirmed that in some parent-child cases, such unrealistic expectations were detrimental to students' final year (Year 12) study score outcomes. As such, parental expectations produced both a positive and negative influence on children's choice of subjects, consequently affecting the chances of achieving viable educational outcomes. This is such an important finding where high parental expectations are observed by a third party such as the CPT leaders being unrealistic, yet children endeavour to meet such expectations. This is the critical role that parental expectations have on children's thinking around subject and career pathway choice. As such, parental expectations are a key mediator, which is congruent with years of research around this concept (Frewen et al., 2014; S. Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007, 2012; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Yet, it is a significant lesson in a way that has never been shown by such previous studies that only demonstrated parents' expectations for student academic achievement alone, without showing their influence on students' subject choice thinking as viewed from a third party perspective. Lesson 2 signals an important message to the key influencers, that is, parents and the career counsellors, to understand children's career pathway decision-making processes, hence setting this thesis apart from the rest in the field.

Dwelling more on the critical role of high parental expectations, the current study also found how parents' unrealistic expectations could be inferred as parents exercising pressure, wanting their children to fulfil their own aspirations of completing a higher mathematics subject. This was an indicator of parents' own prior educational beliefs, which consequently probed their children to have access to different career options given the uptake of a higher mathematics subject. This finding is consistent with sociocultural studies that suggest how parents in an Asian context place extreme emphasis on particular academic trajectories while

expecting non-negotiable success from their children (Kim et al., 2013; Pabelo, 2010; Poulsen, 2009). More specifically, Aunio et al. (2008) postulated that Chinese parents believe in the appreciation for mathematical knowledge to be the reason for aspiring for the high academic achievement of their children. This current study did not aim to compare the beliefs, values and expectations of immigrant parents from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Yet, when comparing to previous studies it highlights that high parental expectations can act as a 'double edged sword' in influencing students' thinking, choices and pressures around unrealistic achievements. Moreover, the previously mentioned studies did not exhibit a mediatory relationship between high parental expectations and negative influences on students' thinking around their maths subject selection. This finding of parental unrealistic expectations was again confirmed by the CPT leaders' reporting of student dilemmas of living up to such impracticable parental expectations. This consequently produced a negative impact on students' future educational outcomes. It cannot be emphasised enough that the current study is nuance in reporting the crucial role played by the CPT leaders during student career counselling and subject selection process in an Australian educational context. The CPT leaders consider that parents' knowledge of the school's maths subject recommendation process and limited understanding of the significant role of teachers in recommending appropriate subjects signals lack of awareness in parents about the process and implications of subject choice. Previous studies in an American context found that parents' involvement in schooling, parental monitoring and control, and parental aspirations have a significant influence on matters regarding children's further education and career choice (Chen et al., 2016; Jung & Zhang, 2016; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). However, none of these studies took into consideration the perceptions of school career counsellors about parental influences in student subject choice. The existing studies that have considered teachers' perceptions of parental involvement have not reported what the current study has informed the literature in the area of the mediatory role of high parental expectations as confirmed by school CPT leaders.

From Lesson 2, the current study builds an argument about how immigrant students' subject choice and career pathway development need a fair and fluid process with recurring involvement of both parents and schools. Such intriguing findings definitely draw attention to the case of immigrant parents and students, and the fact that school personnel realise the complexity of the problem. Parents' unrealistic expectations, coupled with their lack of

knowledge about the Australian educational system, results in parents being too inhibited to communicate with the schools, and this is problematic. From the school perspective, there seems to be a lack of knowledge among immigrant parents about the ‘mediated cultural tools’ hence the necessity for further training and support to deal with such cases. These issues are taken on board further in the recommendations.

## **7.4 Role of Familial Acculturation Process in Favouring and Limiting Subject Choice Guidance**

This study examined how the familial acculturation process influences immigrant children’s subject choice. The mediatory role of parents was broadly recognised by the children and the CPT leaders. The findings brought to attention how experiences within the familial acculturation process include barriers that limit the parents’ roles as mediators with their children. The CPT leaders also confirmed that several factors – language barriers, parents’ limited education, including challenging educational experiences, and parental lack of knowledge about the Australian educational system inhibited parents’ communication and involvement in their children’s subject and career counselling process. The lessons learned from these findings are discussed next.

### **7.4.1 Lesson 3: Familial acculturation experiences can alter the mediatory role of parents’ cultural tools to favour children’s subject choice and career making decisions.**

Some immigrant parents in this study portrayed a general sentiment to make an effort to acculturate with the Australian ways of thinking and doing with respect to the educational options and choices for their children. Both parents’ and their children’s perceptions were in cohesion with each other with respect to parents being flexible and open to their children’s academic choices. For instance, from Ishi–Meher’s interview excerpt, Meher (Ishi’s son) acknowledges, “Coming from Bangladesh, she (mother) always wanted me to do medicine or something, but over time she became more accepting like do whatever you want”. Whether children’s subject choice involved a science-based subject or sport and recreation subject, parents in the current study exhibited beliefs and values that showed evidence of adapting to the Australian way of being predominantly accepting of their children’s decisions. These findings are supportive of Berry et al.’s (2006) and Van Oudenhoven and Ward’s (2013)

proposal that as the result of psychological and cultural change in beliefs and values after moving countries, immigrant families typically consider adapting themselves to their society of settlement. Nevertheless, the current study's finding was novel in the sense that despite changing parental beliefs and expectations and becoming flexible, the parent–child mediation structure within the new Australian educational and learning environment continued to strongly advocate for children's successful career pathway outcomes. This clearly suggests that the familial acculturation process is progressive and transient, where immigrant parents take a leap of faith in compromising and considering autonomy and flexibility with regard to subject and career choices for their children's benefit and future (Sam, 2006a). Moreover, due to the availability of a variety of subject and career pathway options, unlike the educational system in their country of origin, parents show more flexibility in allowing autonomous subject choices. However, they still believe in providing related advice and continue to maintain high expectations of their children. This finding thus presents the value-add to the current study's mediation and internalisation framework, which confirms the continued influential role of cultural tools, despite being altered after moving countries. To this end, children develop ways of thinking for their own future educational prospects, and, henceforth, adopt a positive disposition towards fulfilling parents' high expectations (Windle, 2015).

Though much has been researched in the area of familial acculturation processes (Berry, 1990, 1997; Rogler, 1994; Sakamoto, 2007), little has been spoken about its specific role in shaping children's subject choice thinking in the Australian context. Unlike what Kusurkar (2014) examined in her Singaporean study, this current study deals with different sets of issues pertaining to the familial acculturation processes. More significantly, it highlights, on the one hand, empowerment resulting from a compromise in beliefs and values of immigrant parents because of changes in the mediated cultural tools. On the other hand, the barriers emanating from an acculturative process inhibit parents' mediatory role and involvement in subject choice thinking and decisions. While acculturating into Australia, the immigrant parents who had brought along with them their past educational experiences, beliefs and value systems portrayed themselves as not being overly strict about imposing their beliefs and values to their children. In contrast, surprisingly, they were supportive and amicable about their children's choice of subjects. In addition, despite parental beliefs, values and high expectations, particularly about choosing maths subjects, parents wished to take the



path of becoming more accepting, as long as their children could secure viable career outcomes. Such findings have not been previously described by the studies (e.g., Goforth, Pham, & Oka, 2015; Naval & Hussain, 2008; Sonderegger & Barrett, 2004) and thus this current study contributes to the literature by suggesting how, within the familial acculturation process, immigrant parents change the ways they use their cultural tools while attempting to live in two distinguishable cultural worlds. This ultimately makes the parents to become accepting and allows for an autonomous subject choice process for their children.

Furthermore, while trying to integrate into the Australian education system, the influence of parents' past unachieved educational aspirations were found to build parental expectations of intergenerational progress. Parents were wishful for their children to progress through better educational and successful attainments, and accordingly shaped children's subject choice thinking. For example, parents who had experienced limited educational opportunities in their home countries and lacked English language proficiency wanted for their children to have a better and more accessible education, along with successful opportunities in Australia. For these parents, providing subject choice guidance was off the radar, although they still desired a better life for their children and expected intergenerational advancement. Such findings support previous studies that emphasise the issue of immigrants who resettle in high-income countries such as Australia facing many challenges. Negotiating parenting in a new culture is one of the most pressing challenges that most immigrant parents face (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015). The host country's cultural environment can be at odds with the parental beliefs, values and practices of the countries of origin, and present difficulties in predicting children's future educational outcomes.

Lesson 3 most importantly reinforces the significance of understanding the acculturation process that underlines how immigrant parents make compromise and change their attitudes to be more accepting of their children's needs. However, the current findings go over and beyond previous studies to show that the familial acculturation process can entail parents surrendering their inherent cultural beliefs and values about education or any unfulfilled career ambitions they might have aspired for their children to fulfil. This key finding juxtaposes previous studies in showing in spite of having high expectations for their

children's educational success, parents' tendency to integrate into the Australian context supersedes such expectations (Gilby, 2012; Kim et al., 2013; Kusurkar, 2014; Vanin, 2015). For example, Kim et al. (2013) found that due to unsupportive parenting and parental control, familial acculturation stress was detrimental to children's academic achievement during early and middle adolescence. The degree to which immigrant parents in their study espoused mainstream values, beliefs and behaviours were discrepant from that of their children. Parents failed to recognise or understand the academic challenges their children encountered in the mainstream culture. Parents felt especially uncertain or inadequate in supporting and guiding their children through these challenges, because as foreigners in a host country, they were less familiar with the mainstream culture. Similarly, in Yu's (2014) study, first generation immigrants demonstrated tensions while acculturating and enforced high expectations on children's academic outcomes. In contrast, the current study found that, while immigrant parents believe in practising their original beliefs and value systems and advocate for high expectations around career success, they ultimately become accepting of their children's subject decisions. This indicates their attempts to adapt to the Australian educational context and make informed decisions, which is believed to provide their children with a variety of subject and career pathway choices. Therefore, the current study extends previous studies (e.g., Dey & Sitharthan, 2016; Poulsen, 2009) in contending that the familial acculturation process is a progressive and transient process, where parents attempt to integrate the Australian norms and knowledge of the educational system. As also, simultaneously, passing their high expectations of successful career pathway outcomes on to their children. In sum, Lesson 3 has important implications for developing policies and practices that can cater to the career development needs of immigrant children, who are in the midst of a familial acculturation process. This is taken further in the recommendations section of this chapter.

#### **7.4.2 Lesson 4: Familial acculturative barriers can limit the parental mediatory role in providing children's subject choice guidance.**

One of the major reasons why families move countries is to improve the family's personal and economic situation or for their children's educational development (Sam, 2006a). It is not surprising that in doing so, parents may face several challenges as they traverse two or more cultures. The current study highlighted such challenges as barriers that hinder the parental role in successfully mediating children's subject choice thinking. Barriers include parents facing English language issues, limited education or educational challenges in their countries

of origin, along with parents' limited knowledge of the Australian educational system, which can be labelled as 'markers' in limiting parental advice on children's subject choices. These barriers can act as acculturative stressors that hinder parental capacities in mediating children's subject choice decisions. Consequently, children are disadvantaged and heavily reliant on information from their teachers, since their parents are unable to draw on expert advice provided by career counsellors. These results align with the findings of Al-Deen and Windle's Australian study (2015) with respect to how Muslim Iraqi immigrant mothers lamented that due to lack of resources such as a good educational background, familiarity with the Australian education system and English proficiency, limited parental involvement in their children's education.

The current study extends the literature in relation to emphasising how families who resettle in high-income countries can face many challenges (Hatoss, O'Neill & Eacersall, 2012; Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Titzmann et al., 2011). As Berry et al. (2006) rightly concurred, after migration, experiences within an acculturation process such as the challenges and processes of dealing with life events that include coping with the demands of knowing the host country's language and educational systems, can act as psychological stressors. In this sense, acculturative stress is a stress reaction that can be rooted within such acculturation processes (Berry et al., 2006). For many migrating parents, education is seen as the pathway to attune their children to future success, and correlate with resources and future occupational opportunities, all of which are protective factors. In this study, parents used acculturation strategies, such as integration, while undergoing acculturative stress, which resulted in positive adaptation (Berry et al., 2006). They incorporated protective factors, one of which was a willingness to be flexible and allow their children to make independent subject choice decisions. Thus, from Lesson 4, it can be argued that it is important for schools to acknowledge and be aware of the acculturating problems experienced by immigrant parents, which may change over time. It is also important to consider the relationship of such problems with the use of cultural tools prior to acculturation and to be aware of the opportunities these parents are seeking from the host society (Berry, 1997). Moreover, students' positive or negative acculturation experiences in relation to the host country's education system involving the case of high level maths related subjects and implied career pathways can play an important role in what they perceive for their future (Vela et al., 2013).

With respect to CPT leaders' perceptions of the parental role in student subject choice, the current study contends that the acculturation experiences can challenge not only parents and students, but also the schools' understanding of the role of the cultural tools used by parents to mediate student subject choice thinking. These findings juxtapose with previous studies where teachers perceived acculturation challenges that included deficiency in parental involvement, disinterested parents, lack of parental communications about success and high expectations of their children (Hill, 2009; Theodorou, 2008). Parents in this study demonstrated positive adaptation while undergoing acculturative stress within an acculturation process, since they had no option but to remain complacent about their children's subject choice decisions. In the face of such familial acculturation experiences, the current study's nuanced findings advocate the CPT leaders in their role as moderators to support parents and students, provide support that can aid parents with the knowledge and skills to navigate their own way and strategies to deliver effective subject choice guidance. This may also entail protecting the psychological well-being of both parents and children during the familial acculturation process, as flagged by the CPT leaders.

#### **7.4.3 Lesson 5: Parental adherence to inherent beliefs, values and educational expectations for children's maths subject choice can have a negative impact on children's academic outcomes.**

While part of the appeal of flexible subject choice was demonstrated in the parent-child perceptions, the CPT leaders had mixed perceptions and rather negative experiences of this issue. The CPT leaders viewed that the lack of parental knowledge of the Australian education system and available maths subject choices, particularly the teachers' maths recommendation process, limited parental capacity to guide their children's career pathway decisions. Additionally, parental adherence to their inherent beliefs and values, reflective of certain cultural backgrounds produced undue pressure on children to choose high level maths subjects. Such alarming findings were also introspective in some of the children's perceptions, as seen in their admittance of their teachers' role being more inspirational and supportive as opposed to their parents when providing subject choice and career pathway advice. This finding supports studies that noted immigrant parents from South Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds exercise power in such a manner as to place excessive pressure on their children with a view to fulfilling their own expectations and adhering to cultural beliefs and values for education. This is indicative of their past cultural beliefs, which are in

dissonance with the Australian norms adopted by increasingly acculturated parents (Baptiste, 2005; Dey & Sitharthan, 2016; Walton-Roberts 2009). For example, Dey and Sitharthan (2016) asserted that in spite of being more inclined towards integration, South Asian (Indian and Bangladeshi) immigrants in Australia experience acculturative stress within familial and environmental contexts. Similarly, the current study highlighted the negative impact of South Asian immigrant parents continuing to make every effort to retain the key features of their inherent educational beliefs. As such, parents typically over-expect the next generation to pursue high mathematics-based subjects and related careers, without realising the potentially negative repercussions on their children's academic outcomes. What sets such findings apart from the field relies on the fact that these views of parental pressure on children's maths subject choices came from a rather critical source – the school CPT leaders.

Furthermore, the CPT leaders' perceptions demonstrated how parents' high aspirations for their children's career success are detrimental to students' final year (Year 12) schooling outcomes. Parental pressure was perceived to provoke negative educational outcomes for students, such as being at-risk and setting up students with undesirable career pathways. The CPT leaders yearned for schools to create and implement better opportunities for parents to feel more involved and aware of the teachers' maths subject recommendation process. Such findings are nuanced in the Australian educational context, specifically in the field of the career development needs of secondary school students. Studies so far, which have been mainly being in an American context, have focused on teacher perceptions of the parental role and related involvement in student achievement (Barge & Loges, 2003; Hollingsworth, 2015). The current study contributes to the literature about the critical mediatory role that not only involves parents, but also career counsellors and teachers (herewith referred as the moderators), in tacitly influencing children's subject choice thinking (Baron & Kenny 1986; Chao, 2011; Edward & Lambert, 2007). The role of the CPT leaders as moderators in the parent-child mediated relationship is elaborated on in the next section while discussing the study's extended theoretical model.

## **7.5 Extending the Vygotskian Theoretical Framework**

The central theoretical premise guiding this research is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that underlines a child's environment plays an essential role in the development of

higher mental functioning (Vygotsky, 1978). This study considered that the students' environment is comprised of the more knowledgeable other persons, such as, primarily, their parents, teachers and the school career counsellors, who are more experienced in the student's learning environment. For instance, during parent–child interactions, within their mediatory role, parents can act as the more knowledgeable other in transferring their knowledge and skills onto their children through the communication of their own educational experiences, beliefs and value systems (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of the school career counselling process, according to the students' perspectives of making their subject choices, career counsellors and teachers were found to be the experts in understanding students' needs around making career decisions in their learning environment. In addition, the CPT leaders' perspectives validated and unpacked other significant difficulties, issues and strategies needed in dealing with the immigrant parents and students about subject choice and career pathway decisions. This study, hence, makes a valuable contribution to the body of literature by not only validating but also extending the study's conceptual framework. Within the realm of parent–child interactions, although parents take the superior role as the mediator by transferring their values, beliefs and high expectations, albeit exerting a positive or negative influence onto their children's subject choice decisions and eventual career outcomes, the role played by the career counsellors cannot escape scrutiny. As such, a detailed argument of the career counsellors' role in extending the study's conceptual model and their significance in student subject choice is provided next.

#### **7.5.1 The role of career counsellors as moderators in student subject choice.**

In the face of career development and students' thinking around subject choices, the current study has made a mark in the field by illuminating the role of career counsellors as moderators. Therefore, what is a moderator? In general terms, a moderator is a qualitative (e.g., sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Seminal quantitative studies have distinguished between the properties of moderator and mediator variables in such a way as to clarify the different ways in which conceptual variables may account for differences in human behaviour (Baron & Kenny, 1986). For example, the studies have effectively used moderator and mediator distinction with regard to a wide range of phenomena, including control and stress, attitudes and personality traits. Edwards and Lambert (2007) demonstrated how, quantitatively,

moderator variables influence the paths that constitute the direct, indirect and total effects of mediated models. Chao's (2011) study on high school students' mental health showed how the moderation effect of social support was mediated by problem-focused coping. Their quantitative results indicated how the exacerbating effects of low social support on stress and student well-being contributed to the understanding of students' high school life. High levels of social support significantly moderated the association between students' stress and well-being. However, such concepts of moderators and the related moderated action have been applied only in quantitative studies, whereas, the current study is one of its kind, being a qualitative one. In the current study, the vital role that career counsellors play in moderating the influence of the parental cultural tools of beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation experiences on children's career pathway decisions was unveiled. From the CPT leaders' perceptions, it can be evidently argued that the CPT leaders act as moderators in the parent-child mediated relationship, thus influencing parents' and students' decisions about subject and eventual career choices. In other words, when parents and students feel supported by the CPT leaders in solving the issues around parents' unrealistic expectations of subject choices may further enhance students' overall career choice success.

In addition, career counsellors and teachers, in their capacity as the more knowledgeable other and in their interactions with parents and students can moderate the mediating effects of parental influence on student subject choice thinking. As such, I argue that moderation happens when career counsellors intervene and debrief parents about concerns during the subject selection and career counselling process. For example, when students are perceived to be 'at risk' and vulnerable to non-completion of the subjects that they were compelled to choose and study, the career counsellor's advice to parents act as a form of moderated action. The career counsellors and teachers, as admitted by the students, can indirectly be supportive figures and play a decisive role in student subject choice. Whilst in their conversations with students and parents, the career counsellors can mellow the mediating effects of unrealistic parental expectations, thus reinforcing their role as moderators in student subject choice. Taken together, the present study offers novel contributions to qualitative research in understanding student subject choice as a three-way process involving significant interactions between career counsellors/teachers, parents and students.

### **7.5.2 Theoretical model for ‘parent–school partnered role as moderated mediators in shaping student subject choice thinking’.**

This study had constructed a conceptual framework (see Figure 7.1) that extends the conventional understanding of Vygotsky’s (1978) mediation and internalisation constructs. The model had proposed that cultural tools such as parental beliefs, values, expectations and acculturation experiences operate in conjunction to mediate student thinking around senior subject choices. In essence, influence on student thinking about making their subject selection was seen as a path mediated by parents. However, data from the current study indicate that the cultural tools such as parental beliefs and expectations form the core of how parents communicate with their children about the value of education and what they desire for their children. Familial interactions that centre on propagating parents’ educational beliefs of achieving their best, endeavouring to secure a university course and opting for high level maths subjects, work as a mode where parents instil their values and expectations. Moreover, through acculturation processes, parents’ thinking is more flexible than it would have been prior to their migration. This study, hence, provides evidence for Vygotsky’s (1978) mediation and internalisation theory in understanding parent–child interactions within the domain of secondary school subject choices.

Additionally, parents act as providers of their past schooling and failed career aspirations to their children. Students perceive those experiences in a positive way and showed signs of making their own subject choice decisions that matched their parents’ aspirations and beliefs. Within their mediatory role, parents act as both providers and interpreters to offer guidance about possible subject choice and career paths for their children. Vygotsky’s (1978) mediation framework has helped here to explain how the mediatory role of cultural tools has an indirect and rich effect on children’s subject choice decisions. The current study extends research that has shown how parental advice that is derived from their beliefs and experiences can affect their children’s subject choice thinking and career outcomes (Ule et al., 2015).

To extend the literature in the field, the current study’s nuanced findings have provided evidence not only for the sociocultural role of parents as mediators, but also for the role of school personnel such as the CPT leaders and subject teachers as moderators who aid in



sustainable student subject choice outcomes. Students' interpretation and their decision-making capacities around their subject choices and career pathways together were influenced by parent–child, parent–career counsellor and student–teacher/career counsellor interactions. Recognising the fact that students grow and learn at home, at school and in their communities, interactions with mature persons consisting of families, teachers and career counsellors may influence student decision-making processes (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). In this study's extended model (see Figure 7.2), the students' environment is represented by parents, teachers and career counsellors, whose nested relationships and interactions exert an influence on student subject choice thinking and career pathway decisions.

The extended theoretical model (see Figure 7.2) based on this study's empirical evidence frames the role of parents, teachers and career counsellors as partnered relationships, yet findings from this study reveal that the roles of the more knowledgeable others work from distinct standpoints in influencing student subject choice. Partnered relationships among parents, teachers and career counsellors were not signalled in the students' responses, although communication or collaboration from these more knowledgeable others can benefit or influence student's decisions. Additionally, in extending Wertsch's (1985) concept of the mediatory triangle (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.1) encompassing the role of subject–object relations in human activity as mediated by culturally available tools, this study presents the theoretical model for a 'parent–school partnered role as moderated mediators in shaping student subject choice thinking'. As seen in Figure 7.2, parent–child, parent–career counsellor and student–career counsellor/teacher interactions can influence students' interpretation and decision-making capacities with regard to their subject choices and career pathways together. The significance of these interactions as the contribution of this study to knowledge are specifically elaborated on next.

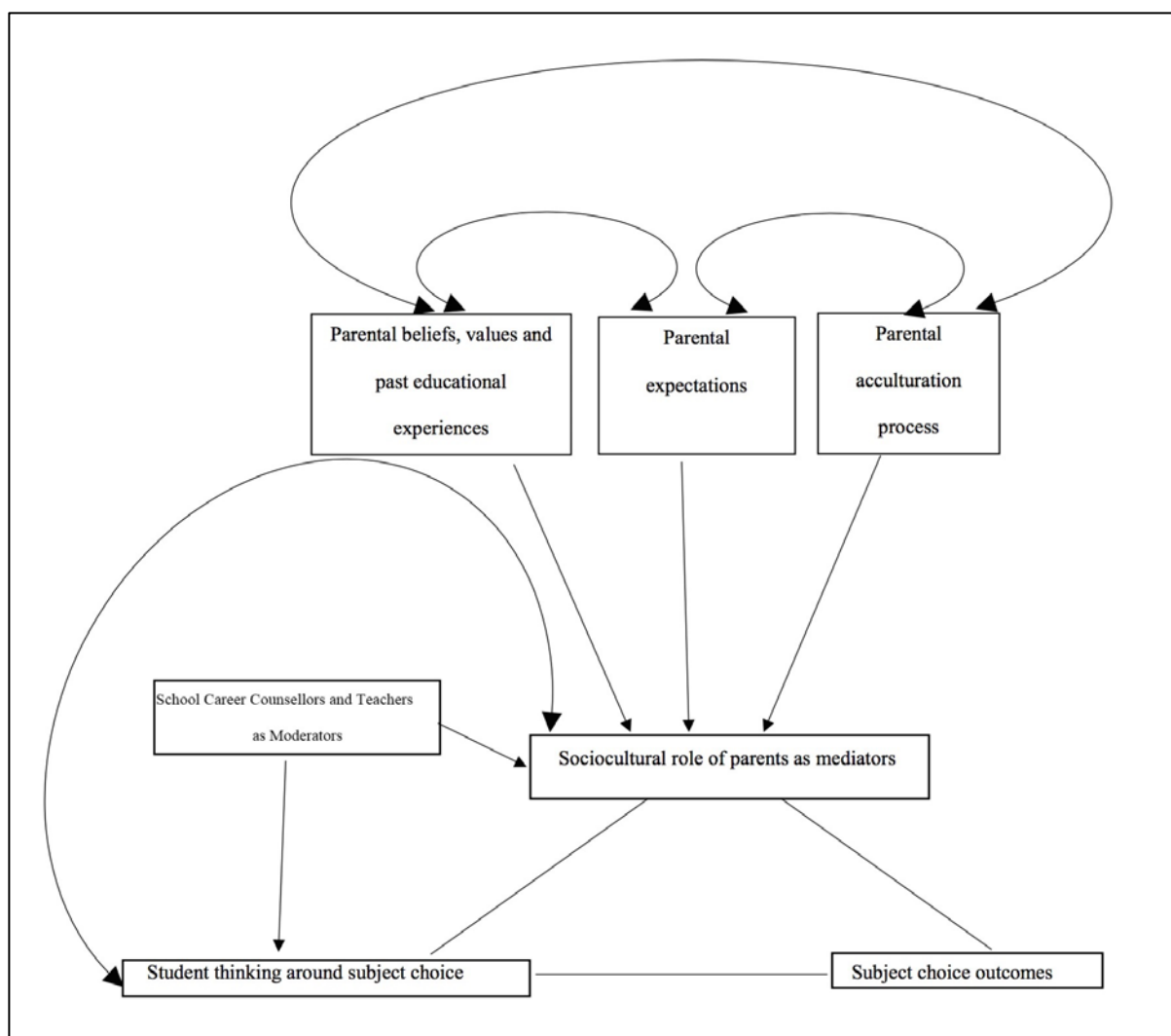


Figure 7.2 Parent–school partnered role as moderated mediators in shaping student subject choice thinking.

#### 7.5.2.1 Parent–child interactions and Parent–career counsellor interactions.

The interactions between parent–child and parent–career counsellor demonstrate the mediated action of parental beliefs, values, expectations, parental past educational and failed career aspirations, and familial acculturation processes on student subject choice thinking. Particularly, experiences within an acculturation process not only affect parental capacities as mediators, but also brings into question children’s capabilities of making subject choices and related career pathway decisions. Additionally, moving countries can open up a whole realm of educational and learning opportunities inclusive of challenges as families settle into a new environment (Berry, 1997). Prior to their acculturation experiences, the beliefs, values and expectations that parents held in their original countries can interfere with the family’s

current acculturation experiences. Moreover, parental control and parental advocacy of their own high aspirations and expectations can empower or affect children's educational outcomes in their interactions with school career counsellors (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; S. Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; Vanin, 2015). Specifically, high parental expectations and their past educational experiences can influence the quality of the educational experience of children.

With respect to the significance of parent–career counsellor interactions, career counsellors while communicating with parents can function as moderators to smoothen the tensions during parent–child mediation of unrealistic expectations, thus indirectly influencing students' subject and career choice outcomes (Chao, 2011). It has become evident that the career counsellors have the ability to establish positive mediated effects on parent–child interactions, thus altering a negative subject choice outcome to a positive one. This will require such moderators (career counsellors) to collaborate with parents (mediators) in order to establish sustainable post-secondary educational outcomes for students.

#### ***7.5.2.2 Student–career counsellor/ teacher interactions.***

This study's enquiry into students' perspectives identified what was critical in terms of enriching students' thinking to envision or secure viable subject choices and realisable future educational outcomes (Galliot & Graham, 2014). With the students' recognition that teachers' and career counsellors' positive interactions are the next significant other, aside from their parents, it can be argued that students' informed career choice options can be shaped by the right kind of career pathways information, subject choice recommendations, guidance and support as provided by teachers and career counsellors. The role of career counsellors and teachers as moderators are an indirect source of inspiration and guidance that allows students to better comprehend and feel more empowered about their subject choice and career decisions (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Edward & Lambert, 2007; L. K. Yin, 2012; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). Of particular significance is understanding students' familial acculturation experiences, which can also reflect how they ought to be supported by their teachers in terms of providing conversant support and, hence, act as an instructive interface with their parents to promote career pathway decisions.

In discussing the several factors that influence students' subject choice thinking and decisions, it is important to investigate further on the role of career counsellors and subject teachers and the ways it needs to be strengthened. The current study signifies the role of teachers and school career counsellors who are directly involved with the parents as being the more experienced partners in preparing students' career decisions. The study's extended model highlights the role of school's career counsellors as moderators within the mediatory triangle involving parent-child interactions as a three-way nested relationship. The upper hand that parents partake as mediators in coercing children to make decisions that can result in non-completion of chosen subjects. This situation can be rectified by CPT leaders' and teachers' timely interventions. Career counsellors' and teachers' roles can indirectly influence student subject choice thinking, whereby student-teacher interactions and student-career counsellor interactions serve as moderators for student's reasoning about their subject choice decisions.

The next section of this chapter draws conclusions from the lessons learned in the significance and benefits of this study, while reflecting on the research questions. In doing so, ways forward with the use of the lessons, implications, and new avenues for further research, keeping in mind the limitations of this study, are also discussed.

## **7.6 Responding to Research Questions**

Firstly, to answer research question one of the current study, the lessons learned highlight how several aspects of parents' beliefs, values and expectations inclusive of their past educational experiences, are dominant in children's thinking surrounding subject choice. The scenarios and views witnessed in the findings suggest that the parents' and their children's perceptions of influences on subject choices heavily align with the parents' mediation of their cultural tools and the children's internalisation of the same. These include the mediated action of parents' past educational challenges and failed career aspirations. Of significance, the critical role of unrealistic parental expectations to choose high level maths subjects, as deciphered by the CPT leaders cannot escape scrutiny because of the concerns placed on students' pressured capabilities to cope with the demands of performing successfully in such subjects. Consequently, this becomes a basis of tension for the school's career counsellors and the students. Such disparities between parents' unrealistic expectations and students' manageable subject choice outcomes are crucial factors contributing to students' career

pathway success. In sum, the mediatory processes involving parents' beliefs, values and expectations for children's subjects and eventual career choice are instrumental in shaping children's subject choice decisions. Parental past educational experiences and their sole aspirations for mathematics-related career choice clearly accentuate how parents should be made aware of the impact of such an influence. Thus, the responsibility is not only on career counsellors and teachers, but also on parents to become aware of the protocols for helping achieving viable subject choice outcomes for the students.

Secondly, to answer research question two, the lessons learned highlight how the inherent values, beliefs and high educational expectations that immigrant parents continue to cling onto after moving countries predict subject and career pathway decisions. Within such an acculturation process, the impact of passing down high expectations to their children can be both beneficial and detrimental to their children's future educational outcomes. They are beneficial because parents' goodwill and concern to see their children being financially stable and successful in life after moving countries is a major inspiration for children to strive hard and perform highly in their chosen subjects. However, they are detrimental because parents' high ambitions that originate from their own failed career and educational aspirations, including their adamantness about choosing maths-related career pathways, result in children being at risk of non-completion of Year 12. With respect to the parental adaptation to the Australian norms and the educational context, yet again, this study puts forward that the mediation of cultural tools can be a dynamic process that can include changes that occur as immigrant families progress in their acculturation to new norms in a host country (Berry et al., 2006). Thus, there are binary influences that either favour or limit parents' role as mediators. Parents either become flexible about their children's academic choices or are limited by acculturative barriers that may hinder parental capacity to mediate subject choice decisions. Thus, the familial acculturation process is a complex interplay of parents trying to assimilate into the present norms and educational system whilst simultaneously rendering their high expectations of successful career pathway choice on their children. As such, there needs to be a more holistic understanding of how familial acculturation processes influence the cumulative experiences of parents and their children's thinking around career development learning. The school's career counsellors and teachers, as moderators, have a more important role to play in assisting this whole process.

Thirdly, to answer research question three, with an interest in sketching the dynamics of the lessons learned from the CPT leader perceptions, there exists a dissonance between the immigrant parents' foundational knowledge of understanding the Australian educational system and the teachers' recommendations for maths subject choice. As such, parents' awareness of students' career counselling practices and the available subject choices, particularly with regard to maths-related career pathways, remains as an increasingly pervasive problem in secondary schools. Considering the current study's evidence, it has become explicitly important to look into the academic and career development among immigrant children and how parental influence on their subject choices can pose visible problems/challenges. Some practical educational implications and recommendations are suggested that Australian education policy makers and stakeholders will find relevant in light of the recent emphasis placed on immigrant students' career development needs.

## **7.7 Implications**

The current study reinforces the significance of parent–school partnered relationships within the domain of secondary student subject and career pathway choices. Taking into account students' assertions regarding the influence of parent–child and student–career counsellor/teacher interactions, parent–school partnership can be the conjuncture to such nested relationships. As such, students' future career decisions can be an outcome of parent–school partnered relationships, whereby schools and parents would work together to deliver opportunities and viable and meaningful experiences to enhance student subject choice thinking (Sheridan & Kim, 2015). Moreover, as Vygotsky (1978) argued that the student has a reciprocal relation with the environment, school community and, specifically, with the culturally constructed tools of parental beliefs, values and expectations encompassing parents' past and current educational experiences within the familial acculturation process. These intertwining relationships conceptualise children's future educational aspirations. It is henceforth inescapable to consider the influence of such significant partners on student subject and career choice (Rogoff, 1990). It becomes imperative for schools to consider parents as active partners in student subject and career pathway choice.

Furthermore, tensions surrounding the practical use of cultural tools translating into impracticable educational outcomes for students are minimally addressed in educational

settings, particularly those with high numbers of immigrant population (AMES, 2017; Windle, 2015). For career development learning to occur, schools must meet the needs of students coming from immigrant backgrounds, because such learning evolves not only from academic skills, but also from a systemic influence of familial beliefs, values, expectations and the familial acculturation experiences. Thus, promoting students' abilities to make career pathway decisions requires an emphasis to be placed on the involvement of all significant parties, both parents and schools (DEEWR, 2011a; Teese, 2007).

While this thesis focused only on three public secondary schools in the WMR of Melbourne, Victoria, the findings have implications for other schools, whether public or Independent, where there might be a high population of immigrant families. Career counsellors can facilitate conversations between parents and children, intervene and solve issues relating to parents' unrealistic expectations and support students to cope when under pressure. This could possibly increase students' abilities to make a sustainable career pathway choice. Parents can learn how to buffer the stress that children face during the final years of schooling while deciding their career options (Chao, 2011). Parents can also learn how to be mindful of their children's stress so as not to render them vulnerable to failures. Moreover, career counsellors can invite subject teachers and parents to talk about how students perceive the subject recommendations from their teachers (NCDS, 2011). This will allow parents to understand the subject selection process and the related impact on students' career pathways, rather than assuming that students will work it out themselves with their parents. The more career counsellors and parents understand students' capacities to make informed career decisions, the more effective their role as moderators becomes. In sum, in addition to the mediating effect of parent-child interactions on student subject choice thinking, this study advances the knowledge of the capacity of career counsellors and teachers as moderators in facilitating sustainable subject choice outcomes.

## **7.8 Recommendations**

This study proposes the following recommendations based on the lessons learned and the conclusions.

**Recommendation 1:** Schools should introduce career information nights for specific communities, such as those from immigrant/non-English proficiency backgrounds. Schools need to consider providing immigrant parents with information such as which subject at which university would be the best option for their children to choose and the related opportunities for work after completion of the chosen university course.

**Recommendation 2:** Introduction of partnerships between school career and course information counsellors and those at universities to provide substantial and easy to understand career pathway information to parents and students (Years 10–VCE) during University Open Days. It will also be beneficial if the university’s careers and course information centre could work in conjunction with schools to offer more accessible advice and support regarding subject selection to parents whose children wish to study at university.

**Recommendation 3:** It is recommended that the education departments and policy makers work with AMES Australia to understand the educational needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Such partnerships will enable the schools in their endeavours to connect with local community services, and to understand and consequently cater to the needs of parents and students from immigrant backgrounds. Simultaneously, AMES Australia will be provided with credible information to inform schools on policies and practices regarding the influence of the experiences of immigrant families on students’ career pathway choice.

**Recommendation 4:** Provision of professional development programs to enhance career counsellors’ and teachers’ capacities for catering to the specific needs of families, and guidance in subject choice recommendation and career pathway advice. This will also aid in ensuring the career counsellors are up-to-date with policies and practices and, consequently, enhance their knowledge of government initiatives.

**Recommendation 5:** Schools to conduct workshops on careers and pathway transition support not only for students, but also for parents. Encouraging parents to attend such workshops along with their children will be a way of providing support to parents to have



career conversations with their young children (Years 7–VCE) and to feel more confident in terms of the information that they can share or resources that they can bring to that conversation.

**Recommendation 6:** Research to be conducted by DEEWR and NCDS into what strategies and resources parents, students, teachers and career practitioners can be equipped with, or the effectiveness of existing career and pathway development programs for secondary school students. Additionally, the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (DET, 2014), within their current partnership projects should consider conducting research with universities to focus on enriching immigrant parents’ knowledge of school-based career counselling programs, providing on campus activities relating to outreach and subject choices and providing practical assistance in enhancing parents’ expertise and confidence in having career conversations with their children.

**Recommendation 7:** It is also recommended that conducting further research on parental influence on student career pathway development from the start of Year 7 is needed. Further research into this area in middle years (Year 7 – Year 9) may bring new insights that help to fill the gap in understanding student thinking about subject choice in secondary schools.

**Recommendation 8:** The current study recognised that, besides parents, career counsellors act as moderators in students’ subject choice thinking and career pathway decision processes (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Additionally, Vygotsky referred to mediators as the significant others who are more knowledgeable than the students. Therefore, by considering teachers as the next important mediators, future research including quantitative methods could extend this study to include the teachers’ role in promoting student subject choice decisions, and understanding teachers’ attitudes towards parental involvement when predicting students’ thinking about subject choice would be useful.

**Recommendation 9:** Because this study happened to interview only mothers and did not include fathers may have further implications on students’ thinking of their subject choices. The fact that both the mothers and the children mentioned the involvement of husbands and fathers respectively, in the student subject choice decisions, implies that fathers may also have an additional role in their children’s education and career decision processes. This

warrants future research to delve into a more wholesome picture of achieving student career success.

**Recommendation 10:** It may be worthwhile for future studies to look into the differential effects of parental influence on immigrant children's subject choices and career decisions with the potential generation effect that was not taken into account in the current study. As suggested by many studies (Dey & Sitharthan, 2016; Poulsen, 2009) on generation effects among immigrants, it could be anticipated that a third-generation immigrant parent would be more liberal when it comes to their children's subject choices and would encounter less problems with the Australian education system and culture than many other parents of first- or second-generation. Another suggestion for future research is to compare parents' use of cultural tools and expectations between immigrant dyads of higher and lower SES backgrounds, and between immigrant and non-immigrant dyads.

## 7.9 Final Reflections

At the heart of this empirical study, the findings have addressed the research gap with respect to the significance of parents' and schools' combined role in serving as an interactive loop in relaying prophecies of tangible conceptions of student subject choice in the context of multicultural Australia. The literature to date has shown that there has been little focus on examining the parental role as mediators in using their cultural tools of beliefs, values, expectations and past educational and acculturation experiences to influence students' choice of senior secondary subjects within the context of the school career counselling process (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Gilby, 2012; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). The aim of this study was to fill this gap in understanding these perceptions from three angles, namely, parents, their children and the school career and pathway transition leaders.

The current study has paved a novel path for disseminating findings on how parents' expectations, values, beliefs systems and, in particular, the acculturation processes due to migration, can act as a mediatory framework in shaping children's subject choice perceptions. In documenting the nexus between the role of parents and schools in the context of student career counselling and subject selection process, it seems that there is a need to examine how immigrant parents can be instrumental in supporting student success at school (Galliot & Graham, 2015). Furthermore, the study's unique findings indicate the need for further

attention to be afforded to the sociocultural nuances in multicultural school settings, given the validation and extension of Vygotsky's (1978) mediation and internalisation framework. Being a qualitative study, the findings also provide original insights into the three-way interaction process involving career counsellors/teachers, parents and students, which encompasses the significant role of career counsellors as moderators in student subject choice decisions.

With respect to the mediation of cultural tools, it can also be acknowledged that human cultures and interactions are incredibly complex and that children's academic success is not merely a question of parents becoming accepting or demanding about their children fulfilling their expectations about subject choice, much less having the right disposition within an acculturation process (Windle, 2015). The proposed lessons provide empirical support to the idea that the mediated cultural tools are part of a progressive acculturation process that is dynamic and changes as parents acculturate. Student subject choice thinking is shaped around familial migration experiences and high expectations for children's educational outcomes. This can also include past educational experiences, failed career aspirations and unrealistic expectations that parents, perhaps inadvertently, carry along with them even after moving countries (Berry et al., 2006). On another note, it is not so much a particular ethnicity that shapes students' subject and career pathway decisions, but rather the familial acculturation experiences. Parents' memories of educational failure/success, including parents' high aspirations for their children's future contribute to student's career pathway decisions. Moreover, only when children internalise aspects of parental thinking, values and beliefs about education, defines parents' role as successful mediators. While policy work is crucial in developing educational initiatives for young children seeking to receive subject choice and career pathway information, guidance and advice, it is equally important to consider how these initiatives can tacitly position schools to educate parents. Specifically, how parents can become concomitant with these initiatives to suffice the common goal of students' viable future educational outcomes is the next question in hand/key vision (Holloway & Kunes, 2015). This thesis now concludes by opening the below conversation to academia and school/policy practitioners:

Career education starts at an early age in the home, extends with formal and informal education throughout the lifetime, and occurs as a result of collaboration of all parts

of the community. There needs to be an integrated and coordinated opportunity for students' education and career. (Hoyt & Wickwire, 2001, p. 242).

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# Appendix A: Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Approval



Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)  
Research Office

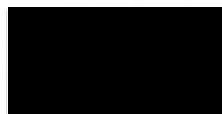
## Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number: CF14/2927 - 2014001620  
Project Title: Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select science subjects post Year 10  
Chief Investigator: Dr Sivaneswary Phillipson  
Approved: From: 6 October 2014 To: 6 October 2019

*Terms of approval - Failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.*

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel): Require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. Future correspondence: Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. Annual reports: Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. Final report: A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. Monitoring: Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. Retention and storage of data: The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Nip Thomson  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Dr Nishta Rosunee, Mrs Sarika Kewalramani

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia  
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton  
Telephone +61 3 9905 5490 Facsimile +61 3 9905 3831  
Email [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu) <http://www.monash.edu.au/researchoffice/human/>  
ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C



# Appendix B: Department of Education and Training in Victoria

## Research Approval



Department of  
Education & Training

Strategy & Review Group

2 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002  
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000  
DX 210083  
GPO Box 4367  
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2014\_002492

Mrs Sarika Kewalramani  
Monash University  
Wellington Road  
CLAYTON 3800

Dear Mrs Kewalramani

Thank you for your application of 11 September 2014 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select science subjects post Year 10*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.



7. If the Department of Education Training has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research and Evaluation Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by

[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Susan Thomas  
Director  
Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch

21/01/2015

## Appendix C: Advertisement for Inviting Parents and Students



Invitation for parents and students in a PhD Research Project: **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!!! We are interested in your parents' involvement in relation to your subject choices post Year 10.**

Dear Later Year Students and their Parents,

**You are cordially invited to participate in this research study Project:** “Parental influences on *Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students'* aspirations to select science subjects post Year 10”

Excited!! Come along for an interview session arranged at a time suitable to you and your parent/s.  
**WHAT'S INVOLVED?**

- Individual interview – this may take about 45 minutes and will be arranged after school hours either at school library/classroom or meeting room at a local library as convenient to you.
- The interviews with student and their parent participants shall take place separately arranged at separate timings.

**Please note**, your participation in this study is not a sort of assessment and unrelated to your academic progress. The sole purpose of the study is to understand how parental and cultural influences can affect your aspirations of subject choice. **COST: BRING YOUR SMILES☺ and leave with a valuable experience!!**

Need more information!! Contact the researcher by emailing or contacting below: Mrs. Kewalramani – [kewalramani.sarika.s@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:kewalramani.sarika.s@edumail.vic.gov.au)

We look forward to HEARING FROM YOU AND CHATTING WITH YOU.

Sincerely,

**Mrs. Kewalramani (Taylors Lakes Secondary College).**

**Project Supervised by Dr. Sivaneswary Phillipson and Dr. Nishta Rosunee (Monash University).**

**Project APPROVED by Department of Education and Training**

## Appendix D: Explanatory Statement for both Parents and Students



MONASH University

### Explanatory Statement for Students AND Parents

**Project:** Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select subjects post Year 10

**Chief Investigator's name: Dr. Sivanes  
Phillipson**

Faculty of Education

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**PhD candidate : Mrs. Sarika**

**Kewalramani (Taylors Lakes**

**Secondary College)**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

**What does the research involve?** This study will explore the role of parent as well as their influences on their child's subject choices coming from Asian and Mediterranean backgrounds. In addition, how these cultural differences can influence students' aspirations in choosing their subjects post year 10 will also be discussed.

The proposed study attempts to answer the following overarching question:

**What are the parental influences on student subject choices in Asian and Mediterranean cultural groups?**

You and your parent/s involvement in the study may involve the following:

- Individual interview who volunteer to take part in the study – this may take about 40-45 minutes for each participant and will be arranged after school hours. This will be in consultation and approval of both the student and their parent/s either at school library/classroom or meeting room at a local library as convenient to participants.

- Recording of the interview will also take place (audio only).

### **Why were you chosen for this research?**

The study aims to involve students from both Asian and Mediterranean backgrounds at Taylors Lakes Secondary College. Therefore, we invite students from Year 10, 11 or 12 and their parents from the above mentioned cultural backgrounds.

### **Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research**

Being in the study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage.

### **Confidentiality**

We would like to assure you that confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Any reports from the interviews will be synthesised to ensure that you cannot be identified through your comments, your confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Reports on the project may be published in professional journals and other publications. Your names will not be used in any publication arising from this research. Pseudonyms will be used instead so that you will not be recognised.

### **Storage of data**

Data collected will be stored in accordance with [Monash University regulations](#). They will be kept at Monash University, Clayton in locked cabinets and secure computer server for five years.

### **Results**

The findings may be discussed in national, regional and/or international conferences and a summary of key findings will be made available to participants on request.

### **Complaints**

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee  
(MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu)

Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

**Dr. Sivanes Phillipson and Mrs. Sarika Kewalramani**

## Appendix E: Parent Consent Form



**MONASH University**

### Parent Consent Form

Project: Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select subjects post Year 10

Chief Investigator: Dr. Sivanes Phillipson PhD Candidate: Mrs. Sarika Kewalramani

**I have been asked/I am willing to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.**

<b>I consent to the following:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>To email or telephone me on my below provided contact details regarding this project.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>To allow conducting interviews with me after school/work hours at a pre-arranged time.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>To allow audio recording the interviews</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>The data that I provide during this research may be used by Monash University in future research projects.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**and**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

**and**

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

**and**

I understand that any information provided is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

**and**

I understand that data will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Name of Parent/Guardian

Parent/Guardian email

Parent/ Guardian contact number

Parent/Guardian Signature



## Appendix F: Student Consent Form



**MONASH University**

### Student Consent Form

Project: Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select subjects post Year 10

Chief Investigator: Dr. Sivanes Phillipson PhD Candidate: Mrs. Sarika Kewalramani

**I have been asked/I am willing to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.**

<b>I consent to the following:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>To email or telephone me on my below provided contact details regarding this project.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>To allow conducting interviews with me after school hours at a pre-arranged time.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>To allow audio recording the interviews</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>The data that I provide during this research may be used by Monash University in future research projects.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**and**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

**and**

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

**and**

I understand that any information provided is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

**and**

I understand that data will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Name of Student Participant

Student email

Student contact number

Student Signature

Name of Parent/Guardian

Parent/Guardian email

Parent/ Guardian contact number

Parent/Guardian Signature

## Appendix G: Explanatory Statement for School Principals



**MONASH University**

### EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Secondary school principals)

**Project: Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select science subjects post Year 10**

**Chief Investigator's name: Dr.  
Sivaneswary Phillipson**

Faculty of education

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Student's name: Mrs. Sarika  
Kewalramani**

PhD candidate

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Your school has been invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

**This project is approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.**

(Project Number: CF14/2927 - 2014001620)

### What does the research involve?

This study will explore the role of parents as socialisers in a cultural milieu and aims to provide an insight into parental involvement and influences on their child's subject choices. The two chosen cultural backgrounds are Asian (Chinese and Vietnamese ethnicity) and Mediterranean (Greeks, Italians and Macedonian ethnicity). In addition, how these cultural similarities and/or differences can impact on students' aspirations in choosing science or non-science subjects post year 10 will also be discussed.

The proposed study attempts to answer the following overarching question:

## **What are the parental influences on student subject choices in Asian and Mediterranean cultural groups?**

In order to do this, three subsidiary Questions have been framed:

1. What are the influences of parents' cultural milieu on student subject choice?
2. How do parents as socialisers influence student subject choice?
3. What are the influences of parents' past experiences of schooling on student subject choice?

Your school involvement in the study may involve the following:

- **Initial paper based Questionnaire** (approximately 2-3 minutes) for parents only to seek parental background information in view of purposive sampling **OR** access to student and parental details for purposive sampling as required for the scope of this study.
- **Individual interview** (about 3 selected students and their parents from each Asian and Mediterranean background – this may take about 45-60 minutes for each participant and will be arranged at separate timings after school hours with the consultation and approval of their parents) – Total of 12 participants (including students and parents of both backgrounds)
- **Individual interview with the School's Career and Pathways Transition Leader** (or equivalent role) - this may take about 45-60 minutes and will be arranged at a time suitable to the participant after school hours.

Recording of the interviews will also take place (audio only).

**Of course they can do the questionnaire without doing the interview.**

## **Why was your school chosen for this research?**

This study aims to involve students-parents from both Asian and Mediterranean backgrounds as per the ethnicities mentioned above. The overall plan consists of recruiting participants from three public schools in the Western Metropolitan Region of Victoria. The three low

socio economic status (SES) schools have been invited based on information relied from ICSEA value of school and your school is one of the WMR schools. Your school also has a good mixture of pool of participants – both Asian (Chinese and Vietnamese) and Mediterranean (Greeks, Italians and Macedonians). Again, the selection of WMR and particular schools from within that region is guided by a desire to maximize the application of any generalisations to other Australian contexts. Additionally, in this way it is anticipated that the research findings will be able to be translated into strategies, structures and processes and enlighten how families within different cultures can shape their child's potential identifications of science, an area where less research has been conducted. Therefore, we invite schools which have students from those cultural backgrounds and your school is one of them.

### **Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research**

Being in the study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage and your students' and parents responses will not be saved or analysed. However, if you have been involved in the submission of any anonymous (non-identifiable) material such as a questionnaire, it will not be possible to withdraw data once they have been submitted.

### **Confidentiality**

We would like to assure you that confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Any reports from the questionnaires or interviews will be synthesised to ensure that the school cannot be identified through participants' comments, confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Reports on the project may be published in professional journals and other publications. Your school's name and the participants' names or any personal details whatsoever will not be used in any publication arising from this research. Pseudonyms will be used instead so that they will not be recognised.

### **Storage of data**

Data collected will be stored in accordance with [Monash University regulations](#). They will be kept at Monash University, Clayton in locked cabinets and secure computer server for five years.

### **Results**

Triangulation of data will be required from different sources such as the parent-student interviews (used as case studies) including the responses from Career and Pathway Transition Leaders. The findings may be disseminated in national, regional and/or international conferences and a summary of key findings will be made available to participants on request.

### **Complaints**

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the

Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics  
(MUHREC):

Executive Officer  
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee  
(MUHREC)  
Room 111, Building 3e  
Research Office  
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052   Email: [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu)

Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Dr. Sivaneswary Phillipson and Sarika Kewalramani

## Appendix H: Principal Consent Form



### Principal Consent Form

*Project title: Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select subjects post Year 10*

Supervisor contact details:  
Kewalramani

Student's name: Mrs. Sarika

**Dr. Sivanewary Phillipson** PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education, Clayton Campus

Bldg 6, Room 345

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**MUHREC number: CF14/2927: 2014001620**

**DET approved application number: 2014\_002492**

I have read and understood the information sheet provided by the researcher about this activity, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have indicated below my agreement to grant permission to data collection. I understand that I will have an opportunity to view any recordings and that I will have the right to veto some or all of that material. I agree to allow my students and their parents as well as the School's Careers Leader/equivalent role to participate in this project, realizing that I may withdraw at any time, without prejudice.

	Yes	No
Individual interview including audio recording		

Copies of the information sheet for this project and this form have been provided to me to keep.

**Name of School** .....

**Name of Principal** .....

**Signature** .....

**Date** .....



# Appendix I: School's Career and Pathway Transition Leader's Consent Form



## Careers Leader Consent Form

***Project title: Parental influences on Asian and Mediterranean secondary school students' aspirations to select subjects post Year 10***

Supervisor contact details:

Student's name: Mrs.

Sarika Kewalramani

**Dr. Sivaneswary Phillipson**

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education, Clayton Campus

Bldg 6, Room 345



**MUHREC number: CF14/2927: 2014001620**

**DET approved application number: 2014\_002492**

I have read and understood the information sheet provided by the researcher about this activity, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have indicated below my agreement to grant permission to data collection. I understand that I will have an opportunity to view any recordings and that I will have the right to veto some or all of that material. I agree to participate in this project, realizing that I may withdraw at any time, without prejudice.

	Yes	No
Individual interview including audio recording		

Copies of the information sheet for this project and this form have been provided to me to keep.

**Name of School** .....

**Name of Careers Leader/Equivalent role** .....

**Signature** .....

**Date** .....

## **Appendix J: Parent Interview Excerpt**

### **Researcher**

Thank you very much Raji for participating in this research study. As you know, the topic is what are parental influences on your child's aspirations to choose subjects in school. If you are uncomfortable answering any questions, then you can avoid, just we can move on to the next one. Can we start with what sort of work do you do?

### **Raji**

I'm a hairdresser and a beauty therapist. So I got my own business.

### **Researcher**

How many children in the family?

### **Raji**

I got two, one daughter and one son.

### **Researcher**

And your daughter is obviously the oldest.

### **Raji**

Yeah, she's in Year 10 and my younger one is in kindergarten.

### **Researcher**

So what's like a normal day for you?

### **Raji**

Only Tuesdays, otherwise all seven days I'm working.

### **Researcher**

Okay. So when you're working, what's a day for you like, when you start work? What's a day like when you're working, the day you're working?

### **Raji**

The day I'm working, mostly weekends.

### **Researcher**

What about Monday to Friday, what do you when you get up early in the morning, what sort of – how does your day start with?

### **Raji**

Okay, day starts with lots of household work, kitchen and then cleaning and then kids,

school packing and stuff, and after that I have to run to the salon and then salon work starts.

**Researcher**

What time does the salon start?

**Raji**

It's 10-6 everyday, except Tuesdays. If I got appointments, I have to open on Tuesdays as well.

**Researcher**

So 10-6 you are at work?

**Raji**

Yes.

**Researcher**

And then you have to prepare meals and everything, lunch?

**Raji**

Everything in the morning. For the lunch, for the dinner, I have to prepare everything in the morning.

**Researcher**

Then when you go back home after work?

**Raji**

Then I have no battery left in me. So just a little bit more kitchen work and that's it.

**Researcher**

It is dinner time.

**Raji**

Yeah, that's it. Then finish everything.

**Researcher**

Your husband, what does he do?

**Raji**

He is security. He works with Linfox Security, and his shifts are more rotational. So this will help us to manage my younger one school times and stuff. Sometimes he got morning shift, sometimes evening, sometimes afternoon, night. It depends every week.

**Researcher**

So he will adjust the shift according to ...

**Raji**

According to – sometime yes, according to our son school, managing things, otherwise whatever shifts he gets, he does accordingly.

**Researcher**

So is this a family business or your own, like you started yourself?

**Raji**

I started myself.

**Researcher**

So it's not like you got it from your mother, father?

**Raji**

No, I just started – I'm the only one in this business.

**Researcher**

Okay, so husband not in the business.

**Raji**

Husband is not doing anything in the business, but yes, he helped me sometimes in the paper work.

**Researcher**

What sort of qualification have you completed?

**Raji**

I did my masters and my B.Ed. from India, and then I did my hairdressing and beauty courses from India and then I came here and did hairdressing, beauty, makeup courses from different places, and then worked in different salons, and now I started my own business.

**Researcher**

Very good. So how long living in Australia then?

**Raji**

It's 7 – 8 years now. I came here in 2007.

**Researcher**

So you came here, re-did the courses, worked also.

**Raji**

Yeah. Because I was working with L'Oréal in Delhi. When I came here, I again studied hairdressing and beauty, and then I started work.

**Researcher**

But you did finish masters of education?

**Raji**

Bachelor of Education from India, B.Ed. from India, from Delhi, Masters in Hindi.

**Researcher**

Is it Masters of Commerce?

**Raji**

It's MA in Literature, Hindi.

**Researcher**

okay, literature. So major in literature of Hindi, which is Sanskrit?

**Raji**

No, its basic Hindi.

**Researcher**

Literature in Hindi? Literature is English?

**Raji**

No. It's how Hindi starts. That's masters in that.

**Researcher**

There was a research in that?

**Raji**

No. There was no research in that. If I had to do, Ph.D. then I had to do research. In masters, we don't have any research work.

**Researcher**

So how did beauty therapy come in?

**Raji**

Because I was not enjoying my studies and enjoying my job because I was a teacher before. But then, I just wanted to do something else. Again, my husband supported me a lot. He said do whatever you want to, and then I did my hairdressing and beauty course from Delhi, and then I said yes, I just want to do this thing only. Since then, I think it's almost 10-11 years now I have been doing this.

**Researcher**

Good. What sort of values do you believe in education then?

**Raji**

For me, it's really very important. Education develops your mind. So I think that is the best thing if any parent can give education to the kids. So yes, it is very important.

**Researcher**

Is there a value in your entire family, like when you were living in India?

**Raji**

Yes. My parents are not educated enough but they tried to give us the best what they could. I did my masters and B.Ed. My sister – we are four sisters and everyone did their masters and B.Ed., and they are doing good jobs and stuff. So they are very concerned about education. Not like – this is not a secondary thing for them.

**Researcher**

Like you could have always not done studies and just done business, hairdressing before bachelors.

**Raji**

Actually, when I finished my Year 12, my mother always got admission to do some hobby courses and I did hobby course in hairdressing and beauty, and that time I wanted to do this but my mother said, do something in education. So then I did my masters and BA and then MA and then B.Ed. But that thing is there somewhere, so then I started this thing. After marriage, I did hairdressing and beauty. Before marriage, I just did my education, completed my education.

**Researcher**

So you are obviously moulded in that way that you have to finish – did they choose you to become a teacher or did you want to be a teacher?

**Raji**

Yes, they chose me to become a teacher. Because I think their mind is set, like teaching job is the best option for the girls. So they said this is the most safe profession.

**Researcher**

Yes, I know what you are talking about.

**Raji**

Yeah, more safe profession for the ladies, the girls.

**Researcher**

We'll continue talking about your educational experience. What type of student were you, average, high, medium?

**Raji**

I think above average because I always got, in my university, in bachelors, first division, I passed my bachelors and then MA, and then – never second -

**Researcher**

Did you parents force you to study at that – from -

**Raji**

My mother was a very strict mother that time. And she said, actually she is a great mother I can say because she said education is important, but the other things are always equally important for the girls, like the whole household work and other qualities like cooking and knitting and stitching, she taught us everything.

**Researcher**

So you had stitching classes, sewing classes.

**Raji**

Yes, whenever we had school holidays and stuff, she always wanted to do something like this.

**Researcher**

Activities. Cooking class and all. That's right. Did you have any challenges during your schooling days? Schooling or even when you were studying university?

**Researcher**

We were talking about what challenges did you face during your days of schooling? And if so, then how did you get advice and support from home?

**Raji**

Challenges, yes, I faced so many challenges, because there was no one who could advise us properly, like parents were not educated enough and we didn't have anyone in the family who had knowledge about education and stuff. So whatever subjects we chose, parents said okay, if it's convenient for you, if you're interested in this, you can go ahead, so we did that way. Now I think sometimes like if that time parents advised us or someone in the family advised us, maybe I would be a doctor, because all of us, all my sisters and my brother, we were very good in studies. But sometimes, if you don't get proper advise, these kind of challenges we faced. All my sisters and me and my siblings, they faced the same thing.

**Researcher**

Mother, father, what about aunties and uncles?



**Raji**

There's no one in the family who was educated enough. This is the honest answer, because that time my grandparents were not that much educated. Yes, but my husbands' family, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law, they are very well educated. My mother-in-law, she's a teacher. She is a retired teacher. My father-in-law, he is retired from IB, investigation bureau from Delhi, so but in my family, none. These kinds of challenges we faced.

**Researcher**

Were you provided – what about financial support, like tuitions, coaching?

**Raji**

Tuitions, because we are very good in studies, sometime my mom said if you want we can start your tuition and stuff, but the teachers said your daughters are already good in studies, there is no need of tuitions. So we were always very responsible about our homework and stuff, and my elder sister, she is I think 6 years elder than me, and she helped me to do homework, and then we helped – like my brother is 6 years younger than me, so we helped each other that way. So there was no tuition. Financially, we were okay, but the thing is there was lack of knowledge.

**Researcher**

Was there an expectation from your parents to do, for you to do well? You're saying you all were bright kids, good children.

**Raji**

My parents' thinking was like if we are not educated enough, but we want the best for our kids. So that's why they always pressured sometimes like do studies, do this thing, do that thing, do indulge into bad things and stuff, very concerned about studies. They were not educated enough, but whatever they did, I think they did their best.

**Researcher**

Did you choose any science subjects when you were at school?

**Raji**

No. This is the problem because when I finished my Year 10, that time, in Year 11 and 12, you had to choose your subjects, and there was no one in the family – and we chose very common subjects, like the basic arts, English, Hindi, Punjabi, Political Science and History. So we didn't get into science and commerce stream or something. When we got knowledge and stuff, that time we were late, we couldn't do anything.

**Researcher**

Were you good in science subjects? I'm sure in India you don't have -

**Raji**

Till Year 10, yes, I was a good student. I got always – not in 70s or 80s, but I remember I got 60% marks.

**Researcher**

In science, like you had Physics, Chemistry?

**Raji**

Physics, Chemistry, Biology till Year 10.

**Researcher**

So did you have choosing subjects when you were in your college, Year 11 and 12, choosing science?

**Raji**

No.

**Researcher**

So Year 10 was the last year.

**Raji**

Year 10. I just studied science till the Year 10.

**Researcher**

That's right. After 10 is end of schooling and Year 11 is college.

**Raji**

College starts. That's I think '93, '94.

**Researcher**

Okay. So choosing art and all was your decision.

**Raji**

My decision. Because we didn't have any knowledge what the subjects are and how we go to the college and stuff. So these are the easy ones, okay take these.

**Researcher**

What about older brother and sister? Did they guide you?

**Raji**

No. They also did the same thing, and I also did the same thing.

**Researcher**

So everybody in the family did the same, B.Ed.?

**Raji**

Yes, they did MA and B.Ed. in the different – like my elder sister, she did MA in English and then B.Ed. Then my other sister, she did MA in Political Science and B.Ed., and I did MA in Hindi and B.Ed. And my younger sister, she did Computers. She did her BCA.

**Researcher**

That's computer technology.

**Raji**

Yeah, Bachelor in Computer Education. Yeah.

**Researcher**

So did these experiences make you value, to study science or not study science when you became – and you understood?

**Raji**

Yes, now I'm thinking that if someone guided us, we definitely could do better things.

**Researcher**

Did you – you said you wanted to be a doctor?

**Raji**

Yes, I wanted to be a doctor. But that time, I didn't know what subject we need to choose and where we needed to go. Not a doctor, but definitely I wanted to be in the medical line.

**Researcher**

Could be any paramedical field?

**Raji**

Any field. Nursing. Because my aunty, my chachiji, she's a retired now. That time I felt, yes, I wanted to be a nurse or in the medical line.

**Researcher**

But you ended up having your business.

**Raji**

Yes, now I'm happy. I am satisfied.

**Researcher**

Okay, we'll go to some cultural part of your family. What sort of family practices do you indulge in, like I know you said you migrated, but back over there, and over here, is it different or same?

**Raji**

Actually my parents side, we have a joint family, so all my uncle, aunty, my parents they

live together, and very good family bonding and all my siblings and my cousins, we are very close to each other. So these kind of culture we saw there, and I'm very family oriented also. So yes, there are lots of cultural things going on all the time. There are weddings or birthdays or anniversaries. The family is very – to be very honest, I can say joint family is the best thing. We can learn lots of things. But sometimes – there are advantages and disadvantages too. Parents can't focus on their kids because they have to see their family.

**Researcher**

So what about any cultural practice here, now here in Australia, with your family?

**Raji**

There are very less cultural activities. Just whatever festivals come, we celebrate here and then -

**Researcher**

As a family? Or only you?

**Raji**

As a family. Yes we have some family friends, so that get-together, birthdays, or religious ceremonies in the temple or something like that.

**Researcher**

You said 2008, right?

**Raji**

Yes.

**Researcher**

So okay, what about engaging, like you said social activities? So to make sure as a family, with your children together or is it just with friends?

**Raji**

I always try to be – whatever we are going to celebrate the cultural activity, I want to be with my kids and my husband. I want to teach them all the festivals and their importance. I'm not saying that if I'm from India I just want to celebrate Indian festivals and stuff. We celebrate Christmas as well. We celebrate Eid as well. The best part in Australia is very multicultural thing. And my job is like – I think every day I meet different people from different communities, so I learnt lots of things from different cultures and their traditions. Because every wedding is different, every festival is different in different communities.

**Researcher**

Now we'll go to this section of your influence. About your child now, you and your child. What sort of guidance do you provide your children? We talk about Year 10 daughter in regard to watching TV shows. Sciency shows, non-sciency shows.

**Raji**

Actually, she is very, very good in dance, and all the time, all the time, she's watching dance programs. Dance and performing arts and stuff. But sometimes, I say dance is one thing that's an activity, but studies are important too. Sometimes, her dad also tells her try to watch some Discovery channel or something like that, but she's not interested in that.

**Researcher**

What about when she was in India? Childhood?

**Raji**

When she was in India, she was a very, very responsible, very, very studious girl because I remember when she was in Year 2, she and there is one girl, she – there was competition between both of them, like if she got 10/10, she got 9-1/2, she would come and cry, why she got half mark extra. Now I think she's more into the activities thing rather than the studies.

**Researcher**

So things were different over there, and now it's different. But over there, was she encouraged to do well, get 10/10? How did that influence her?

**Raji**

That time, I always taught her. In India, the studies are totally different from here. There is lots of homework and stuff.

**Researcher**

We will continue. I think we were talking about your cultural practices, of influencing or motivating your child for choosing subjects. What cultural practices do you think would have influenced her, or any cultural value, as a family?

**Raji**

As a family, I can say, she's a very good – whatever festivals or cultural activities we are celebrating, she's always involved in that, and every week we go to our temple, and she always comes with us. Sometimes she says, "Mom, I have homework" or something like that, then I say, "Okay do your homework." Otherwise, every week she comes with us with the different cultural activities. Like every Wednesday or Thursday, we'll go to

temple for our one hour or two hours. She never says no. Whenever she has very hard work, then she says, “I need to do my homework.”

**Researcher**

So she’s saying herself that she needs to do her homework, so do you believe in her strength? What do you believe her strength and her abilities?

**Raji**

When she was young, she was a very, very good student. I can say, yes we pushed her because I know she is capable to do things whatever we – not we want, we want better for her. So she was very good in studies, and now she’s more in activities and sports and that side.

**Researcher**

So did you encourage her for that or how did that change ...

**Raji**

Yes, encourage, like there were dance classes and stuff because she likes dance, and I put her into the dance classes. Every week she had dance classes and she was very happy too. And I said, “See if we are happy with your decision, you should also think about your parents’ thinking as well.” So she said okay, and she started dance classes and she was happy there. Then we said okay now the study part. That is also important. So – and she studied hard because she got lots of homework these days and all the time she is on the laptop. And sometimes my husband suddenly goes to her room and checks what she is doing. Sometimes there are some songs are going on while studying. He doesn’t like it. But she says, “See dad, I want to finish my homework that way.” Then I told him, I said that’s her way of studying. So don’t force her to do with the calm environment and this and that. If she’s comfortable with listening to music while studying, that’s up to her.

**Researcher**

So you have that belief in her, that she will get the homework done.

**Raji**

Yes.

**Researcher**

And what type of subjects do you think she will excel in?

**Raji**

She is very, very good in French, and every time she gets 20/20, 10/10, and sometimes when she gets 9, she says, “I don’t know, that teacher doesn’t listen to me. Sometimes she

is rude.” I said, “No, if you did mistake then she will cut some marks, otherwise you always get good marks in this.” And that time I thought if you want you can be an interpreter, French, English. You know three, four languages. Like you know Hindi, Punjabi, you know English, and now French. So you can be an interpreter as well, or a French teacher if you are good in French. She said yes, I like French. And I don’t know, she just – she learnt very quickly. But she’s not good in maths because she doesn’t have interest in that. Good in English and Psychology. Actually whatever feedback I got, the thing – like there are no much jobs in Psychology. It’s a very long way to go in Psychology. So I told her if you want you can open your other options as well. So she’s good in English, good in French and Psychology. And she wants to start sport, but sometimes I think she’s a confused child. She doesn’t know what game she wants to be in.

**Researcher**

Yeah, it’s too early I think because Year 10.

**Raji**

So sometimes, I say if you want you can go for tennis or soccer or something like that, but ...

**Researcher**

What sort of advice did you give her, like to be able to make her own decisions? Or there’s always a family or parent input?

**Raji**

I think there is more of family input because if we are not interfering into her matters, maybe she will go to the wrong path, maybe – why because she’s more into – she wants to be a dance. We don’t want to – we said, “Okay, you can go with it as an activity, as a hobby, but not a profession”, because of you say family values, you can say that is not good in our culture or something. She wants to be that, but to be very honest, we don’t what that. This is the honest answer.

**Researcher**

So there will be at some stage in the future, there will be lots of family discussions?

**Raji**

Yes, and like her grandparents, they are also very concerned about studies. All the time, they are asking how her studies are going on, what she wants to be, and her grandmother, she always wants Planquin to be a doctor or something in the medical stream or something. I said, “See mom, it’s her decision, but definitely she’s not going into dance or something

like that.” She said, “Dance is not good, you know, keep her with studies.” I said, “She is good in that, and she wants to be a dancer. That is her decision, not our decision, but we always push her into the studies.” So I don’t know what she’ll be doing in the future but definitely right now, we just advise her with what we are thinking is good.

**Researcher**

What is good for her future. So when you advise her, you’re talking about job prospects, money-earning prospects?

**Raji**

yes, because there’s always – kids are really very career conscious these days. She said, “There are lots of dancers or lots of performers, they earn so much of money and this and that”. I said, “See, they are good, we don’t want to comment on that. But if you are into a good profession, you can earn money in that profession as well.” Like, now we are thinking of putting her into something like health management kind of thing. That’s a health management thing. There are lots of jobs in that, in the hospitals. They want people from that stream. There is good money in that too. There is only one university where they have this health management, La Trobe.

**Researcher**

Okay. So that’s the area you are exploring at the moment. How do you think you will convince her?

**Raji**

I don’t know, because she is in Year 10, and 11 and 12 I don’t know what she is going to do, but right now I can say, she’s a very good girl, she’s a responsible girl. She listens to us and that’s her – I think that’s an age factor. In this age kids think parents just give us lectures and stuff, but after some time, they will realize, yes, they are thinking better for us.

**Researcher**

So that is an expectation from her? Is that a part of your cultural value?

**Raji**

Yes. Because she is the only girl child in our family and everyone’s like – she is very close to her grandfather too, and all of us want good for her.

**Researcher**

So even if she chooses what she wants to, will you be happy for her, or will there be big tantrums at home?



**Raji**

I think yes, there will be a big tantrum at home, definitely, from my husband's side, because he doesn't like this thing as a profession.

**Researcher**

So we'll come to the last section regarding your involvement regarding the career counselling process at school. How were you involved in that career counselling process?

**Raji**

We never met any career counsellor in school.

**Researcher**

So didn't you get information at home about the choice of subjects, or were invited at the filling of forms? You must have filled up forms and signed?

**Raji**

Yes, but the thing is that I think that these things are taken by my husband. I don't know much about these things, but yes, we filled some form. And one of my friends, she is a teacher. She helped us to choose the subjects and stuff, because I told her, because we don't have much knowledge what the education system here is, and she said, okay. We told her like we want more options for her in the future, and according to that, she chose some subjects, whatever subjects she has now, and she said that in the future she will definitely get some better options in the uni.

**Researcher**

So you didn't make any phone calls at school asking about this subject, why not this subject or just ...

**Raji**

No, there was only – we were concerned about maths because school advised her to I think prep maths, but I think the prep maths she can't do in the uni or something, I don't know. Then I asked my friend and she said we'll help her in maths, and then she took Advanced Maths I think. Maths A.

**Researcher**

The normal maths that can take her to VCE, to the university.

**Raji**

So then she took Maths A. This was the only concern we had, and we discussed this thing with the teacher, and she said, "If you are ready to help her, and if she is ready to do this thing, we are going to give this subject to her, otherwise we do not recommend that." But

we said, “That’s fine. We will definitely hire a tutor or something like that and she’ll help her.”

**Researcher**

So that was the only point of contact with the school?

**Raji**

Yes.

**Researcher**

What about checking your daughter’s school diary, forms, excursions?

**Raji**

I’m not checking diary every time, but yes, whatever excursions are in the school, she always gives us the forms. We fill the forms and give the money and everything.

**Researcher**

But do you encourage her to go for science excursion or what types of excursions? Do you ask her what type of excursion is coming up? Why don’t you go for this one and this one?

**Raji**

I think these things school decides, and whatever excursions are there, she always participated in that.

**Researcher**

If anything science or not science or not sport?

**Raji**

Yes, because I think in Year 9, they had city experience, and they went to city for a week every day. They went to city with the teachers and the whole class, and they covered different areas, and they had some assignment or research or something on this, and yeah, there are different excursions that school organized and we never say no to her. She always goes there.

**Researcher**

What about, she chose psychology? Any excursions, do you encourage her go to a psychology excursion or maths excursion?

**Raji**

Yeah, if in future the school organizes some excursion related to her subject, I definitely encourage her to go and participate in that.

**Researcher**

Just finishing with the last – so parent-teacher interviews you said you attend and you ask her about her grades? Do you check on homework?

**Raji**

Yes, all the time, whenever school sends us the report, we discuss that report with the teachers, and to be very honest, I don't know the system of parents meeting here, because they always tell us the positive part of the student. So sometimes, we want to know where they are lacking in. They said, "No, they can do better. They can still improve themselves. Don't worry. She'll be okay. She's a good student." That way. But I want to know what kind of lacking she has.

**Researcher**

So teachers are always appreciating her? Even the maths teacher?

**Raji**

Even the maths teacher. She said, "She works hard, but sometimes she gets confused or something, then she doesn't get a good score." But she always passed, but we expect our – she expects she doesn't make that much.

**Researcher**

So she also wants to do better? Does she expect better of herself?

**Raji**

Yes, and now she is – I think, sometimes when she solves the sums and she says, "Oh, this is so easy, I don't know why I can't understand this thing." And now I think she is building her interest in maths.

**Researcher**

Getting confident?

**Raji**

Yes. I can say yes because last year she was very upset. She said, "I don't want to take maths at all." But then we said, "Don't worry, we will help you, we will arrange some tuition or something like that for you, especially in maths." And now she is okay.

**Researcher**

So you believe that's a value to talk to teachers and liaise with teachers at school?

**Raji**

Yes, not only related to subjects, I want to overall performance in the school. Like she is – now they have organized one drama kind of thing. Every year they have an act in the

school, drama production. For a week that is going in. Last year she participated and she was very happy, and this year again, she is participating in that.

**Researcher**

Okay, she is one of the performers.

**Raji**

Yes.

**Researcher**

Okay, so would you go and see her performance and all?

**Raji**

Yes, I went last year and I saw her performance. She was good.

**Researcher**

You as a family or whoever was free.

**Raji**

Actually, I was free that day. My husband was working. So I went there to cheer her up and encourage her. We are not that much against dance but we don't want her to choose it as a career. That is the basic ...

**Researcher**

Guideline of the family, family policy kind of. Okay. One last question, what if you were in India and not here – instead of being in Australia. What would be your perspective for your expectation?

**Raji**

I think the story was totally different. Because there the studies, in Delhi specially, studies are really very hard. And as a parent, I am also very concerned about study. All subjects, tuitions, and maybe she will definitely be much better than studies rather than here.

**Researcher**

And choice of subjects would have been different?

**Raji**

I think yes, she would take maths, science everything, and she would definitely have interest in maths as well. Because now – she was disturbed because when we came here, she was there at home for two years with her grandparents, and when she came here, the structure of studies is totally different so she got confused. So this is the lagging thing I think.

**Researcher**

Was it a cultural shock also?

**Raji**

Cultural and I think yes, first year maybe the language problem as well. She was good in English because she was studying in a Catholic school there, but sometime the accent is totally different, and that year was a year – when she came here she was in Year 4. That time she was struggling hard, and I think then she dropped her interest in the different subjects.

**Researcher**

And you never pushed her then, when she was ...

**Raji**

Because that time we got also very – for us it was a very struggling time too. And the studying part is totally different from there. Because there was no homework or something like that, because in India, there is lot of homework and kids are always involved in studies.

**Researcher**

Yeah, right. Thank you very much for participating.

## **Appendix K: Student Interview Excerpt**

### **Researcher**

Thank you very much for taking part in this research study. I hope I get lots of responses from you and based on that we will be able to help your career pathway.

Can you start saying what subjects have you chosen this year a school?

### **Pilka**

I have English, Maths A, Psychology, VET course in Sports and Recreation and French, and Drive and Survive.

### **Researcher**

\*Whom do you talk to more about your day at school, is it mom or dad?

### **Pilka**

I talk to everyone equally. I don't have any secrets. My parents know everything about me.

### **Researcher**

What kind of things do you talk to them about? Like schooling?

### **Pilka**

If there's any fights going around, and like my scores and what's been happening lately, so pretty much everything.

### **Researcher**

So you do share your assignments, grades, scores with them?

### **Pilka**

Even the bad ones, I don't mind.

### **Researcher**

What about anything that happened in class, with the teachers?

### **Pilka**

Almost everything.

### **Researcher**

You share with them? On a daily basis?

**Pilka**

Yeah, pretty much. When we will be sitting together, it gets awkward, so might as well talk about school.

**Researcher**

Equally to mom and dad.

**Pilka**

Yeah.

**Researcher**

\*So who do you think would be the role model in your family? Mom or dad or an aunty or someone.

**Pilka**

Can't think of anyone right now. I don't know. Everyone I know are smart, or like they have a future unlike me right now.

**Researcher**

Do you relate to anyone of them? Or would you want to relate to anyone?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I guess, like one of my aunties, but I can't think what it would be like to be like her, but I wanted to when I was a kid.

**Researcher**

Does she live here?

**Pilka**

No, in India.

**Researcher**

So that's when you were in India then?

**Pilka**

But this is like ages ago, I don't even remember what she did.

**Researcher**

What about out of mom and dad?

**Pilka**

I want to get qualities from both of them because dad's smart and mom's hard working, so get both.

**Researcher**

\*As I can see your mom owns a business, how has that influenced your choice of subjects?

**Pilka**

It hasn't. Not at all. I'm just not interested in beauty. I'm more of a tomboy. So yeah, it hasn't – it's pretty much just the maths that I've chosen because of my parents. They wanted me to – I recommended a lower maths when I got the recommendation but that's pretty much it.

**Researcher**

So Maths A. That's average maths?

**Pilka**

Yeah, it's the one that everyone should be in.

**Researcher**

So you're recommended below maths?

**Pilka**

I got recommended preparation maths and that usually doesn't lead to Year 12 unless you get really good scores, like 100% in everything.

**Researcher**

Why weren't you put into Maths A?

**Pilka**

My parents wanted me to do a higher maths which led to Year 12, but I guess I'm fine with this Maths as well, like I can cope with it. It's hard but then, yeah.

**Researcher**

We'll get back to talking about why it is hard and stuff like that and how did you think about maths is hard, but you're saying what mom is doing right now, you haven't chosen any fashion or ...

**Pilka**

No, not at all. I'm really bad at it as well, so.



**Researcher**

\*What are the great traditions in the family that you think of even when you were in India or here? What do you persist with as a family?

**Pilka**

We share everything so my parents know everything about me. I know most of the things about them. Like they started telling me everything when they thought I was old enough, and my grandparents they know about our family, the secrets were share, it's really good. So no one out of family ends up knowing about it. I guess that's good.

**Researcher**

What about indulging in family get-togethers and all, like what sort of things as a cultural thing that you persist with?

**Pilka**

Our family right now is scattered, like grandparents are in India and my uncle lives in a different house, so we don't have get-togethers as much but when I was in India, when I used to live with my mom's family, my mom's mother, they were like a joint family and they had a lot of get-togethers and it was fun.

**Researcher**

But obviously, now it's different. But what about you guys together, like you four as a family together?

**Pilka**

Us four, we're really happy. We try to stay together and have as many outings as possible. Even if mom's been working for too long, like for a week or so without any day offs, we probably take a day off on purpose and go somewhere far, probably on a drive.

**Researcher**

So there is a time, weekly to spend – has to be with family.

**Pilka**

Yeah, every week.

**Researcher**

\*What sort of cultural values do you think has influenced your choice of subjects? What's the most thing that you value as a family that has set your pull to Maths?

**Pilka**

I guess it's just that everyone has a mindset, mostly Indian parents, that you should be smart, engineer, doctor, maths, that's the main, that's life, you can't do anything further. I guess that's influenced me but now I'm making my choices, I just can't cope with it. But they wanted me to be nerdy.

**Researcher**

Was that from childhood?

**Pilka**

When I was little, I wanted to be smart, I was smart, but that was just grade 3 in India, but now, I'm smart but not with studies. Other things ...

**Researcher**

How did that change happen?

**Pilka**

I guess because I wasn't with my – I wasn't with the joint family anymore and it was just my parents. They wanted what's best for me and what I wanted to do.

**Researcher**

So in India when you were in a joint family, was everybody about education and everything?

**Pilka**

Yeah, everyone. Like my grandparents, they want me to be Forensic Psychologist, which I'll be interested in as well, I don't mind, but again, too much study and only because it sounds good, Palak's a Forensic Psychologist, yeah, sounds good.

**Researcher**

What if you were still in India?

**Pilka**

I guess I'd be really smart.

**Researcher**

Would you have chosen subjects that they would have told you to?

**Pilka**

Yeah. Most of them, because now we don't even have the same subjects here. I'm suddenly

more into sports and fitness, and they didn't really focus on sports and fitness in India, it's just Maths and English.

**Researcher**

But Forensic Psychologist is more like a science stream?

**Pilka**

Yeah, but then I was really young to even focus on being a Forensic Psychologist in India.

**Researcher**

Was that that when you were over there, they had an expectation like just grade 2?

**Pilka**

At that time, they just thought of it as being smart in grade 2, to a grade 2 level, they didn't have many expectations, but they'd be happy if I was a doctor or something good, not like just a dancer.

**Researcher**

So whilst you're here, do you talk to them about your educational ...

**Pilka**

Yeah, almost every day, I'll call up my grandparents, tell them what's going on because my grandfather always wants to know what's happening with Forensic Psychology because I was doing Forensic Science last year and now I'm doing Psychology, so it blends in and yeah, I told him that I'm going good and my scores were good and I pass and everything, and he's happy about it.

**Researcher**

You did Forensic Science in Year 9, and this year you chose psychology, do you think that has been an influence. Even now you're here and still you speak to your grandparents?

**Pilka**

Yeah, it has. Specially my granddad. He's really into criminal stuff like CBI, CID and everything, and he wants me to be one of them. They're TV shows.

**Researcher**

What do you feel about it?

**Pilka**

I feel proud, I feel honoured, they want me to do this. I'm close to my grandfather, and no one in the family is, like no other child I guess and whenever he's angry or something, I'll be the only one to talk to him.

**Researcher**

When you say grandad, is it your dad's dad or your mom's dad?

**Pilka**

Dad's dad.

**Researcher**

You're saying that out of even your mom and dad, granddad has been influential?

**Pilka**

Yeah he has, especially in forensic. I want him to be happy. He's a little old fellow.

**Researcher**

But would you be happy?

**Pilka**

Yeah. If I end up aiming and then achieving Forensic Psychology or be one of those smart people I'll be happy, but I know I won't be able to do it somehow.

**Researcher**

What do your parents think about this choice of Psychology?

**Pilka**

They're happy about it. At least I have one nerdy subject, so they're happy.

**Researcher**

So they wouldn't mind.

**Pilka**

Yeah.

**Researcher**

Unlike what else they would have expected?

**Pilka**

They would have just expected me to choose some really low subjects which don't help me

much in my VCE but now I'm doing a Year 11 subject being in Year 10, so that counts towards my actual score. So I guess they're happy right now.

**Researcher**

\*Now we'll talk about TV shows. What sort of TV shows are you into?

**Pilka**

Mostly like dancing and reality shows, gossips and fights.

**Researcher**

\*What about sciency shows?

**Pilka**

I'm not really into them. I don't watch TV much anyways. I may be either on laptop or phone or study. So not into TV as much.

**Researcher**

What about the psychology type, forensic type of shows?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I used to be obsessed with them when I was in Grade 2 or 3 but then that changed because I came here and all TV shows changed. I used to watch it with my grandfather, but then he's not here anymore, so I got over it.

**Researcher**

So if grandfather was here, then he would have ...

**Pilka**

Yeah, I would have been so determined to be a Forensic Psychologist.

**Researcher**

So you'd be asked to see all those type of shows?

**Pilka**

I wouldn't have been asked, but then he would have liked it if he had the company by me.

**Researcher**

Would you accompany him?

**Pilka**

Yeah. Sure, why not.

**Researcher**

Is it just because you look up to him or you would have enjoyed it yourself?

**Pilka**

I would have enjoyed it myself. He's fun.

**Researcher**

\*What sort of beliefs do your parents have - you can talk about anybody in your family, about your strengths and capabilities?

**Pilka**

My dad believes in me. If I get a high score, he knows I can do better. In Maths, I'm not good at it but he still believes in me. Mom, she believes in me but she gets a little bit jazzy, I guess. She'd still push me, they still believe in me.

**Researcher**

What sort of encouragement would they keep giving you, or would they encourage you with what you're doing right now?

**Pilka**

Yeah, they would encourage me by the name of society. They'd be like if you be a dancer, the society wouldn't look up to you as much, especially in the family, but if you were a doctor but someone in the medical or police force, then everyone in the family, relatives and everyone else would look up to you and be like, "Look, there's Palak's grandpa going", but they wouldn't be "There's grandpas Palak", yeah.

**Researcher**

That's the style of encouragement you get. What about your decision to take Psychology? I know Maths you were put in because of your parents, by Psychology, sports and other subjects?

**Pilka**

These subjects have always been my favourite, like I've always liked them. Even next semester, I have two sports subjects, actually three. So Mind, Body and Soul, some fitness, gym related subject and Sport and Rec. So yeah, I've always liked those subjects.

**Researcher**

In terms of your choice of subjects, were you encouraged from childhood or when you moved here, to read these types of books or sporty books or sciency books?

**Pilka**

Not at all. All the subject choices, I made them by myself. The only subject was Maths A, but then I just agreed to my parents. Its better if I do Year 12 Maths somehow because then it opens more choices for me for the future as well.

**Researcher**

So reading books, or what were your encouraged to read?

**Pilka**

No, I've never really been a reader.

**Researcher**

Visiting – like in the spare time going to the library and read books.

**Pilka**

Not at all. They just want me to be happy and they don't care what I do in my spare time. They give me a few dollars, just go shopping, if you're happy with that.

**Researcher**

You said you weren't good in Maths – who told you that? How did you come about this like you were not good in Maths or where did that come from?

**Pilka**

I never really had good scores in Maths. It's been 5 years since I'm here now and I've never really been a maths person. I just don't get numbers, why do they exist?

**Researcher**

\* Were you given any encouragement, any support, tutorial, extra teacher help?

**Pilka**

Yes, I was. I had a tutor for really long. It started helping me, but I just got over it I guess and I was like, "No more tutor". But yeah, my parents always tried to encourage me. Maths A, I'm happy choosing it now because I know I would have more options for me and I can get a tutor anytime.

**Researcher**

So you're happy with the tutorial support that you got. Did you get better after that? Did you feel better yourself?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I did. But then it wasn't for – it's been quite long since I haven't been with a tutor now. But it did influence me.

**Researcher**

What about from you grandparents side? Do they say anything about your Maths score or doing Maths?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I don't really talk to them about maths but then yeah, I'm pretty sure if I told them how the system works here and how I'm in Maths A, I guess they would be happy because that's what my family expects from me.

**Researcher**

\*What do you think your parents educational expectations from you?

**Pilka**

They don't mind if I'm average but as long as I pass it. I think they know that it's too late to be highly educated now. I guess they're happy right now?

**Researcher**

What about going to university or not going to university? Is that an expectation?

**Pilka**

Yeah, it is definitely. Even I want to go to university just to experience what it feels like, sounds cool though, going to university.

**Researcher**

But you think you're going to stick to that pathway of Forensic Psychologist or Psychologist?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I want to, but then a few people have been telling me that it doesn't have a career, like it's really hard to get jobs into Psychology but it doesn't really have a good pay rate, so I'm confused right now to which one to go for. But then I'll see if Psychology is easy and I get it, then I'll probably go on the same pathway.



**Researcher**

\*We'll talk about the last section now, about your choice of subjects and school. How did you get any encouragement or any guidance from the career counsellor or the teachers?

**Pilka**

Yeah, Psychology, the counselling people last year, they also influenced me to choose Psychology because they showed me how many types there are. I always used to think there's just this one type of psychologist, and you go to him and he fixes your hallucinations, but there are 10 other types, and they told me about that, and I got interested in it. They told me there's two types of main psychologists. One of them needs maths, the other one doesn't. I was like, "Yeah, this is my pathway, the one without maths". It got me interested.

**Researcher**

\*Did your parents come along in that meeting, when you were discussing?

**Pilka**

No, it was just the students, it was at school.

**Researcher**

So parents were not allowed to come or they were not allowed to come.

**Pilka**

They were allowed to but I didn't tell them they were allowed. I just went.

**Researcher**

So you went by yourself and got the guidance and the information.

**Pilka**

I got all the websites they were looking at as well. They gave me this pamphlet. I showed them the websites at home though, and they looked up.

**Researcher**

So did you take that information, bring it home and discuss it with your parents?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I did, for a little bit and they looked at it and they were like, "Yeah, we'll think about it".

**Researcher**

So but then when you went back and actually chose your subjects, you know how parents had to sign forms? How did that process go?

**Pilka**

Yeah, like when I got the subject selection book, I wrote all the subjects that I wanted and then my parents spent a week thinking about it and they influenced me to change it all and then all my subjects were the opposite of what I chose. I chose stuff like Drama, Cooking where there's no study, but then my parents influenced me to go with all these Math A, French stuff.

**Researcher**

Which subjects were turned around because of parent influence?

**Pilka**

I think most of them. French has always been there because last year French was probably the only subject, which I got pretty good score at, so might as well keep it. English was always there. Maths A – I chose Prep but thinking that it doesn't lead to Year 12, I changed that to Maths A myself.

**Researcher**

So Drama was out of the picture?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I ended up choosing all the sports subjects because we have to get recommended for the VET course and my teacher recommended me because my scores were good and even the practice classes and the theory classes, I was good at both. So they recommended me according to it.

**Researcher**

Were your parents happy with that recommendation?

**Pilka**

Yeah, they were, because they knew sports subjects I would be happy with that and besides one of the sports subject are a VET course, so I do one of those subjects in Year 12.

**Researcher**

But you would end up taking Year 12 VCE?

**Pilka**

Yeah, VCE.

**Researcher**

So there was a negotiation in the family on the types of subjects?

**Pilka**

Yeah, there was. I wanted to do three sports subjects, and I could only choose eight, because six subjects go through the year and two of them change. Because I chose the VET course, it goes through the year because it's split into 1 and 2, and I guess it was just alright.

**Researcher**

So between the family, you were happy with the sporty subjects?

**Pilka**

Yeah.

**Researcher**

So the influential subjects were Maths A, Psychology.

**Pilka**

Yeah, I wanted to do Psychology but then I thought it was too hard and I can't be bothered, but then my parents pushed me for it and "Just do it, and we're pretty sure you'll do good at it". So I chose them.

**Researcher**

And you had Standard English and French you said you kind of liked it.

**Pilka**

Yeah. I don't mind French.

**Researcher**

So obviously, that information that you got from school had to be brought home and then discussed?

**Pilka**

Yeah.

**Researcher**

Did you discuss with grandad?

**Pilka**

No. Because the system's really different here, so there's no point discussing it. He'd have hundreds of questions.

**Researcher**

So you're saying that are you pushed enough to do well at school or with these subject choices now?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I am.

**Researcher**

Or it's going to come by yourself, that I'm going to do well.

**Pilka**

No, it won't. Because it's just the sporty subject that I don't mind and Psychology I've always wanted to do it. It's just the Maths. And I get pushed from my teacher a lot. I love this teacher, my Maths A teacher this year. He's so nice. Whenever I'm sad, he always comes up to me like "Why you're sad" and we talk about it. But yeah, he's really helpful as well.

**Researcher**

The helping part of it, but the teacher influence was not there for choosing Maths A?

**Pilka**

No. Because last year's teacher didn't really encourage me or push me for Maths A at all. She was always like, "There's just no way you'll be able to do a Maths A. You'll only do Prep", and I was like "Yeah, I can only do Prep", but then my parents felt, no we're pretty sure you can do Maths A.

**Researcher**

\*And do your parents accompany you to school signing forms or talking to teachers, interviews?

**Pilka**

They don't miss a chance for parents-teachers interviews. Everything they have to be there. There's one coming up next Tuesday or the Tuesday after. I'm just going to be sick that day, you know it. My teachers are going bad at school right now.

**Researcher**

So they will accompany and make sure?

**Pilka**

Yeah, every time. Even if they have to take a day off but it's not really an important thing, they just still do it. It's like they want a chance to take a day off. That's like a reason.

**Researcher**

\*What about attending the parent info night? You have parent information nights?

**Pilka**

I always miss them. I never know when they come and go. I know about it on the day and then it's too hard to organize parent's shifts and everything. So I just miss it every time. But I'm pretty sure they'll come with me if I knew about it.

**Researcher**

\*Do they ask about what excursions happen at school, checking your homework, your dairy?

**Pilka**

Not my work, but they know what I'm up to because I'm in my room with my door closed and my laptop with me, that means I'll study, but if my laptop's just there and my bag's there and my door's open, that means I'm just mucking around.

**Researcher**

Are you told off then or they know you're responsible?

**Pilka**

Yeah, they know I'm responsible. They wouldn't stop me from whatever I'm doing. If I'm in my room with my bag and laptop that's it, like you're going out.

**Researcher**

Do you want to add anything else about any other influential factor, friends, aunty, regarding your choice of subjects, career or about your doing good at school?

**Pilka**

As far as it's about peer pressure, my friends are not nerdy and they're like into gangs and everything, so I wasn't really influenced about studies by them.

**Researcher**

Now one last question. What would your parents think if you wouldn't go to university?

**Pilka**

They'd be disappointed, because they know I want to and I'm capable to. But I think it would be a wrong decision anyway, they'd be disappointed.

**Researcher**

So you yourself will go to university, and work towards it?

**Pilka**

Yeah, I want to. I just want the experience.

**Researcher**

Thank you very much.

## **Appendix L: Career and Pathway Transition Leader's Interview**

### **Excerpt**

#### **Researcher**

Thanks for taking part in this research study. As you know, the topic is parental influences, the role they play in their child's aspirations, to choose subjects post Year 10. So we're good to start?

\*If you can briefly mention your role as the pathway transition within the team. How many years at this school or totally in this career.

#### **CPT 1**

In this school, this will be my fifth year. I started at school in 2010. Overall though I've been in this field since 2001. This will be the third school that I've worked at. Two previous schools I was at Gladstone Park Secondary for 7 years, all very large schools, all one campus, Year 7-12 schools, probably Gladstone Park Secondary and this school tells secondary quite similar in terms of the student cohort. But yeah, the second school, Strathmore, more middle-class quite different I would say in terms of student demographics to this school. And I was at that school for three-and-a-half years.

#### **Researcher**

Yeah. Student demographics at this school, do you want to elaborate a bit about that, as to your experiences with students or with parents in general.

#### **CPT 1**

In this school, I would say very varied and diverse socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds. I would say a high proportion of students who come from Croatia or countries around the former Yugoslavia area, but my understanding is they're all born in Australia. So you're looking at second generation. Probably also students from Asian countries, such as India, probably Singapore, Malaysia maybe. I've dealt with effectively students who are from refugee countries in Africa, so there's a few of those here. Also in terms of abilities, we have quite a large number of students here who have disabilities. So yeah, that's what I mean when I say the student population is quite diverse.

#### **Researcher**

We'll probably delve more about that, because my topic is mainly about Asian and Mediterranean perspectives. How do you see these Asian parents being involved during the

career counselling process? This school, you start choosing subjects in Year 9. Year 9 into 10, 10 to 11?

**CPT 1**

I think our process here is probably in some ways the most thorough of all the schools that I've worked in, in that it's quite extensive. We start the process with a general assembly with the students and then one classroom session with their course counsellor, and then individual interviews. We also have a parent information night that students' parents can choose to attend. So I think there's a lot of opportunity for parents to become involved.

**Researcher**

Do they take that opportunity on board? What's the number of attendance at the parent info night?

**CPT 1**

I think it varies quite a bit depending on the year level that the student is in. Certainly at Year 9, so Year 9 students going into Year 10, I would say there's definitely the most involvement. So we'd have a large turnout at the parent information night and a large number of parents turning up for the individual interviews or for the student individual interviews with course counsellors.

**Researcher**

So you invite parents as well. It's not only for the career counsellor and just a one-on-one speak between ...

**CPT 1**

That's right. So there's no classes for the students on that day. So the only appointment that at the specific appointment time. That's usually 15 minutes but can go longer, and parents of all year levels are invited to that. So there's a specific day usually for Year 9 going into Year 10 and then a separate day for Year 10s going into Year 11 and then a separate day again for Year 11 going into Year 12. So it's done over three separate days depending on the year level the student attends. Majority of the parents that come in would be with students from Year 9 going into Year 10, because there seems to be the most anxiety about that particular transition. Probably the least number of parents would come to the Year 11 going into Year 12. So I would suggest by that stage, you probably get maybe a third of the numbers of parents coming to that particular transition as you would coming for the students going from Year 9 into Year 10.



**Researcher**

Do you see a reason for that?

**CPT 1**

I think there's probably a number of reasons. I think to some extent students' choices, they don't have as much anxiety about changing subjects once they finish Year 11 going into Year 12. I think they understand the structure of VCE a lot more, and it's really just in a large number of cases, making decision about which subject they're going to drop. So from six subjects of semester 2 of Year 11 down to five subjects in Year 12. That's not usually a large amount of change that students make in their subject choices between Year 11 and Year 12. I think it's also possibly due to the age of the student and I think – I get the impression, it's not something I can really backup with any firm evidence, but my impression is that at that age, parents are more inclined to trust the student knows what they're doing or that they know -

**Researcher**

They're familiar with the process?

**CPT 1**

They're familiar with the process and they don't feel the need to be as involved in that decision process.

**Researcher**

Right. We'll go back to that question about the engaging parents. What sort of strategies does the school put in place to bring these, as you said, migrant communities or lack of knowledge of the Australian system. Can you see this school's building strategies for that, or if you've got existing strategies to get more parental involvement from those backgrounds?

**CPT 1**

That's a good question, and I think it's something that I don't think this school has necessarily addressed, as completely as it could. It's certainly something we spend a lot of time discussing when I was at Gladstone Park, and we were starting to explore things like sending letters home in different languages but at this school as far as I know, my personal view is that a lot of our information is very English-centric in that it's all delivered in English, and it's also quite verbose, so I think at parent information nights that seems to be our way of saying this is our way of communicating what you need to know to you. I don't think that works for every single family, and I think there are probably ways that we could

engage with some of those communities a lot better than we do. I know that for example there's programs that the department's developed which other schools have been delivering. There used to be a program called PACTS, Parents at Careers and Transitions Support, and is now one which is called EPICC, Engaging Parents in Career Conversations, which is a series of workshops which are designed to be much more informal and may be in small groups, and supposed to be discussion based, and really a way of providing support to parents to have career conversations with their young people and to feel more confident in terms of the information that they're sharing or resources that they're bringing to that conversation. And to my knowledge, we've never delivered any of those types of programs, not during the time I've been here anyway to our parent groups.

**Researcher**

So you're relying on students to take back the information.

**CPT 1**

A lot of students do take the information and to start the conversation and for the parent information night to point questions, parents get as much information as they need, then go back and continue that conversation. But I think it's a bit like learning in the classroom, as teachers you're encouraged to differentiate your learning and your methods of providing information and ...

**Researcher**

Do you have interpreters when parents come along or wish to come along?

**CPT 1**

Occasionally.

**Researcher**

Do they ask on the phone?

**CPT 1**

Not for career conversations. I've never needed to have an interpreter, but I know that they are used often for meetings with say perhaps year-level coordinators or the assistant principal, usually when there's an issue to do with the student's learning that needs to be resolved, and sometimes I'm involved in those conversations if a student might need to switch from VCE to VCAL for instance, or to explain what VCAL is, so that the parent can make a more informed choice about VCAL versus VCE, or at a point where unfortunately a student's

failed everything or isn't coping and may need to look at alternatives to school. So certainly interpreters are engaged at those times where needed, but not at the point where subject choice or career choices are made.

**Researcher**

You don't get parents coming back at a later stage enquiring about why my child has chosen that subject or how did that subject come into place? He should not be doing that subject. Now I want him to change.

**CPT 1**

They sometimes get involved when a student starts to struggle with a subject and it may be at the point where a meeting is held, where say for example with the year-level coordinators to say, "Look, this concern about your son's progress or your daughter's progress in Physics" and I think sometimes at that point, part of the discussion can be "She never wanted to do that subject in the first place, blahblahblah", but in general I don't think they have much reason to be dissatisfied with the choices that their son or daughter is given. I think this school really, it does an enormous amount of work to make sure most students get most of their choices. And, the timetable is not just constructed until that's done. It's not that the time table's there and the students are stuffed into the way that is, because it's actually done the other way around.

**Researcher**

It looks like the parents here, they're probably leaving their choices to the kids.

**CPT 1**

I think to a large extent, yeah.

**Researcher**

Doesn't matter if it's an Asian community or it's a Mediterranean.

**CPT 1**

I don't think it makes a lot of difference in terms of their background. I think that probably the biggest issues we have at school with parental involvement or engagement in the subject choices in the maths domain, and that's because we have a, I guess you could call it a streaming process. There's probably the most parent dissatisfaction that you would have – you mentioned before, are they unhappy with their child's choices or why were they given that subject. A lot of the times those conversations are around their Maths and that's because

I think parents do understand that Maths of all subjects that exist, have the bearing on what they're able to do at the end of Year 12. So where there are disputes, most of them would be centred around Maths that had been recommended for, and disputes about whether that Maths is the maths that their student should do.

**Researcher**

So it's not so much about Science. English is compulsory.

**CPT 1**

English is compulsory. It's definitely the majority of parent contact me regarding subject choice would be about the Maths. Is this the right Maths for him to become this or do that. What Maths does this mean that they're going to end up doing? He's been recommended for this Maths. We don't think that's fair because he didn't like the teacher last year and I think he or she would actually do this Maths instead and in some instances they'll put the foot down and say, "Look, I don't care whether they've been recommended for that maths. I want him to do this maths."

**Researcher**

Is there any standout community in regarding being very fussy and vigilant about which Maths or it's in general?

**CPT 1**

That's probably across the board.

**Researcher**

Sounds good. I think I've just skimmed through the top questions but you did answer all of them giving lots of examples and interesting point that you mentioned about Maths, and that's come out a lot. Even parents say that too. Whether it's an Asian, Malaysian or Vietnamese or Serbian or whatever, "I want my kid to do really well in maths." It doesn't matter – even if he wants to go and be a sports coach or play soccer for the rest of his life, he needs to be good at maths.

**CPT 1**

And where there is a dispute between the student and parents is often about the Maths because the student will often say I want to drop down to this Maths, and the parents will be trying and encouraging them to try and stay at the high level Maths because they seem to be

more aware of the implications of that choice in the student. I know that the school is in the process of reviewing the Maths pathways here, so there's review at the moment, but ..

**Researcher**

They're re-doing the entire streamlined process and introducing more of Maths subjects, so special maths is coming along to be a choice for Year 10 students to pursue – whilst at Year 10, they can do Year 11. Advance.

**CPT 1**

I think there is a recognition that if we have any flaws in our process, like I said I think it is pretty comprehensive, it's definitely in the Maths area that we need to look at ways of delivering that component of it better because of the number of contentious cases and disputes and probably unhappiness on the part of the student and the parent in terms of the Maths that they've been assigned.

**Researcher**

We'll talk more about the community as to the two cultural backgrounds that I'm looking at. What sort of differences do you see with your acquaintances or your engagements with Asian parents and Mediterranean parents, you could give examples? As you said they send you e-mails, phone calls, or they turn up, they have conversations in front of you. What sort of ....

**CPT 1**

Specifically, I'd probably make a distinction between the parents that do engage directly with the school and parents that don't engage directly with the school but you still have an influence. I think I've spoken to you before about a particular family where my conversations with the students were very constrained by some of the parental or discussions that they had with the parents and some of the constraints that the parents had put on them, and yet, the parents had no direct involvement with me at any stage of the process. So the student was reporting, "Look I have to do this. I've talked about this at home. This is what we want as a family or this is what my parents want me to do", but I had no direct contact with those parents. So, you can only go on what the student is saying about what the parents what in that instance because the parents don't engage directly with me, and I'm not really sure why is; is it a language barrier or a ...

**Researcher**

Or a recent migrant community?

**CPT 1**

I don't know – in that particular instance, I'm not sure. There are some families here who I would say that their level of involvement or their engagement in school is very low and I suspect that that's for a number of reasons. I think probably it could be a language barrier, it could be a cultural barrier, it could be in some ways almost – perhaps in some ways maybe a fear of the authority that the school stands for. It could be a time issue. It could be a lot of families in this community who would work, both parents would work.

**Researcher**

What sort of background are they?

**CPT 1**

I'm thinking, I know I spoke to you specifically about a brother and a sister that I dealt with both of them, a year apart. Both who picked all science subjects because they were very, very strongly of the view that they should go in the science and the medical field. And yet, they weren't really able to demonstrate to me necessarily that they had an aptitude for maybe that particular area. And in fact, both of them ended up doing very poorly in their Year 12 and I was engaged with them for quite a lot of work towards the end of Year 12, particularly when their results came out and they were looking for a quick fix in terms of being able to still get into the medical area.

**Researcher**

So the parents still didn't come to terms with their – even after seeing the results.

**CPT 1**

That's right. So that's what I meant when I said lack of understanding of the system in Australia because I think both students were very unrealistic in terms of their results and where it could lead them in the short term. Their results were – we're talking about ATARs in the 20s, too low to even get into a pathway program at say somewhere like La Trobe college or Monash college, which might lead into a degree program at the respective universities. We were clearly looking at a TAFE program of some kind. And both of them were quite resistant to that because they didn't see it as prestigious enough.

**Researcher**

Were the parents from a medical background as well?

**CPT 1**

Not sure.

**Researcher**

It was just a pressure.

**CPT 1**

Very much. I think the fact that both the brother and the sister demonstrated the same interest, very much gave me the impression that this was something that was a familial or a parental aspiration. The sister wanted to go into pharmacy and the brother wanted to go into biomedical science.

**Researcher**

Were there any other examples, particularly to differentiate between the Asian and the Mediterranean community, like you said, there's lot of Croatian, the people migrated from Yugoslavia, so what sort of differences do you see when you deal with those parents from those cultural backgrounds?

**CPT 1**

I think to a large extent, our parents are very – I think in some ways, maybe the ignorance of the Australian system turns out to be a positive thing in many ways, because I think – probably a lot of parents I see express a desire for this – ultimately for their students to be happy in their career choice.

**Researcher**

So you're talking about both these communities, Asian – overall.

**CPT 1**

Overall. I've certainly seen instances. I'm not just talking about this school. I'm talking generally about the three schools that I've worked at. I've certainly come across instances where parents have had a very strong – they have very much, and I guess, particularly at Strathmore, we have a lot of international students. They're more from the Asia-Pacific region. So we had a lot of Chinese or students from China, from Singapore, from Malaysia who attended Strathmore, and yes, they were very – you could tell that it wasn't so much towards science though they were very strongly interested in the business area because a lot of them saw commerce as being a pathway to success; that very much for them that commerce meant a high performing or high paying jobs and they were all very, very focused

on either Monash or Melbourne, and even in cases in that group of students where I felt perhaps there were quite a few, for example, with strong creative interests, photography, design, that sort of thing, who were very strongly discouraged from pursuing those types of or related occupations because they weren't seen to be ones that would provide a stable income and a secure future. Whereas, at this school, I don't see nearly that same level of what I would consider to be influence or interference. I think most of the parents that come along whilst they are concerned that their student achieves well, they're much more open to what students themselves want and what they're looking for, for themselves, what they're aspiring for themselves. Although I would say that I have noticed amongst the Asian students here probably low, is a stronger interest in Science. So a lot of them would have aspirations for the legal industry. Not sure why that is but yeah.

### **Researcher**

So looks like a change in the mindset of the tiger moms to go with the flow as to what their child is happy with or good at.

### **CPT 1**

Yes. They're still encouraging them to finish school and to go to university, but they're not as prescriptive in terms of saying you have to study this or you have to study that. Whereas, that's a very clear distinction that I make in my mind having worked in the three schools between the parents at Strathmore say and the parents of the other two school communities. With some exceptions, of course. There was a family I dealt with at Gladstone Park, whose son was in Year 12 and who had selected Chemistry and wanted to be a doctor, and he picked his subjects on the advice of his brother rather than the advice of the school personnel but there's some sort of myth that circulates sometimes in families I would say from certain backgrounds that if you know the right people, you know they seem to operate on the system that getting into a course is more about who you know rather than on what's prescribed in terms of the prerequisites and the ATAR that you achieve. So it's quite difficult combating those beliefs because they're never really necessarily spoken out loud but you find out that rather than taking your advice about you should do these subjects because in the Victor Guide these are the subjects that are prescribed for entry to Medicine, and yet they take the advice of someone else who says, "Well, I'm that university doing this course and I think you should do these subjects because then you can do this and from there you can get into here, and I'm here and I can help you get in there", and when you sit down and explain to the student that just because you're brother's at Monash or you're brother's at RMIT, it's not going to mean



you can get into the course, and you should have done Chemistry and we told you to do chemistry and now you can't get into medicine", and you know it's quite devastating because it's too late at that point for them to go back.

**Researcher**

Yeah, subject choices and career choices are made as family and then liaise that with schools. Right. We'll wrap up with maybe a couple of more questions. What are the schools expectations when you advertise all these programs? You got your career counselling process, you said you've got already a robust one that you run through from 9 to 12. What are the schools expectations of parents as to being engaged or being involved in contacting the school, the teachers, coming to the info nights?

**CPT 1**

Yeah. I think it's an invitation really. I think our approach is an invitation for them to be involved. So I think the main method of communication used to have been letter as opposed to COMPASS would have replaced that to a large extent, but it's very much about these opportunities. These are the opportunities that the school's providing.

**Researcher**

Again online, do they take that on board? You expect them ...

**CPT 1**

Yeah. There is an expectation that they'll read the letter and/or look at Campus. I'm assuming a lot of that will now be done by Campus this year but this year would be the first time. Last year and all the years I've been here, have been via letter, and then attend the night if they're able to and/or come to the individual session with the student if they're able to, because that's all clearly spelled out in the initial information that goes home. These are the dates, these are the times, these are your chances, these represent your opportunity to take part in the process.

**Researcher**

Overall, what are your beliefs about parental influences, their child's subject choices? Do you think – if I get you to rate between the three things, parental influences, teachers and peers, which are the strongest?

**CPT 1**

I would say here, in this school, probably peers would have a largest influence, not initially

necessarily, but there's a lot of opportunities that they have at this school to change subjects, so in between the time that their first set of choices is admitted and when they finally evaluate it, and then when the course confirmation day is held, they have another opportunity to change subjects then. There's an orientation day for Year 11 and Year 12, where they get to experience one period of each class and there's a lot of students who request a change after that day. Then at the beginning of the year, once classes start, I think they've got about a week to again request changes, and then middle of the year, after first semester, they get another chance to put up a request in. We have an enormous number of requests for changes and I think a lot of those changes reflect things like the teacher that might be taking the subject or friends and where friends are in terms of the subjects that they're doing.

**Researcher**

Is it something that they're put into that subject and they don't enjoy it?

**CPT 1**

I think to some of them, yeah, it is that. But I don't know how much influence parents have. I suspect they don't have a great deal. We have procedures where parents have to agree to any changes, but I would say there are countless cases of parents pre-signing forms so the students can write down what they want to change and then just submit the form, and the parents already signed it. They're not really following the process as it's been designed.

**Researcher**

Even if this parent is a migrant, he or she still wants their child to do well in maths, doesn't matter what's the future goal, whether if it's a Science degree, Melbourne university degree or Monash, he or she needs to have a well path for Mathematics. So these parents understand that.

**CPT 1**

Yeah.

**Researcher**

What kind of language barriers do you see that as, because there's mainly second generation of refugees parents, so is there any language barrier or any other barrier that would ...

**CPT 1**

I think the barriers are mainly for parents who perhaps weren't schooled here who don't

necessarily understand what VCE or VCAL are in terms of how they work and what they lead to, what pathways they each allow in the education sector here in Australia.

**Researcher**

Are there ways for them to find out?

**CPT 1**

The information night I guess is really the form for that information to be taken on board. And I think we give the students a lot of material as well, like a handbook for them to read and we encourage them to take it home and read it with their parents, show their parents.

**Researcher**

Do students come back and say, “Yes, we’ve had a family discussion about dropping this subject or I need this subject”. Do they come back with these conversations or telephonic calls from the parents?

**CPT 1**

Actually, there are mostly e-mails from parents, sometimes phone calls. In a large number of cases, it’s usually the parents who have the questions rather than the students. In fact, most of the course advisors here, the course counsellors would say that they’re disappointed that the student doesn’t seem to have opened the handbook, so to speak, or read many of the entries about the subjects and they rely a lot on the course advisor, the course counsellor. They ask them a lot for their recommendations and their suggestions and part of the training process that the course counsellors undergo is to try and direct that sort of question back to the student and to say, “Look, well what do you think or have you read the handbook or have you been to see those teachers?” I often start the process by looking at what subjects they’re doing now and which ones they’ve enjoyed and which ones they haven’t enjoyed, and use that as a starting point about the discussion about the subjects that they are enjoying, for instance, what those might then become in the following year.

**Researcher**

In those conversations, do you see a relationship between any family involvement or discussion being put forward?

**CPT 1**

Yes, where the parents are there, that often, in general, there is a lot of discussion between the parent and the student, and I guess I get the impression that I guess that they always haven’t

had that discussion until they're there in front of me. And I think that parents have a different perspective than students. Students, I think, are a lot more concerned about the here and the now whereas I think the parents are a lot more interested in, "Well, if you do this subject, it means you have these choices." They seem to be more understanding of the implications of some of the choices that the students make, whereas the students seem to be a lot more focused on details like what they'll be doing in the subject, or maybe which teachers they might have for those subjects, or how much practical things would be there in the subject versus theory and that sort of stuff.

**Researcher**

Thank you very, very much. I apologize if I had grilled you too much.

# **Appendix M: AARE Conference Paper - Peer Reviewed**

## **PARENTAL ROLE AS SOCIALISERS IN SUBJECT CHOICES AMONG ASIAN AND MEDITERRANEAN SECONDARY STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explored parental role as socialisers in subject choices of students from Asian and Mediterranean descent in Victoria. Using a case study approach, 12 parents and their children from Asian and Mediterranean background from three schools in Victoria, were invited to participate in this study. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore parents' perceptions about their own social and cultural background, schooling and migration experiences, and career aspirations for their children in making decisions about subject choices. Children's perceptions of parental beliefs and expectations were also investigated. Thematic analysis guided by a socialiser framework revealed that parental beliefs and familial practices within the social and cultural parameters from these parents' backgrounds played a major role in influencing their children's subject choices. The changes in attitudes and beliefs within an acculturation process also appear to have strong influences on children's subject choices where parental expectations underscore the perceptions that students have of their parents' beliefs and aspirations for their future career. These findings are discussed in relation to parental role in their children's schooling and how this role can be optimised within the platform of home-school partnership.

## Background

Parental involvement in schooling is a current and contentious issue in Australian education literature and politics, with a recent focus on the establishment of home-school partnerships to support student learning and wellbeing (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, ACARA, 2009). Within this context of contention, conceptions of parent–school relationships have been recently problematised, with researchers such as Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) and Saltmarsh (2015) arguing that policies do not take sufficient account of parental background and social class issues, and instead treat all families in similar ways. These kinds of arguments highlight gaps in policies especially when initiatives are taken to implement home-school partnership in many schools throughout Australia.

Home-school partnership conceptualisation and operationalisation are based on the premises that parents and carers have an invaluable role in boosting their children’s learning and wellbeing by being actively informed and involved from the early years through to adolescence (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, DEECD, 2013). According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET), a meaningful and active engagement within and between families is essential if they are to fully meet the needs of every student and to drive system-wide gains in Victoria. This is particularly true in addressing the complex needs of students who are disadvantaged or vulnerable such as from low socio-economic or ESL backgrounds. DET’s view reflects a large body of research that has documented the substantial influence of parental involvement on students’ academic achievement and academic behaviours (Fan & Williams, 2009). However, such studies in Australia have focussed more on Indigenous, rural and refugee’s student achievement or Maori families (Saltmarsh, Barr & Chapman, 2014; Clinton & Hattie, 2013; Fleming & Grace, 2015).

Although it has generally been suggested that parents have positive influences on their children’s educational outcomes, much of the research has not fully considered the differential effects of various aspects of parental involvement on elements of secondary school subject choices and aspirations (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005). Therefore, more specific information is needed to understand which parental activities and behaviours contribute to promoting and shaping the development of adolescents’ aspirations of subject choices in high school. Moreover, there have

been few studies of families' experiences and perspectives acting as socialisers with respect to involvement in transitions to higher education in Australia.

Hence, this paper investigates parental influences in mediating their children's choice of subjects in secondary school by interviewing 6 Asian and 6 Mediterranean parents and their secondary school children from Western Metropolitan Region (WMR) schools in Victoria. This paper explores the social cultural background and perspectives of these parents and children, as well as their schooling and migration experiences to identify factors that have an influence on student subject choice. Accordingly, this paper begins with the literatures that frame the conceptualisation of this study around parental involvement as socialisers within the sociocultural milieu, beliefs and practices as well as acculturation and schooling experiences.

### **Parental influence of their beliefs, familial practises and cultural values**

According to Darling and Steinberg's (1993) contextual model of parenting, "the primary way that parents socialise their children is by communicating the goals they want their children to attain, the aspirations they want their children to fulfil, and the values they want their children to internalise" (cited in Spera, 2005, p. 130). More importantly, the goals, aspirations and values that parents hold relate to their children's school-related outcomes including subject choices, persistence in school, school-related accomplishments and university attendance (see Spera, 2005). The study conducted by Ule et al. (2015) in Europe made claims that parents have become children's confidants and advisers and emotional psychological supporters in their decisions. Parental decisions about their children's education are based on their beliefs, life contexts, and invitations from the school as well as their own desires for their children reinforcement for certain behaviours.

Past studies in the area of parental influences and involvement tend to focus on students' academic achievement where parental involvement worked as a platform for parents to transfer their beliefs and expectations to their children (Epstein, 1991; Phillipson, 2009; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2012). Through various types of parent-child interactions where parental practices act as socialisers, children come to believe that getting a good education is worthwhile. Parents' beliefs regarding their

child's ability and their aspirations for their children are likely to influence the actions that they take, for example during completion of homework (Ying & Han, 2008).

Findings from Phillipson and Yick (2013) study assert that there are a number of common factors that fall within the dimensions of parental involvement across cultures – parental expectations, beliefs and values, and parental social capital context. These are seen to influence children's academic achievement, for instance in helping with homework or reading books with children. Most importantly from the Phillipson and Yick (2013) synthesis, the ways and extent to which parents get involved are seen as dominant parental influence on children's aspirations and motivations to do well in their studies. Parents who value education and base their intentions of involvement on this premise have better success at parenting their expectations to their children.

There have been a number of cross-cultural studies comparing Asian parents with European or American parental involvement. Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) found that Anglo-Celtic parents in Australia encouraged their children to do their best in school, and their best need not be high academic achievement. Other recent studies have reported that Asian parents are more involved, for example, in helping their children with their homework including tutoring them, checking over their work, assigning additional work, and structuring and monitoring their time. These parents were found to value education very strongly, have high expectations and performance standards for schooling, and believe in the importance of hard work and effort (e.g., Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Frewen, Chew, Carter, Chunn, & Jotanovic, 2014; Pabelo, 2010; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; 2012). Therefore, it appears that Asian parents generally tend to certain standards in ensuring the school success of their children.

### **Parental acculturation and past schooling experiences**

While parental beliefs, values and expectations may be important predictors of children's achievement, parent behaviours and changing mindset after moving countries can also affect student subject choice. For example, Gilby's (2012) New Zealand study examined the extent of Asian immigrant parental understanding and effectiveness of current home-school communication practices. Findings corroborated the empirical data with academic rationale and highlighted an extensive language barrier,



unrecognised cultural aspects of communication, inaccurate knowledge from alternative sources of information, and potentially conflicting worldviews of education. In contrast, Ying and Han's (2008) study examined the positive contribution of parental acculturation, parental involvement, and intergenerational relationship to well-being of Filipino-American adolescents. Findings indicated that parental acculturation facilitated involvement across school, home-education, and social contexts (when the adolescent had primarily non-Filipino friends), and parental involvement in the latter two settings enhanced the quality of the family relationship, which, in turn increased the esteem in Filipino adolescents.

In the context of African migrants and refugee families, another study conducted by Renzaho and Vignjevic (2011) concurred that migrants who resettle in high-income countries such as Australia face many challenges. Negotiating parenting in a new culture is one of the most pressing challenges that are faced by most migrant and refugee parents. It was found that as a consequence of the new country's cultural environment that has values and practices that might be inconsistent with parenting from countries of origin, differing acculturation rates of parents as compared to their children might lead to difficulties and challenges in familial relationships. Therefore, it seems imperative to investigate how such a significant factor of parental migration experiences into Australia can influence student subject choices.

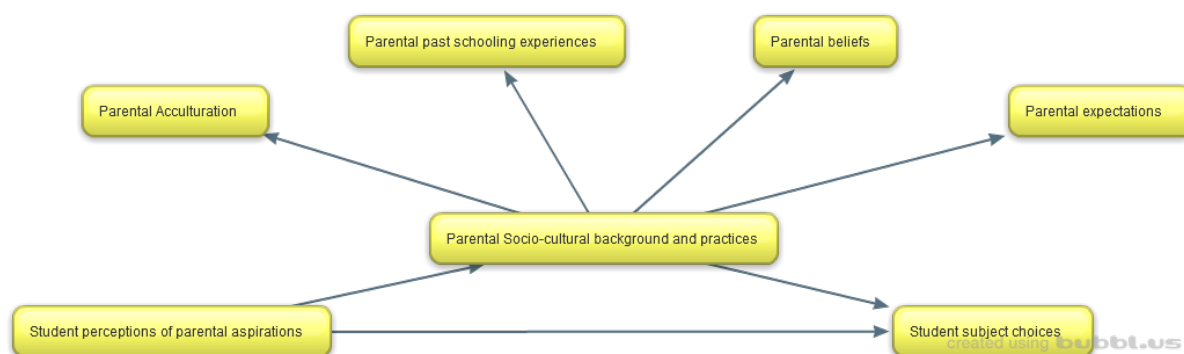
Acculturation experiences can also be impacted by parents' past experiences of their own schooling, which in turn can contribute to career choices for their children (Dick & Rallis, 1991). Furthermore, parents with higher educational levels and occupational attainment can bring better psychological support when their children are making their subject choices and enhance their career making decisions (Hung, 2007). Parents who value education and have had rewarding school experience and have successful careers, tend to provide more social and capital support to their children's academic development (Jeynes, 2007). For instance, when parents who share a positive experience in learning mathematics can influence their child's aspiration to perform well in that subject. Hence, parental schooling experiences and educational concepts can influence their own thoughts around the schooling experience they wish for their children.

## **Parental as socialiser's framework**

Researchers have described parents as “expectancy socialisers” (Eccles et al. 1990) and focusing on the ways in which parental aspirations and family social status function as an “environmental press” that has a relationship to children’s academic achievement and their own educational aspirations. (Hung & Marjoribanks, 2005). In a seminal work on parents as socialisers, Dick and Rallis (1991) claimed that parents that come from different cultural stereotypes exert an influence on student’s career choice through their own expectations. The authors iterated that the surrounding culture of a family could undermine and/or develop students’ perceptions of themselves and their beliefs about career values. For example, for students with exceptionally strong high school academic preparation in mathematics and science and have been influenced by their parents in a strong culturally inspired setting are more likely to choose science subjects as their career choice.

Accordingly to Dick and Rallis (1991), cultural values that put forward dominant maternal or paternal roles could also influence children’s aspirations and their career choices. However, the effects of parents in particular, as socialisers in influencing career choice could be subtle yet extremely powerful since the perceptions and attitudes of parents, their level of educational and professional experiences could also contribute to their children’s choice of subjects at school. The educational experiences include parental past schooling experiences. Hence, parents as socialisers are characterised by their beliefs and expectations, cultural values, current and past experiences. Similarly, Davis-Kean (2005) found direct effects of parental education on European American children’s standardised achievement scores. Correspondingly, the developmental importance of mediators of parent education effects such as late adolescent achievement and achievement-related aspirations predict educational and occupational success for their children (Dubow, Boxer & Heusmann, 2009).

In conclusion, students’ subject choices then could be influenced by the factors as shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Parental Socialiser Framework*

Extending Dick and Rallis's (1991) notion of socialisers, this study focuses on applying the above parental socialiser framework to investigate how parental social cultural background as well as their schooling and migration experiences can influence student subject choice. With this aim, this paper intends to further contribute to the knowledge of parental role in children's academic performance, specifically in terms of subject choices.

## Methods

### Research Design

This qualitative study employed a multiple case study design, where a set of six parents and their six children of Asian background and another set of six parents and their six children of Mediterranean background voluntarily participated in this study. The children are students of various schools in Western Metropolitan Region of Victoria (WMR) who responded to the call to participate in the study.

A brief analysis of the My School website page was made to determine the choice of schools from the WMR. The contributing factor of Index of Community Socio-Education Advantage (ICSEA) was taken into account and kept controlled for the purpose of this research. The overall plan consisted of recruiting participants from various low ICSEA value public schools from the WMR as opposed to private independent schools in the WMR, since the latter were more driven by 'elite' group of parents who were paying enormous fees to secure their child's senior schooling studies just as is the case for University course selections. The WMR schools also had a good mixture of pool of participants – both Asian (Indian, Philippine) and Mediterranean (Italians, Serbians).

## Selection of Participants

A detailed profile of parents and students is provided in Table 1 and Table 2. The Asian and Mediterranean families were chosen because both groups comprise a majority of the population from the participating schools having language difficulties and are first and second generation immigrants from Asia and Mediterranean parts of the world. These cultural backgrounds form a dominant spread of migrant families enrolled in the WMR schools as shown in data drawn from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS presented that Greeks, Italians, Serbians form about 34% of the migrant families with Indians (26%), Filipinos (24%) in the WMR of Melbourne (ABS, 2011).

Student participants were chosen from the upper secondary cohort. This is because students in these schools begin to choose their electives as choice of subjects from Year 10 onwards. These subjects are typically chosen a year ahead for the next academic year and progressively for the subsequent years right up to Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE, Year 12). Whilst this research had no intention to compare the aspirations of boys and girls, gender balance amongst the chosen student participants was taken into consideration in the case of co-education classes to ensure equal representation of male and female students. Students' ages ranged from 15-18 and were from year levels 10, 11 or VCE (Year 12).

Table 1  
*Asian Parent-Student Profile Summary*

Name	Ethnicity	Profession	Educational background	Country migrated from	Student Year level
Parent 1	Indian	Self-employed	Bachelor's degree	India	Year 10
Parent 2	Indian	Factory worker	Year 10	India	Year 11
Parent 3	Philippine	Teacher Assistant	Bachelor's degree	Philippines	Year 10
Parent 4	Indian	High school English teacher	Master's Degree	India	Year 12
Parent 5	Bangladesh	Doctor	Biomedicine	Bangladesh	Year 12
Parent 6	Indian	Home maker	Year 10	India	Year 10

Table 2  
*Mediterranean Parent-Student Profile Summary*

Name	Ethnicity	Profession	Educational background	Country migrated from	Student Year level
Parent 1	Italian	School Accountant	Bachelor's degree	Italy	Year 11
Parent 2	Spanish	Teaching Aide	Bachelor's degree	Spain	Year 10
Parent 3	Polish	High school English teacher	Master's Degree	Yugoslavia	Year 11
Parent 4	Serbian	Office	Year 12	Serbia	Year 11
Parent 5	Serbian	Home maker	Year 12	Serbia	Year 12
Parent 6	Syrian	Home maker	Year 12	Syria	Year 11

As seen from Table 1 and 2, parents' current jobs and experiences have been listed to shed more light on their perspectives of their own past educational and current career experiences. These will be evident in the findings section of the paper.

## Interviews

The recruitment of participants was completed in accordance to the University Human Ethics procedure. Students and their parents responded to advertisements placed in schools with the principals' permission. Both students' and parents' consents were obtained before the interviews were conducted. Semi-structured parent and student interviews that lasted up to 45 minutes were conducted over a period of two school terms. The parent interviews explored questions relating to their perceptions about their own social and cultural background, schooling and migration experiences, and career aspirations for their children in making decision about subject choices. Similarly, the student interviews explored questions clarifying their perceptions of parental beliefs, practices and expectations in regards to their aspirations for senior school subject choices.

## Data analysis

Thematic data analysis was performed using Parental Socialisers Framework (see Figure 1). The interview data were transcribed and then sorted using an analytical induction method (Gray, 2009) to identify similar and contrasting patterns that allowed the data to be clustered in meaningful themes under the framework. Initial data analysis involved identifying themes within each case (parent-student) followed by a cross-case among all parent-student cases (Yin, 2013). This allowed for interpreting whether or not and to what extent parent-child mediation to influence subject choice had occurred. The sorting, comparing and clustering were completed in an iterative process, taking into consideration the elements of the analysis framework and the complexities of parent-child relationships. This sorting process was completed in three phases. In the first phase, the sorting was completed by the first author in this study. In the second phase, the initial findings were compared and further categorised by the first author. The final phase consisted of further sorting and categorising, bringing in the second author to validate the trustworthiness and credibility of the data and the analysis. Such an analytic exercise produced two broad themes that revealed the processes involved in parental role as socialisers in their children's subject choices.

## **Results and Discussion**

The two broad themes that are presented in the results and discussion of this paper are as follows:

1. Influence of parental values and own aspirations on student perceptions
2. Perceptions of family migration and acculturation process on student perceptions

### **Influence of parental values on student perceptions**

The data under this theme revealed that parents' beliefs and practices were in having family get together that reflected a collectivistic orientation. Family was deemed as very important by parents despite being busy with their own work/career commitments. As stressed by Parent A,

“When we do get a chance to get together, we do. Apart from that, we actually love sport also, mainly soccer”.

Emphasis was strong on family practices, for example, Parent A's mention about soccer as a social event that holds them together. Parent A further added,

“So we do attend a lot of soccer games and watch a lot of soccer and in saying that [my son] is in a soccer team so that takes a lot of time also”

Accordingly, Student B’s response echoed his parent’s sentiment that familial network is an important aspect in his cultural background.

“Coming from Spain, my whole mom’s side of the family is into sports. And I have chosen Vocational Education and Training (VET) soccer sport subject is because I love soccer and I always grew around sports and it has always been the number one thing”.

The results show that John having being brought up in a family that has soccer as part of their social focus, seems to have an indirect bearing on VET soccer subject as one of his choice. Notably, there appears to be an underlying influence of such common family practices of getting together, having those conversations about participating in soccer sports including watching the game as a family, on student’s subject choice. This illustrates that parents can act as transmitters of familial values, beliefs and experiences that are likely to model students’ perceptions of valuing the same.

In another instance, Parent B’s response resonated their preferences/values and practices that can advance student aspirations of subject choice. As seen from their words,

“One of the great traditional practice was profound love for reading. Absolute love of education. Profound respect for education, and reading”.

Student B’s voice concurred with her parents’ response,

“Education is a cultural value for us. I am always asked about my career aspirations during family get togethers. As for my mom, wanting how to teach me read. She’s been from day one, trying to help me read, reading stories to me, getting me interested in writing and reading. It was almost inevitable to go in the direction of Literacy and Humanities based subjects”.

As seen from the exchange of Parent B-Student B, the role of parental values and practices was not only prominent but also inspirational in having the student to choose Literature as a subject. There was an obvious connection between family practice of love for reading and student’s views of choosing Literacy based subjects.

The literature reviewed supports these findings in terms of parental influential role as providers, interpreters and models. It has been found that parental role in socialising their own values, beliefs and

practices can have far reaching effects on the thoughts, emotions and behaviours their children adopt towards academic achievement (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Panelo, 2010). The current finding shows that the role of parental beliefs, socio cultural and familial practices can also have notable effect on student subject choices. This finding is consistent with Spera (2005) in a sense that children perceive the values that are held by parents and this perception have an impact on student aspirations and subject choices.

Furthermore, the results also revealed that despite the influence of family values and practices, student subject choice is meant to be a democratic process. In saying that, there was a general consensus amongst both Asian and Mediterranean parents that they prefer to be autonomous and allow their children to make their subject selection decisions. Nevertheless, this preference was qualified by an expectation that their children should always try hard and do well in those subjects. As Parent C explained:

“Yes, he is his own person to make those decisions. You can only guide him towards like, you’re really, really good in Maths, why don’t you think of doing that?” But in the end of the day, he’s the one that needs to live that. He’s the one that needs to make those decisions. So if he decides that “Okay, I am really good at maths but I really want to pursue law”, then that’s fine. But there will never be, “I’m really good at maths but I want to sit at home on my backside playing computer games” there will never be any of that. That is not an option”.

Student C echoed his parents’ sentiment by saying that,

“They’re pretty happy with my choice of subjects. I think they prefer me to be able to do well. It’s not so much forced, but they want you to do well, because it’s such a big part of life. The family practice is just trying your best in whatever you do and give it a go”.

In another case, Parent D clarified,

“Not so much in you should be doing this or you should be doing that. Whatever he’s come up and chosen, it’s like fantastic. If that’s what you like, that’s great. But always work on your strengths and cultivate your strengths, and yes, there’s a lot of interest in what he does”.

Student D’s response was in agreement with his parent,



“Yeah, Dad encourages me, like, you’re good at this, stick to that. He’ll be like you’re good at this or something, do that or don’t do that. Do what you’re good at. I take all their advice on board because I know they just want the best for me”.

The results show that parents believed in providing guidance without undermining their children’s preferred subject choice. Most importantly though, parents tended to have an underlying desire to support their children’s decision of subject and tertiary course selection that would lead them to have a decent job and living for themselves in future, consistent with many studies (e.g., Frewen et al., 2014). Such preferences were well perceived by their children and reflected in their subject choices. Interestingly, parental preference reflected a focus on an academic track that would translate to future lucrative careers and most always came from their own unrealised past aspirations.

It was found that there was a strong relationship between parents’ past career aspirations with student decisions about subject choices and career pathways.

As Parent G stated,

“Schooling and to finish Year 12 was important. I wanted to do teaching after I finished high school but I didn’t get in and I later went on to do childcare. And now, [Student G] said she wanted to do childcare and I was fine with that. I didn’t push her to do that. I did give her an idea”.

Similarly, Student G clarified,

“My mum wanted to have a child care centre so I want to do the same”.

In a similar vein, Parent H responded,

“There wasn’t any pressure, but I think my father would have thought that I would have always gone through the whole schooling and always get good grades. If I got a C, it was always questioned. With [my daughter], she wants to be a Veterinarian, so she wants to do all those Sciency subjects and she’s been motivated on her own. We have always watched educational shows to do with vets and animals and animal planet, so she’s always been into it”.

Student H was in agreement with her parents’ response that the family passion of love for animals had substantially influenced her and hence the choice of Science based subjects. She has chosen to become a Vet since her mother had always aspired to become a Vet but never did.

“I always knew that I wanted to be a vet because ever since we were younger, we’ve always had pets at home. I know my aunty wanted to be a vet and so did mom, but they’ve never done it. Mom says that being a vet would be cool in helping animals. My aunty brings up that she wanted to be a vet but she never ended up doing it. She had a discussion with me saying that I should put that into consideration”.

This finding shows that parental expressions of their own past career aspirations (those they never seemed to have attained) influence student subject and career choice. This finding aligns with Dick and Rallis’ 1991 study where parents acted as providers of their past schooling and current career experiences to their children. Students perceived those experiences in a positive way and pursued their parental aspirations and beliefs. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with studies that show parents have substantial influence on their child’s subject choices not only because they act as socialisers, but also because children often choose them as their first advisors and trustworthy persons who will always consider their best interests (Ule, 2015). Parents in the current study seemed to act as both providers and interpreters whilst their involvement was subtle enough to offer guidance about possible subject choice and career paths for their children. Strikingly, this is in contrast with the stereotypical image of Asian families (e.g., Pabelo, 2010; Phillipson & Yick, 2013) whereby Asian parents are known to impose their expectations and beliefs in forceful ways on their children to perform highly. Although this study does not aim to compare Asian and Mediterranean parents’ cultural beliefs and values, this dissimilarity may partly be due to the participants’ acculturation and adaption to the Australian way of life. This rationale is explained further with the next theme of parental experience of migration and acculturation process on student perceptions.

### Perceptions of family migration and acculturation process on student perceptions

The results that emerged under this theme revealed how parents’ changing mindsets after moving countries and family acculturation process were well perceived by their children. Parents seemed not to be overly strict about imposing their subject and career choices onto their children. Thus in essence, the

findings revealed that parents seemed to be supportive and amicable about their children's choice of subjects. As seen from Parent E's response,

"Like Australian culture, they're very open. You discuss everything with your kid and all which I do is to guide them. It won't be like in Bangladesh – the thing is you can push your kids up to a certain stage but not after that. After that they are the people who will do their own things. They have to handle".

Student E's response reverberated his mother's sentiment,

"Subject choices, she always wanted me to do medicine or something, but over time she became more accepting like do whatever you want. We just talk about what's the best for the future. What I'm going to be more satisfied and happy with".

The result also suggested that though most of the participating parents and their children were first generation immigrants, both parents and children seemed to have assimilated into the Australian culture. Parental perceptions of being flexible and open to child's academic choices could be seen to be a result of psychological and cultural change in adapting to their environment in Australia (cf. Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002), that in turn seem to have impacted on flexibility in student choices. Of noteworthy though, parental responses revealed barriers and challenges that hindered parent's capacity to provide guidance in subject choices, and this finding could be a more plausible reason for this change in mindset. As articulated by Parent F:

"Our biggest challenges, was when we migrated to Australia, not knowing the language. We came to Australia without a word of English, not a word and when she came here, the structure of studies is totally different".

Student F expressed similar predicament about her parents' non-English speaking background,

"My parents had a hard life settling here in Australia and struggle speaking English to help me make decisions. They did not study here so they cannot advise me...It's my decision to choose these subjects. They just want me to my best and go to University"

Such responses indicate that students appear to have understood their parental perceptions of doing well despite of not being in a position to provide guidance and thus act accordingly. These

findings concur with studies that have indicated parental involvement in immigrant families may be significantly compromised due to limited understanding of the new context and other post-migration pressures (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Ying and Han, 2008).

As Renzaho and Vignjevic (2011) stressed, the current study reinforce the significant value of acculturation in overcoming barriers in a new country. Some of the barriers parents face include not only language barrier but also forming an understanding of new school system and starting new jobs. Renegotiating parenting in this situation can be challenging, and hence part of the acculturation process requires parents to adapt to the needs of their children without compromising their core expectations of success (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007). Likewise, students agreed that due to their parents having struggled a lot for their better education and schooling, they wanted to keep up to parental expectations and do well in their senior schooling subjects. This notion can be further seen in the next theme of this study where parental own past aspirations has bearing on student perception and subject choices.

Overall, the findings in this study reinforces that parental role can be seen as socialisers in mediating their children's perception and decisions around subject choices whilst encouraging them to be successful in whatever subjects they aspire to choose. Parents in this study were generally involved in the educational courses, career pathways and decision-making of their children in a multitude of ways; from offering support, advice, evaluating their children's wishes, and guiding their children's choices. Students' perspectives about their parental beliefs, values and expectations and own failed aspirations highlighted the significant role that parents play as socialisers. Familial migration experience also compelled students to frame their own abilities of making subject choices as well as chance to succeed and do their best in whatever course they wanted to pursue.

## **Conclusion**

This study emphasises parental role in addressing the needs of students from migrant communities. As discussed, difficult acculturation experiences do affect student and their family in adjusting to the demands of their new schooling environment. Hence, there is a need to look at how parental role as socialisers can be instrumental in supporting student success at school. Supporting families from varied

socio-cultural background with the goal to maximise student success in subject and career choices could be in the form of a dynamic home-school partnership where the concept of parents as socialiser are optimised. Building partnership between schools and parents can be a step where parents play a prominent role in mediating their children's participation and performance in schools (cf. Saltmarsh, 2015). Hence, parents and teachers can become partners where teachers are able to teach their students by "persuading" parents on what's best for their children. In line with this thinking, Gill Crozier (1998, p. 126), put forward that "in order to achieve a satisfactory partnership in the eyes of the teachers, they (the teachers) need to persuade parents, and through parents the pupils, to adapt their value system..."

This case study was undertaken to explore the perceptions of six parents and six students of each Asian and Mediterranean background from WMR schools of low ICSEA value. The results though important, should be cautiously generalised to students from a wider range of schools such as Independent and Catholic schools in Victoria or other ethnicities of similar backgrounds. Despite our efforts to capture the multidimensional nature of parental influences, we might have neglected some other important dimensions due to the wide scope of parental involvement, the numerous aspects of parents' and students' lives that can be examined and the limited interviewed data. In addition, the views of parents need to be investigated, particularly what they appreciate in terms of parent-school partnership, what is not useful and what they would like more of that can help them support their child's career and subject choice decisions.

## Notes

1. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used.
2. The My School website was released in 2010 by the then Labour government with the intention of enabling parents to compare schools based on things such as demographics, levels of advantage (ICSEA value) and test results.
3. The Victorian Certificate of Education, or VCE, is the final credential for high school students in Victoria.

4. Vocational Education and Training, or VET, is the part of tertiary education and training in Victoria which provides accredited training in job related and technical skills.
5. Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, or VCAL, is an accredited secondary certificate that gives students practical work-related experience.

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