CHINESE PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

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Abstract

It is widely believed that Chinese parents devote much to the education of their children, and a considerable number of parents intervene the decision-making of their children's majors in university, as well as their choices of occupation and marriage. As a result, some adolescents have to give up their own interests and pursue what their parents consider as 'safe careers' though they have no passion for them at all. For example, some parents overlook social science and arts, and push their children to study economics or engineering instead.

However, as Chinese society develops, the free choices of children are being increasingly emphasised. Therefore, students now may mainly base their major choices on their personal interests. In other words, parents no longer involve in major choices as much as they used to do. The traditional recognition has been irrelevant.

In this piece of research, applying a methodological triangulation, I collected both valid and reliable data which later more or less pointed to a clear direction of the concurrent situation within Chinese society.

Several key features of Chinese students' major choices were identified using the quantitative data.
First of all, almost a half of the participants' parents have, explicitly or implicitly, mentioned about what they expect their children to study in universities. Their reasons are alike: the certain major could lead to a decent or well-paid job.
The second key point is that Chinese teenagers do think they own their future.

Thirdly, the data reveals that, although parents may make strong suggestions, quite a lot of students still take a firm stand of their owns.

Moreover, several features of the parents and the participants are identified based on the qualitative data.
For the participants, while there are some of them would be obedient to their parents, the others see personal interest as a priority, or, consider several aspects including opportunity and income and make their own decision.
For parents, while only a small portion of them did not give any opinion at all, the others either hold strong attitude on children's major choice or give certain suggestions.

This piece of research eventually concluded that, although parents suggest their own opinion frequently, nowadays, generally speaking, there is not much parental intervention in children's major choices in Chinese society.

Despite the research was made as impeccable as possible, a few flaws, due to researcher errors or uncontrollable conditions, still exist to slightly lowered the validity and reliability of the conclusion. Nevertheless, its advantages outweighed its weaknesses overall. A more thorough evaluation would be discussed in the paper.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

Trying to capture every single word, a father gazed at the advisor with his whole attention. In his hand, an organised, massive folder was firmly grasped. 'Which major can lead to a nice job in the future'? As the rest of the parents all echoed, it seems that 'A decent job' is the crucial viewpoint of most of the parents.

This happened in the occupation counsel meeting in school. While parents are obsessed with career choices along with a pleasant income, they might ignore their children's real interest. In China, high school graduates used to follow parents' wish to obtain their further education, which would later affect their career. While it seems young people are able to design their own future, parents' expectation, or sometimes even intervention, plays an important role in teenagers' decisions. However, as Chinese society develops, the free choices of children are being increasingly emphasised.

This has prompted me to conduct a social research on 'Parents' involvement in major choices' during the Chinese New Year Holiday. In this piece of one-month research, 149 participants, which was consisted of 40% male and 60% female, were involved. Moreover, 9 of them are interviewed thoroughly about their views on major choices. 60% of the 149 sample are students from the province I live in (Guangdong, China), and the rest are from other provinces. The sample could be biased to some extent, which is discussed later in the paper.

I applied a methodological triangulation in this research to improve validity and reliability. Therefore, a structured questionnaire was used along with semi-structured interviews to collect both quantitative data (numerical data) and qualitative data (descriptive data).

This paper is written to present my research precess and conclusion about the degree of Chinese parents get involved in students' major decision. Also, further improvements are discussed in the paper.

2. Background

Before carrying out my own research, I collected the secondary data online to orientate the main direction of further works.

Data base on the western society aspect mainly comes from the two pieces of research, conducted by Nucci (1996) and Bregman et. al. (1999).

Nucci (1996) argued that parents should be cautioned against imposing their own goals on to their children or seeing their child's accomplishments as a reflection on themselves. While parents should show genuine interest and support for their adolescents career plans, they must allow adolescents to discover who they are on their own. Some teenagers fear the disapproval of their parents if they pursue a career in art/drama/music as opposed to a practical high-earning occupation such as law or medicine.

Bregman and Killen (1999) found that adolescents valued parental guidance of career choice, and it is important for parents to give support and encouragement as soon as possible for adolescents to explore the many options available to find the best career fit.

Specifically with the Chinese aspect, a piece of research by Jianwei Liu et. al. about 'Parental Influence on Child Career Development in Mainland China' is studied. This qualitative study by Jianwei Liu et. al. used interpretative phenomenological analysis to examine how Mainland Chinese parents influence the career development of their 5th-grade children. Six superordinate themes were identified from both the children's and the parents' perspectives: responding to career curiosity, influence on career gender stereotypes, emphasising the importance of education, encouraging independent career decision making, providing opportunities for career interest development, and mothers as career role models. This is especially true in Mainland China, where family life is highly valued. Suggestions are offered for future career development learning programs and research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

The aim of this piece of research is to examine the extent to which Chinese parents intervene their children's decisions for future, in particular, their choice of majors and occupations.

3.2 Method

Two methods are used in the research.

The first one is structured questionnaire.

Structured questionnaire is a questionnaire that provides multiple choice questions. In other words, the answer can only be chosen from our of the choices. In this questionnaire, 12 multiple choice questions are required to be answered including 'Which is most important for your major choice?' and 'Have your parents ever mentioned before their expectation of your major choice?' etc.

In addition, in the question 'To what extend do you think 'you own your future?', participants are required to give a rating on a 100-percent scale to indicate their situation from 'I do not own my future at all' (0%) to 'I totally own my future' (100%).

Furthermore, an open question at the end allows participants to give any supplement answer in their own words. Contact information is also asked for further use.

The questionnaire is distributed through Wechat, a popular social communication application in China. In this paper, a part of the questionnaire is shown below. (Fig.1)

10. In your parents' opinion, major in college:
    A. Have to be connected with future career
    B. Does not have to be connected with future career

11. What is your attitude on the issue of major choice?
    A. I should listen to my parents
    B. I should make my own choice even though against my parents
    C. I have no worry since my parents and I already reach an agreement

12. To what extent do you think your parents help you with your major choice?
    A. Really helpful
    B. Quite helpful
    C. They do the opposite

13. To what extend do you think 'you own your future'?
Rating: 1(0%)- 10(100%)

Fig. 1 Structured questionnaire Extract

If interested, visit the website below (Chinese version):

https://sojump.com/jq/7132424.aspx

Another method is semi-structured interview.

Basing on the data from structured questionnaire, the semi-structured interview contains pre-prepared questions and prompted questions during the conversation. In this interview, questions about parents' attitude on major choices is elaborated to obtain detailed information so that each case could be clearly specified. Moreover, participants are asked about WHY they choose to behave in a certain way towards their parents' opinion. For example, a female participant who chose to listen to her parents' suggestion is asked for her motivation and reason. The interview is carried out mainly via telephone. Participants are contacted to have a conversation on their phone rather than face-to-face.

3.3 Sample

•Demographics

For the structured questionnaire, 149 Chinese high school students from four different year groups are included. 40% of them are males and 60% of them are females. Also, 60% of these students are from Guangdong province while the other 40% are from else where in China.

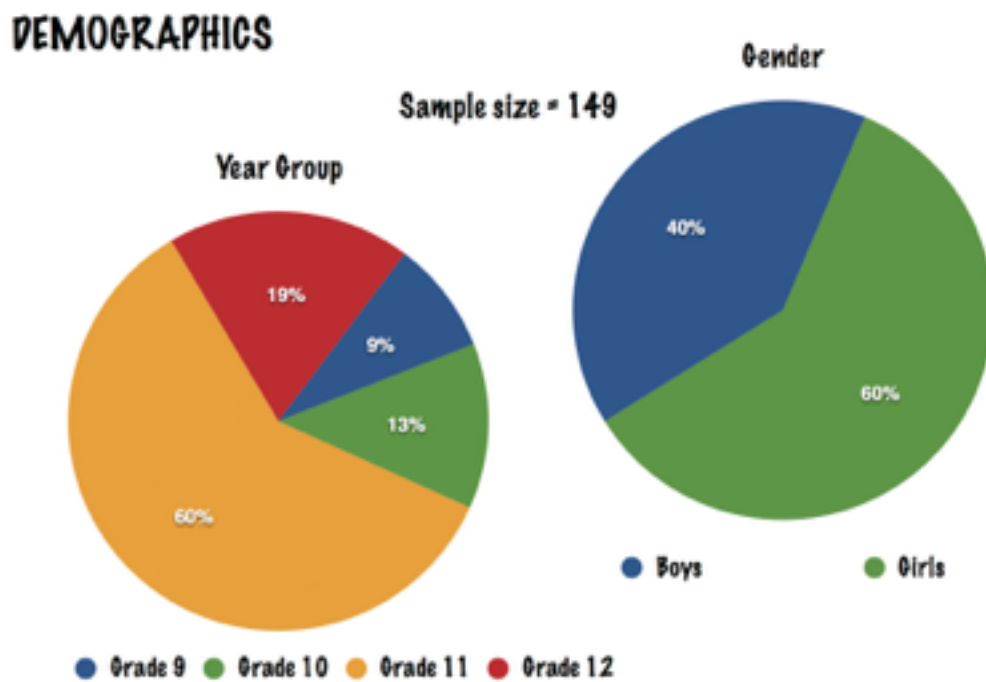Some of the demographics of the sample is shown below. (Fig2.)

Fig. 2 Demographic of Sample

For the semi-structured interview, 9 respondences (17 reduced to 9) initially from the questionnaire are selected to carry out a thorough conversation about their major choices, self-interest and parents' opinion. 4 of them are males and 5 of them are females. 8 participants withdraw from the interview resulted in a small interview sample. (see fig.3 below)
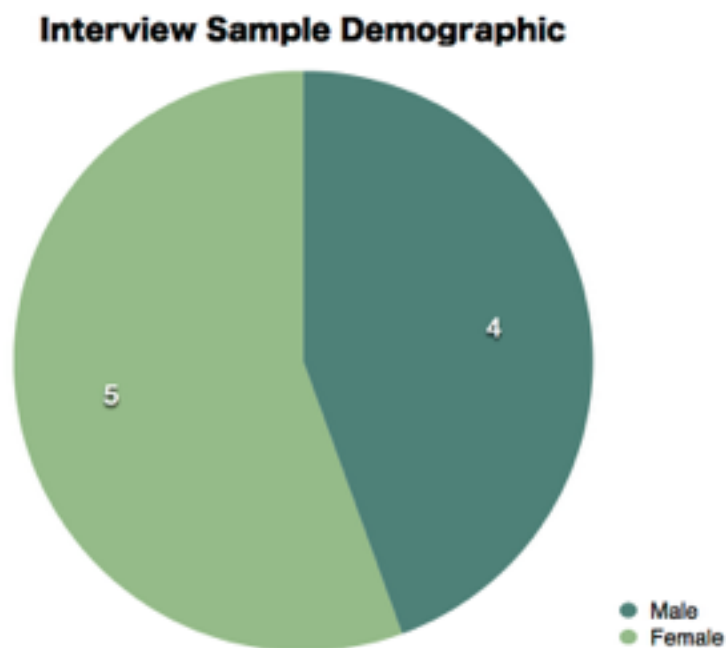
Interview Sample Demographic

Fig.3 Demographic of interview sample

•Sampling Technique

For the structured questionnaire, a voluntary sampling technique is applied.
The questionnaire is distributed through social network 'Wechat' so that anyone who see the link online would be able to answer the questionnaire.

For the interview, an opportunity sampling is applied.
Potential participants, who provide their contact information in the questionnaire, are contacted to request a telephone interview.

3.4 Data

• Quantitative data

Quantitative data is data that in a numerical form. It could be numbers or percentages. Quantitative data is obtained from something, say, a scale or counting, that is measurable and analysed statistically. Also, it can be measured repeatedly. Therefore, according to positivist perspective, quantitative data is favoured to improve reliability of the research.

In this research, a structured questionnaire is used to obtain quantitative data including percentages, numbers of people and ratings.

After collecting all of the raw data from questionnaire, I processed them into bar charts and pie charts.

For instance, for the rating question 'Do you believe the future is in your own hands', the ratings are organised into a bar chart to show the score distribution according to numbers of participants. The average is worked out as well. A diagram is illustrated below. (Fig. 4)

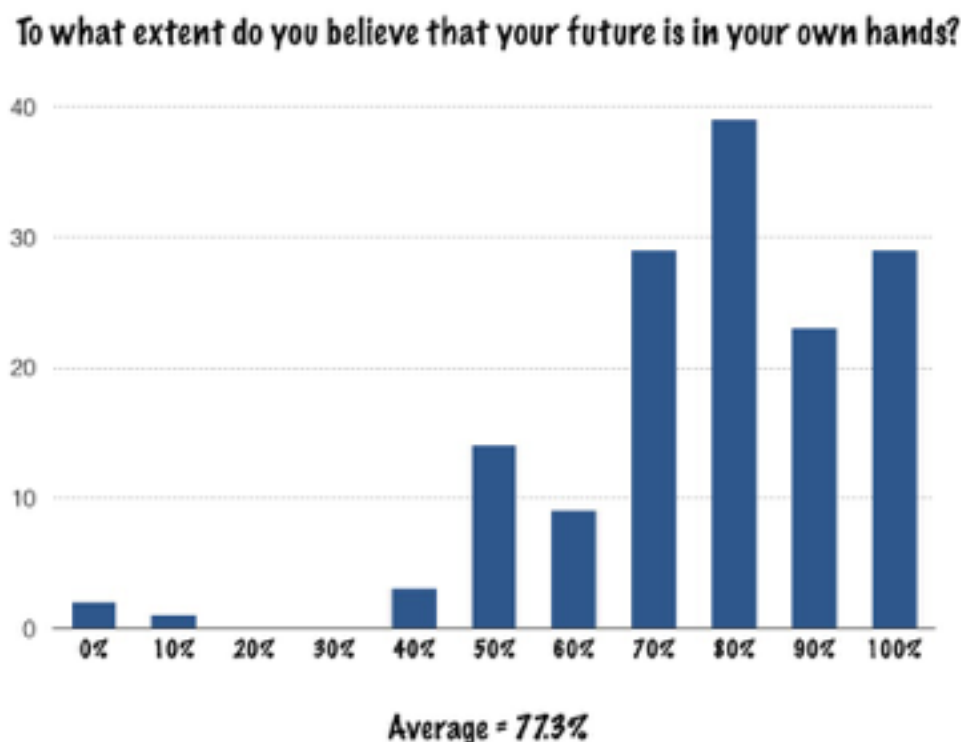## To what extent do you believe that your future is in your own hands?

Average = 77.3%

Fig. 4 Ratings stats. from Questionnaire

Another example could be a pie chart distribution of students' attitude about parents' opponents.

In this format, the majority of choices can be seen directly.

(see fig.5 below)

If my parents don't support my major choice, I would...

- Listen to my parents
- Listen to parents if fail to persuade
- Make my own decision if fail to persuade
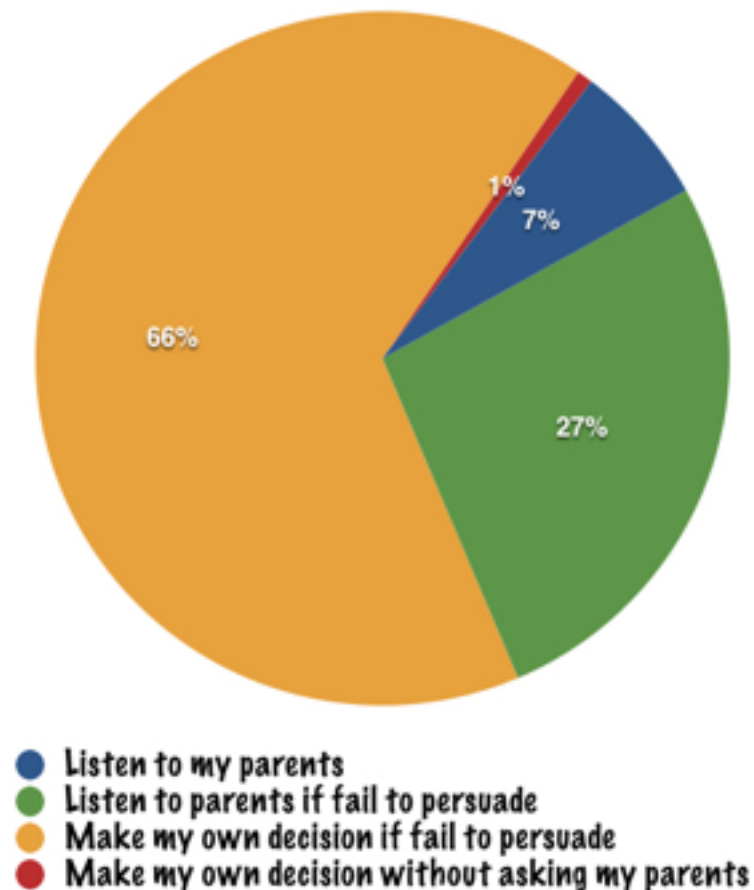- Make my own decision without asking my parents

Fig. 5 Students' attitude from Questionnaire

The two examples here are to illustrate how the quantitative data is collected and processed. Further analysis of data would be presented later in the 'Results and Conclusion' part.

- Qualitative data

Qualitative data is the descriptive and explanatory data from participants. It is usually in word form so it cannot be measured or statistically analysed. It can neither be measure repeatedly hence lower its reliability.

However, qualitative data is highly valid. According to interpretivists perspective, which is in oppose to positivist perspective mentioned above, qualitative data presents a real picture of the situation since it gives in-sights and details.

In this research, qualitative data is mainly collected from semi-structured interview. Also, a few of the datas are from the supplement question in the questionnaire. During the phone interview, participants answer questions are give their own explanation and opinion. For example, a male participant from grade 12 stated in the interview that **'I'll try my best to meet my parents' expectation and I should be doing it'**. In contrast, another participant suggested that **'Interest is the most powerful drive force of learning'.** From these points of view, more in-depth information could be included. Further analysis would be presented later.

'I'll try my best to meet my parents' expectation and I should be doing it'.

'Even though I enjoy music and art and I've done quite well, I wouldn't pursue either of them as my career because it would be too hard to succeed, or even make a living on that.'

'Interest is the most powerful drive force of learning.'
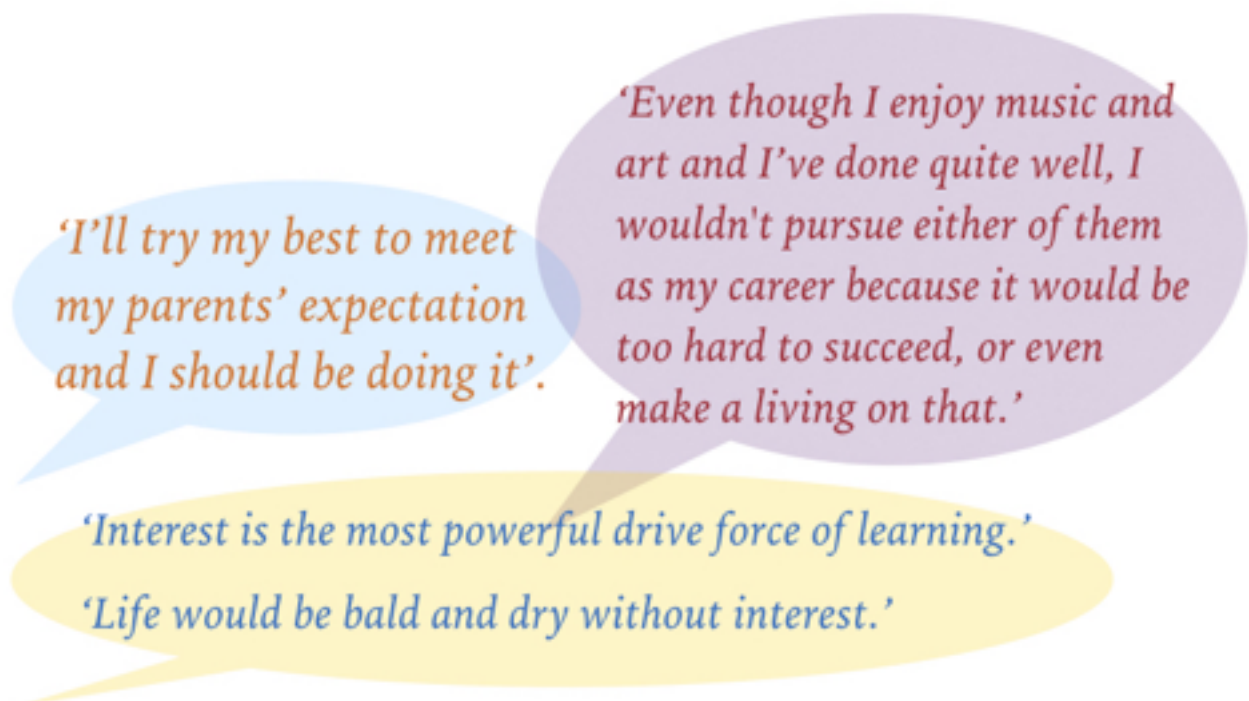
'Life would be bald and dry without interest.'

Fig. 6 Examples of qualitative data

3.5 Triangulation

Triangulation is combining qualitative method and quantitative method, or combining qualitative data and quantitative data. In other words, when a research includes both qualitative and qualitative data, a triangulation is reached.

A purpose for this is to improve both validity and reliability: the quantitative data is replicable and the qualitative data is more in-depth. Consequently, a more rounder picture of reality could be presented.

There are two types of triangulation.

One of them, data triangulation, combines two types of data using only one method. The semi-structured interview in this research is one of the examples. Another one is methodological triangulation, which combining two types of method in one research. For instance, in this research, structured questionnaire, a quantitative method, is used along with interview, a qualitative method.

Specifically, in this research, the combination of structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview leads to a methodological triangulation, which provide both percentages and ratings of 'owning their future' from participants and explanation of why they choose to listen to their parents/make their own decision etc. Moreover, data triangulation is reached using semi-structured interview. From the pre-prepared questions like 'Are your parents agree with your major choice now? ', qualitative data of the two answers 'Yes' or 'No' could be obtained, then counted. On the other hand, prompted questions like 'What do you think the purpose of studying in university?' provide more explanatory information and thus broadened the research findings.

Triangulation will as well be further discussed later in the paper. *(see chapter 6, 6.2 Evaluation)*

To know more about **Triangulation**, several studies are good references:

* Eileen Barker - 'Making of The Moonies'
* Nazroo - 'domestic violence'
* Catherine Hoyle - 'Police & Domestic Violence'

4. Key Findings and Results

4.1 Findings from quantitative data

From the quantitative data from structured questionnaire, a range of numbers and percentages are found. Several key features are identified below.

- According to the responses to the question 'Has your parents ever mentioned what they expect you to study in university?', it is found that **70/149** respondences affirm that their parents have, explicitly or implicitly, mentioned about what they expected the child to study as a major. Only **no more than 20/149** say their parents never mentioned about expected major. However, **60/149** participants stated that parents support their interest. The situation is shown in the bar chart below. (fig. 7)
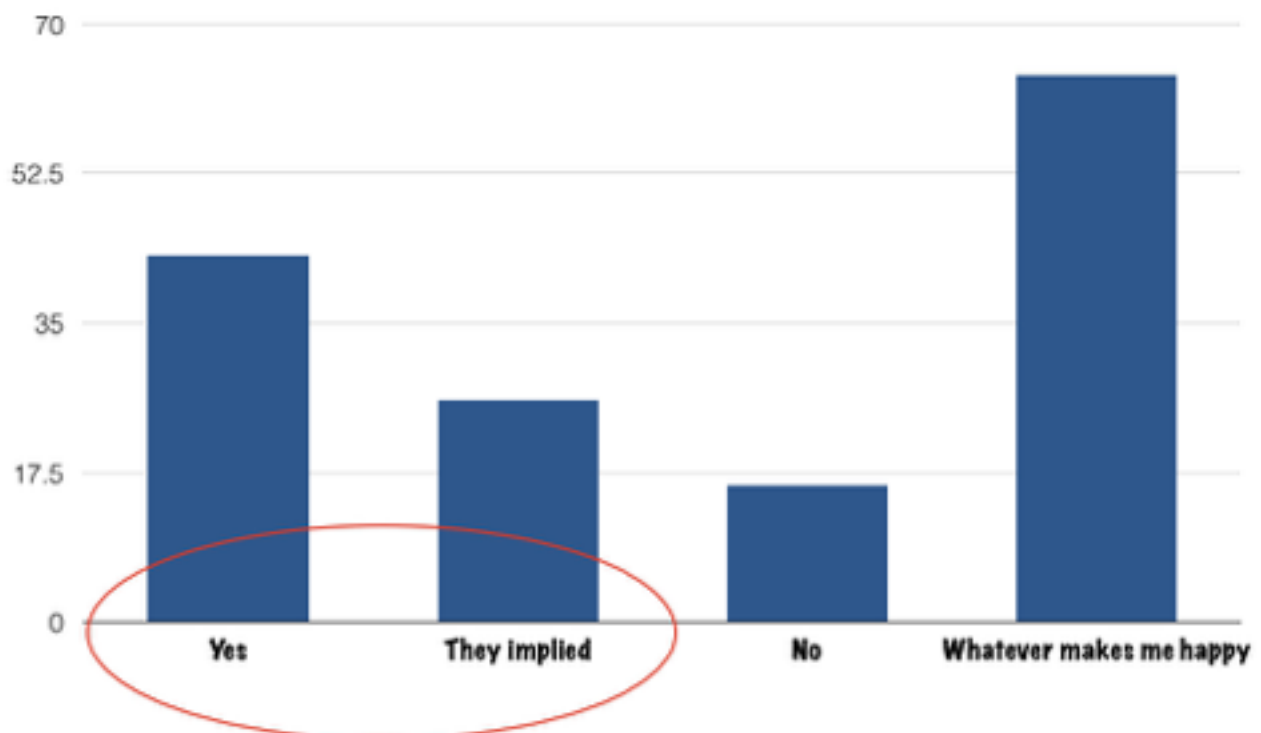

Fig. 7 Questionnaire Q1 analysis

- Another noticeable point is the expected major difference between parents and their children.

The data from questionnaire reveals 3 main points as listed below. (see also fig.8)

1. **54%** of respondences' parents see Finance/Economic/Management as their expected major, but only **15%** the same for students.
2. While only **5%** of parents want their child to study humanities as a major, **32%** of students do want humanities as their major.
3. **13%** of students want to study art in university when only **3%** of parents see it as an expected major.

Your parents' expected major is

What do YOU really want to study then?

- 🟢 Natural Science/Engineering 🔴 Finance/Economics/Management
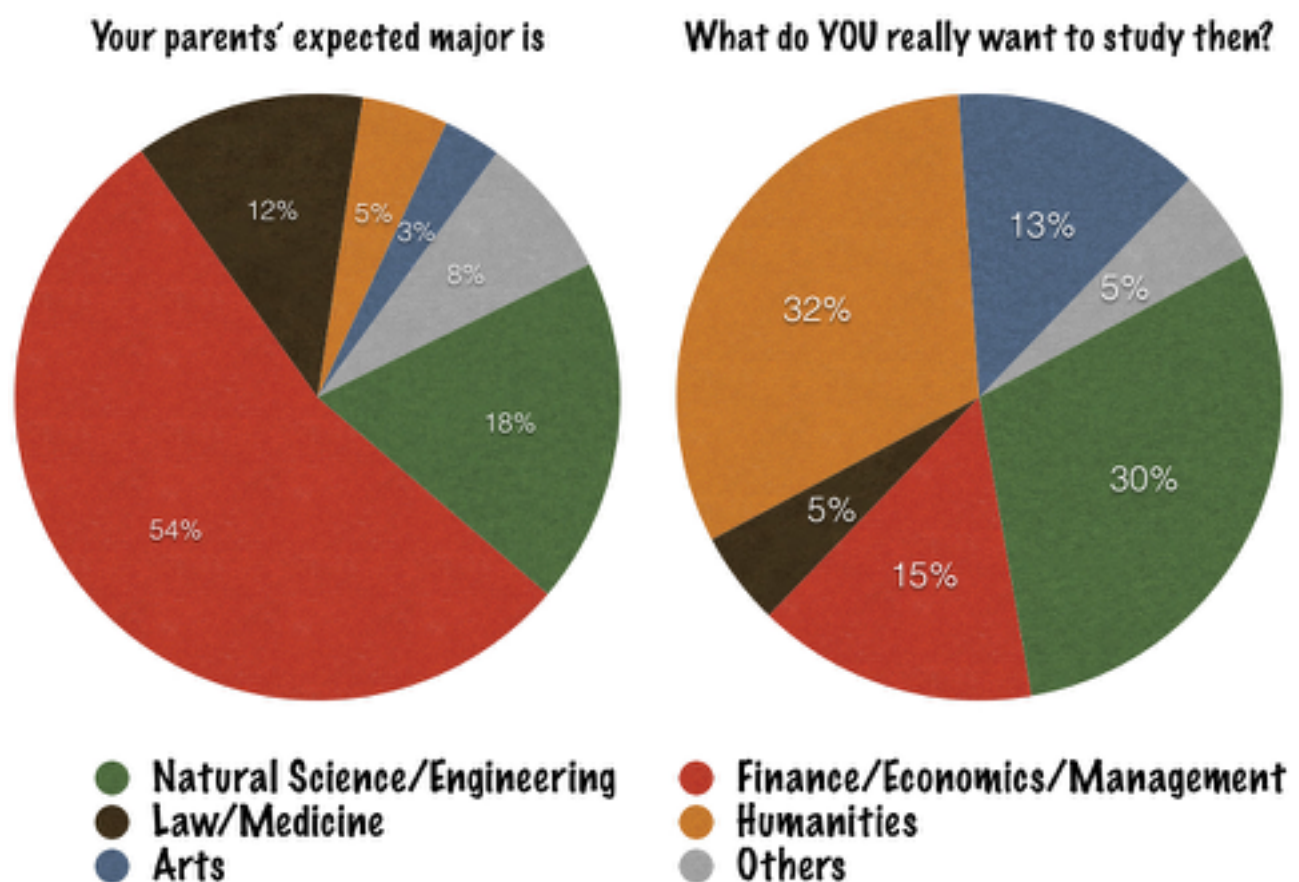- 🟤 Law/Medicine 🟠 Humanities
- 🔵 Arts ⚪ Others

Fig. 9 Questionnaire - comparing parents' and children's expected major

From the data above, it can be clearly seen that the three top majors for the participants' parents are:

- Finance/Economic/Management (54%)
- Natural science/Engineering (18%)
- Law/Medicine (12%)

On the other hand, the three top expected majors for the participants themselves are different.

The top three for participants are:
- Humanities(including sociology and liberal arts) (32%)
- Natural science/Engineering (30%)
- Finance/Economic/Management (15%)

These results are organised into the table below.

| Top 3 for parents	Top 2 for participants
Finance/Economic/Management	Humanities (including sociology and liberal arts)
Natural science/Engineering	Natural science/Engineering
Law/Medicine	Finance/Economic/Management

Table. 1 Comparison between parents and children

Therefore, the data suggested that conflict between parents and their children exists mostly in the subject of **Humanities** (including sociology and liberal arts). While children want to study humanity as their major, parents are less likely to agree with them.

Moreover, conflict is likely exist in **Finance/Economic/Management** major choices. While children want to pursuit other majors and careers, parents may expect them to study subjects about finance instead.

In addition, **Arts** major is a main source of conflict. The smallest proportion of parents encourage their children to pursuit arts majors while arts major is ranked the fourth expected major for the participants.

- What's more, according to the participants' answers, the majority of the parents support their major choice. **90/149** participants affirmed that their parents support them when as soon as hearing their voice, while **105/149** stated that their parents agree with their own choice eventually. Only **no more than 10** participants stated that their parents do not support their choices. (for details,

Your parents' first reaction is
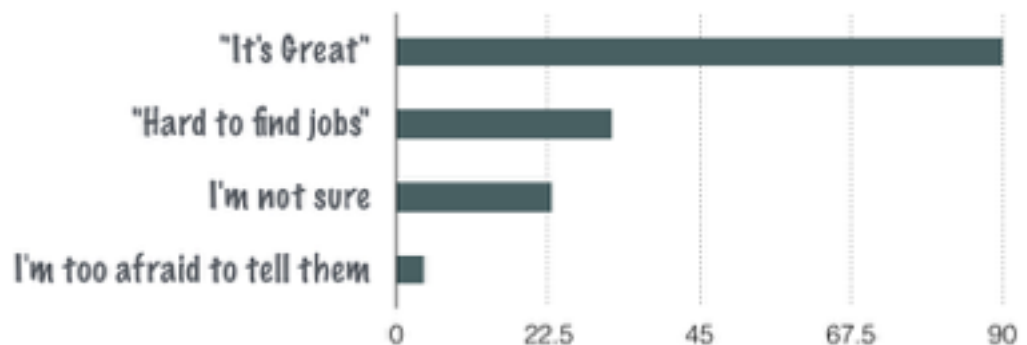
Now their attitude is
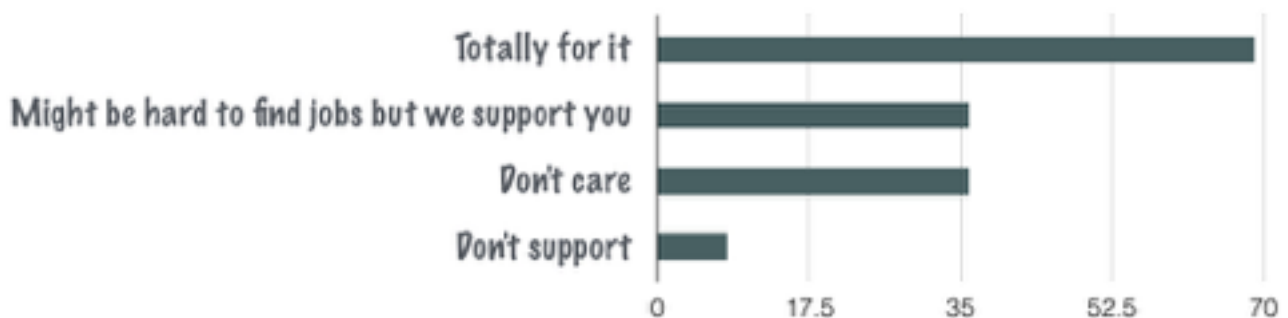
see fig.10 below)

Fig. 10 Questionnaire - Parents' attitude

- For the participants that parents do not agree at the first moment, **93%** of them would try to persuade their parents. Only **7%** of them would listen to their parents' decision, and **1%** would not persuade their parents yet **make their own decisions** anyway.
- After persuading, if parents insist, 67% of them make their own decision without parents' interference. In other words, they are not obedient to their parents. However, 33% would listen to their parents' decisions.

The two points are shown more directly in fig. 11 on the next page.

If my parents don't support my major choice, I would...

- Listen to my parents
- Listen to parents if fail to persuade
- Make my own decision if fail to persuade
- Make my own decision without asking my parents
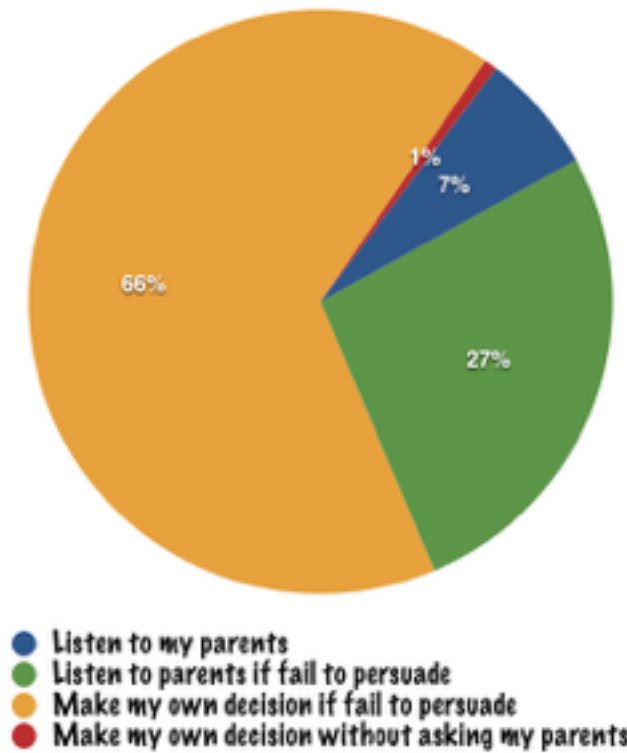
Fig.11 Questionnaire - children's reactions

- Another notable feature is that almost **46%** participants see interest as the most important factor for major selecting and **40%** of them think it should be eclectic, that is, to view various factors equally important. While **14%** of the participants stated that leading to a decent job is the primary factor, **none of them** think parents expectation is the most important. (see fig. 12 on next page)

What's the most important factor to choose a major?

- Interests
- Eclectic
- Decent job
- Parents' opinion

Fig. 12 Factors of major choice

19

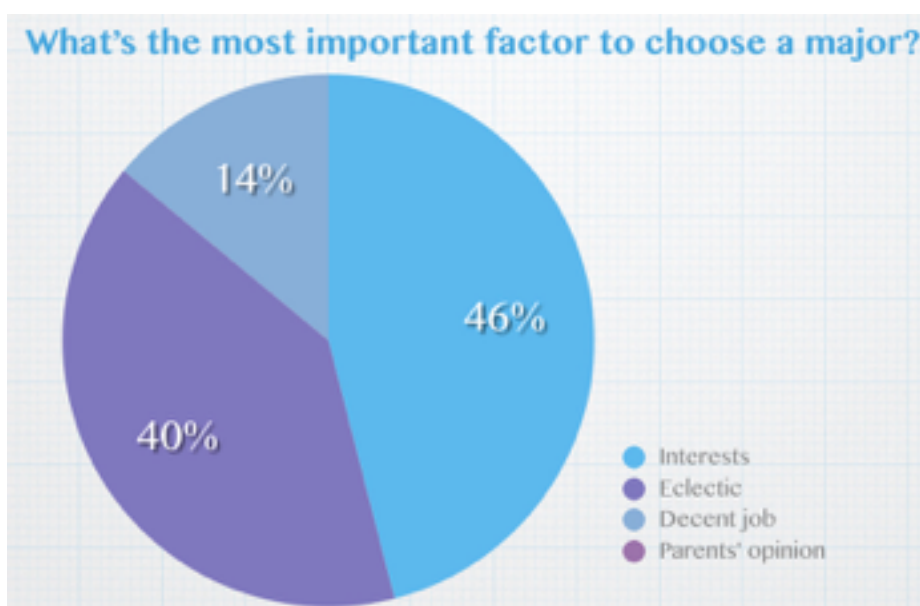- The last point from quantitative data is the subjective ratings of 'owning your future'.

The **largest number of participants (40)** give a rating of 80%, which is a fairly high score. Also, there are approximately equal number of participants rate 100% and 70%. From the bar chart (fig.13) below we can see that the **majority of participants (120/149)** go for ratings equal to or larger than 70%. As a consequence, the **average rating is high: 77.3%.**

However, there is significant proportion of participants rate 50% and a few also give 0%. Therefore, while most of the participants are satisfied with the degree of owning their future, a few of them do not.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU BELIEVE THAT YOUR FUTURE IS IN YOUR OWN HANDS?
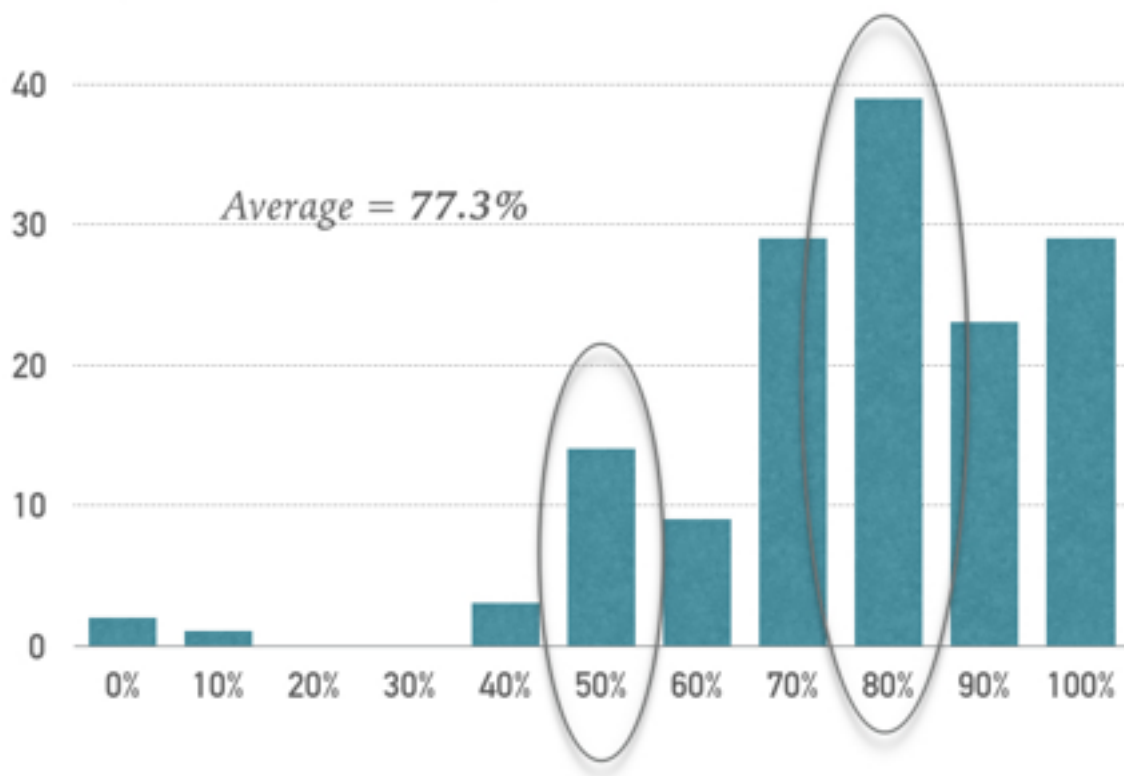

Fig.13 Ratings from questionnaire

4.2 Findings from qualitative data

Qualitative data from semi-structured interview provides in-depth details and explanations, enriching the research findings. From the qualitative data, reasons behind questionnaire choices and personal experiences are obtained. Important points are summarised below.

These are findings that identified according to the participants' attitudes.

- Many of the participants regard 'interest' is an important factor in selecting major. Even, for some students, the choice is simply theirs and should not be dominated by other factors except their own wish. Having strong opinion on their owns, they always insist on what they actually interested in. For reasons, many state that interest can encourage them to study and make progress. Also it can give more purpose to life. (see fig.14 below)

'Interest is the most powerful drive force of learning'.

'It is worth studying for four years only when I myself enjoy it'.

'I study hard for my goal and dream. I hope that I could get a job which I really enjoy in the future. For this, it is important to go to the university that I like and study something more professional. We always have our chances and our own future'.

'Life would be bald and dry without interest'.

'Do not be obedient to any 'authority' except for ourselves.'

Fig. 14 Qualitative data - interest

- For some of them, it should be eclectic and considering something more realistic like future employment and family economic condition. These participants have their own points of view as well but do not see interest as a dominant factor. They make decisions more carefully, regarding other aspects, say, most commonly, financial situation or self-ability, as important as personal interest.

(see fig. 15 on next page)

'Even though I enjoy music and art and I've done quite well, I wouldn't pursue either of them as my career because it would be too hard to succeed, or even make a living on that.'

'It is actually a contradict question. While I want to study my ideal major, I am worrying about my future employment and economic status. Parents think for our good to some level, but they really need to believe our abilities and let us make the choice.'
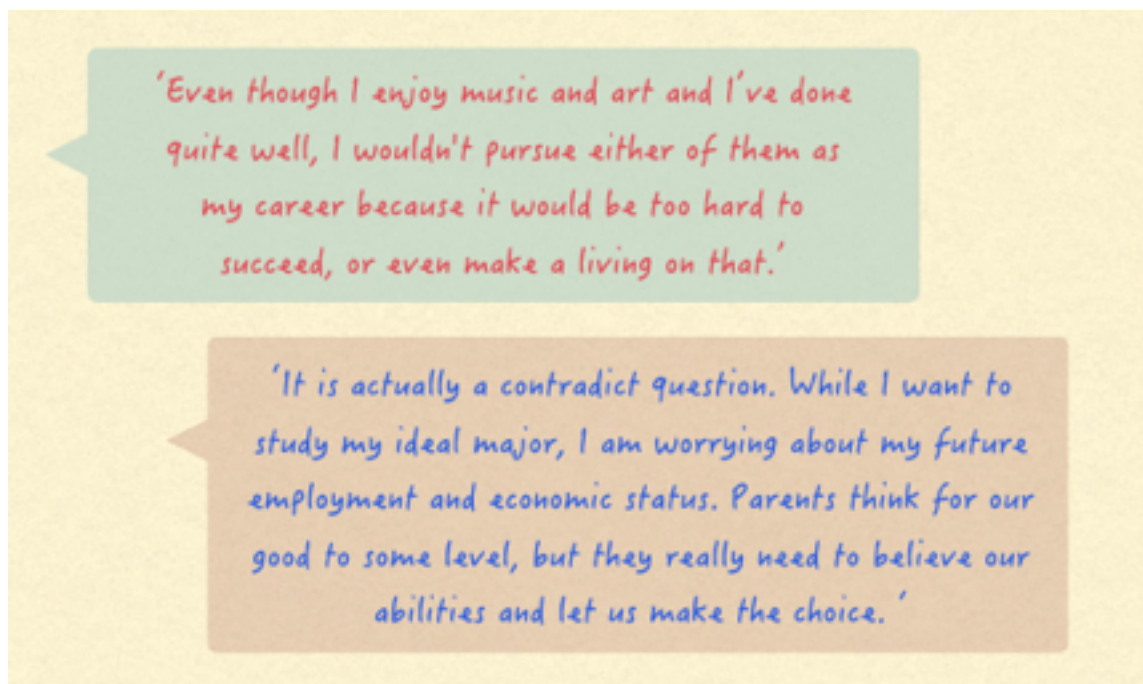
Fig. 15 Eclecticism

- Though few, certain participant expresses the idea of being absolute obedient to his parents, which may be seen as a special case. During the interview, a male participant says that '**I'll try my best to meet my parents' expectation and I should be doing it**'. When asking for further reasons, he regards this as one of his family responsibilities.

Furthermore, according to the description of their parents from the participants, several features about the parents are found.

- In most of the situation, parents have their suggestions but they let the children make their own choices. These parents give their children guidance but do respect children's decision. They hope their children to be responsible for themselves. (see fig.16.1 on the next page)

- Meanwhile, some parents hold a strong opinion, usually base on their unprofessional knowledge and self experiences instead of making a choice after learning about several choices. The opinion might be quite reductionist (eg. studying finance gets a decent job). (see fig.16.2)
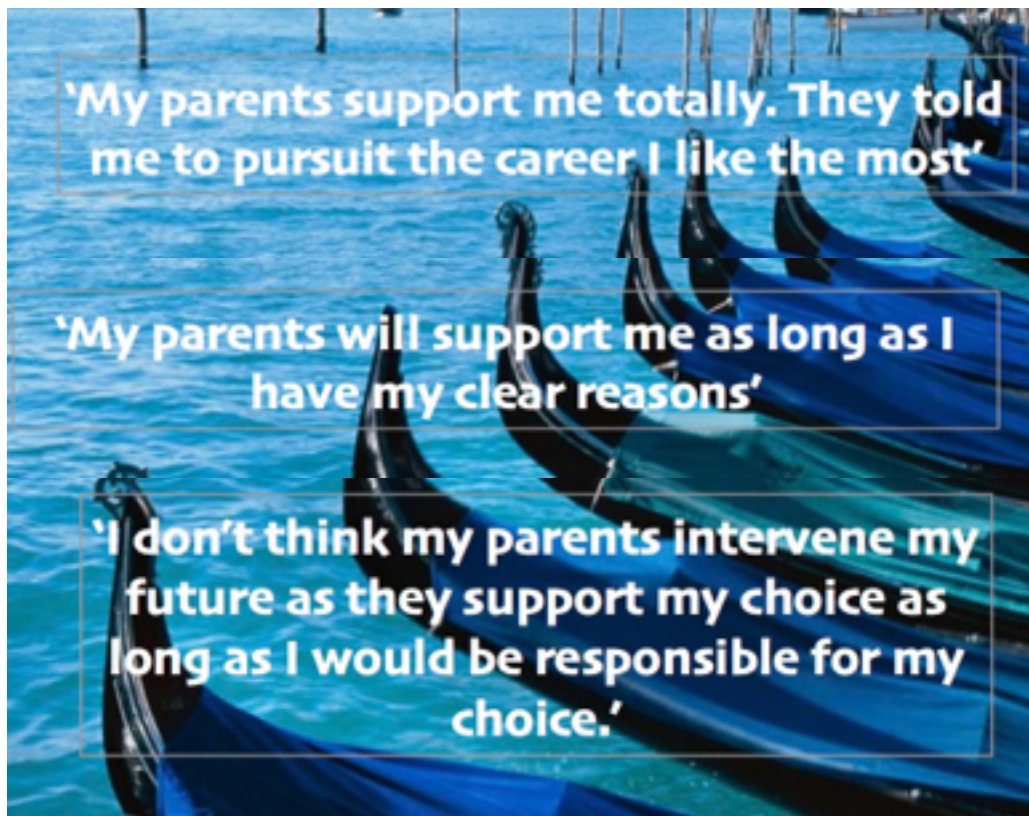
'My parents support me totally. They told me to pursuit the career I like the most'

'My parents will support me as long as I have my clear reasons'

'I don't think my parents intervene my future as they support my choice as long as I would be responsible for my choice.'

Fig. 16.1 Parents' attitude

'My parents want me to study finance because it is popular these years and they think jobs related to finance are creditable.'
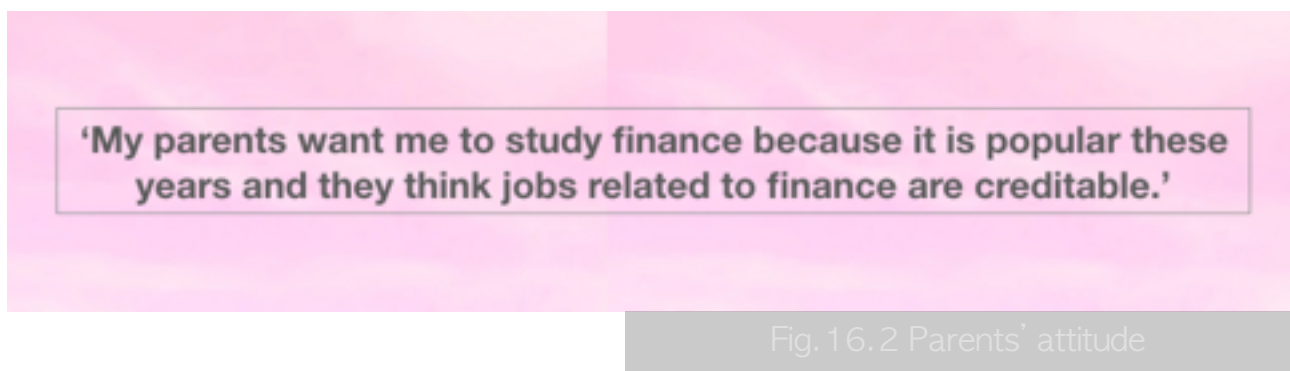
Fig. 16.2 Parents' attitude

- Also, seldom parents have absolutely no opinion on their child's major choices. Normally, they simply express agreement when know about the child's choice. However, normally they do care about the child's academic achievement but in a different way. **'My parents believe that any job can make a living and being success if I am interested in it. They are happy for any choices'**, a participant said during the interview.

5. Conclusion

There are indeed, different opinion and choices between parents and the child. The most controversial area is humanities and arts. Most of the disagreements come from the child's choice of these two areas and parents' choice of finance or natural science.

However, in most cases, parents respect their child's major choice and encourage them to follow their interest. For the children, their own future is not being dominant by the parents.

Generally speaking, there is not much intervention of children's major choices from their parents nowadays in China.

6. Further Analysis

6.1 Difficulties
A main difficulty would be conducting the semi-structured interview.

- First of all, the research was conducted during the Chinese New Year Holiday, which means participants were back in their hometown or on vacation. Thus, it was hard to interview them in person. Due to the restricted mobility, it seems impossible to interview the participants face to face. Therefore, this might cause some facial expressions, which could indicate some important information, to be missed out, hence reduce the in-sights and details of data. For example, when the participant stated that he regards his parents' opinion as priority, it was hard to know if he is happy to do that or just take it as a burden without reference to his facial expression and gesture.

- The next difficulty is that sometimes participants do not understand the topic well, or misunderstand the question, so they provide inadequate information. In order to solve the problem, I found giving an example answer would direct them into the right topic easily. However, when explaining and expanding the idea of the question, the interviewer was more likely to ask leading questions, which means, the example answer may, more or less, alter the participant's real attitude, or distract their own opinion. Therefore, the response from the interview may be less valid due to 'researcher effect'.

- Also, there was problem in accessing the participants. They left their e-mail address for contact but many of them did not read or reply our e-mail of interview request. A small proportion of questionnaire respondences left their contact information (17), and afterward the real number in the interview became even smaller (reduced to 9). In order to obtain more interview participants, I tried to access to them using all the popular social network. For example, one participant left his email address with his phone number as an account name. After waiting for too long to an e-mail reply, I texted him via the phone number, meanwhile I searched his account on WECHAT. This method proved effective. However, not for every cases, and, the original number is unfortunately a small one. As a result, the sample of semi-structured interview is small and may not be representative of the target population.

6.2 Evaluation

• Methods
The two methods used in the research are structured questionnaire, a quantitative method, and semi-structured interview, a qualitative method. They both have their own pros and cons. The discussion below analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the research in terms of the two methods.

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

In the research, a structured questionnaire is used.
This quantitative method is favoured by positivism, a belief that social research can reveal an **objective fact** of the society and identify certain **social patterns**. Positivists argued that society has its own trend which should be separated from personal opinion. They emphasise **reliability** of the research. In other word, as natural science, a social research should be value-free while it can either be proved or disproved. (An example could be Durkheim's quantitative study on suicide rate [1970] in the EU. countries and Britain)

Strength 1: High Reliability
One of the strengths of using questionnaire is that it collects quantitative data. The data that the questionnaire produced is in a numerical form. For example, the number of students are obtained from the question of 'What is your favourite major?', so it can be analysed statistically using graphs and compare with each other, hence certain patterns could be recognised. Therefore, an objective result can be drawn from the data, preventing any researcher bias. This improves the reliability of the research.

Strength 2: High Replicability
Also, quantitative data from questionnaire can be easily replicated ,or repeated, as the choices of participants are more likely to maintain in the current situation, which means the same research carried out by another researcher could reach the same result (concurrent validity). For example, for the question 'What is the most important factor of choosing a major', participants' choices are likely to be the same when a second questionnaire is answered. Therefore, it can be claimed that the data from structured questionnaire has high reliability.

Weakness 1: Low validity

However, using structured questionnaire does not provide detailed information and subjective interpretations of the participants. When answering the questionnaire, they only select one or more choices instead of having an opportunity to express themselves. For instance, when the participants answered the question 'How much do you feel your future is in your own hands?', they simply give a rating on the scale but do not go deeper to explanation. Thus, when analysing the data, lots of valuable insight would be missed out, or, even worse, the researcher would interpret the quantitative data base on their own understanding, which may, sometimes, be strongly biased. Therefore, quantitative data from the questionnaire do not have high validity.

Weakness 2: Researcher bias

What's more, using structured questionnaire may not reflect the real picture of society. The questionnaire provides only a few 'most-likely' choices for the participants, so it is unable to cover all of the choices in real life. Consequently, the participants are forced to choose the one that is most appropriate for them but not the most real one. Also, though having some background research as basic understandings, those 'most-likely' choices are base on the researcher's own interpretation, which is more or less subjective. For example, for 'the most important factor when choosing a major' question, only four choices are provided. Choices like 'educational opportunity' are not provided for participants. Therefore, the data from a structured questionnaire has lower validity since it may contain researcher bias.

Apart from questionnaire, a semi-structured interview is applied in this research. This is a qualitative method favoured by interpretivism, which, contrary to positivism mentioned above, emphasise subjective meanings of social members and **validity**. Therefore, to present a **true picture** of society, the researcher must understand how the participants think and the way they experience to reach '**verstahen**', a german word meaning 'to understand'. As for different individuals, different explanations are given and different meanings are attached to the behaviours, it would be invalid if the conclusion is based on only figures. (An example to compare with the positivist suicide study [Durkheim 1970] would be Douglas's study [1967] 'The Social Meaning of Suicide')

Strength 1: In-depth data
An advantage for semi-structured interview is that the qualitative data collected contains participants' own explanations and interpretations. This enriched the research information, providing lots of in-depth details for better understanding. An example could be a female participant who wants to study humanity subject in university. During the interview, she suggested that, although her parents disagree with her choice, they seem unable to provide adequate reasons for their choice (finance) except for it leads to a relatively more decent job in the future, which is purely base on their limited knowledge of the major. Therefore, richer information could be collected during the semi-structured interview.

Strength 2: High Validity
Moreover, using the semi-structured interview, participants are given the opportunity to explain their choice in the questionnaire. This prevents researcher misinterpret the quantitative data and cause biased. For instance, when interviewing a participant who regards parents' opinion as priority of major choice (he chose this choice in the questionnaire), he was asked for reasons so he had a chance to explain WHY he thinks parents' opinion is the most important. Otherwise, instead of what he stated 'a responsibility and family obligation', it could be misunderstood that his parents forced him to be obedient. Therefore, the research is more valid using semi-structured interview.

Weakness 1: Low Replicability

Nevertheless, a disadvantage of semi-structured interview is that it is unlikely to be replicable. As verbal description and personal meanings are negotiable and interpretable, unlike a simple choice in a questionnaire, it would be hard to obtain the same qualitative data again if the study is repeated. Participants, though are likely to have the same opinion, may forget about the minor details, which sometimes can make a real difference to the data. As a result, the research cannot obtain exactly the same result if repeated by another experimenter. Specifically in this research, if a participant is asked again 'How did your parents help you with your major choice?', he would probably provide an answer a bit different from the original one. Therefore, it is hard to replicate a qualitative semi-structured interview to obtain the same result, hence lowers its reliability.

Weakness 2: Demand Characteristics

Another weakness of the semi-structured interview is that it may contains demand characteristics. Since the interview requires certain personal information and a conversation, the participants may provide socially desirable answers to present a good image of themselves. For example, a participant who does not feel free to choose his major at all may state that he is free to choose in order to present a pleasant family background. Also, some participants may provide information that suits the research aim. For instance, a participant may claim that his priority to choose a major is his own interest because he think the answer is preferred by the researcher. As a consequence, the data collected may be less valid since it does not reveal the participants' real opinion.

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Methodological Triangulation

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(see also: 3.5 Triangulation on page 14)
As we can see above, each method on its own has its flaws. Therefore, two methods are used to reach methodological triangulation so that to improve each of the methods and hence improve the overall research. Methodological triangulation involves both quantitative method and qualitative method, so they can balance each other and reach an overall high reliability and high validity. The low reliability of interview can be offset by the advantages of using questionnaire, and the low validity of a structured questionnaire can be balanced out by the interview.

• Sample

The sample size for the structured questionnaire is fairly large: 149 Chinese high school students from four different year groups. The gender ratio is 40% male and 60% female. Also, 60% of these students are from Guangdong province while the other 40% are from else where in China. For the semi-structured interview, the sample contains 9 participants initially from the questionnaire. 4 of them are males and 5 of them are females.

The strengths and weaknesses in terms of population validity of the sample is discussed below.

Strength 1: Large Sample Size

An advantage of the sample is that the sample size for the questionnaire is quite large (149 participants). Therefore, the sample would be representative of the target population since it prevents the result to be influenced by individual differences, which is a negative effect due to a small sample to cause the conclusion to be invalid. The large sample avoid drawing the result base on some untypical cases. Thus, the research has high population validity: it could be generalised to other people.

Strength 2: Demographics

What's more, the gender demographic of our sample is similar between male and female. In 149 participants, 40% of them are male and 60% are female. Consequently, the sample is less likely to be gender-biased since the proportions of male and female are similar. In other words, the sample is highly representative of the target population, which contains both male and female. Therefore, the population validity of the study is high.

Weakness 1: Distribution Method

On the contrary, it could be argued that the sample is low in population validity because it is distributed only through WECHAT. The only people that saw the link of the questionnaire and fill it can be only the researcher's friends or those who are friends with the people who 'repost' it. They are mainly from the same community or cultural group. The way of distribution is quite narrow and therefore limited the variety of the participants. As a result, the sample may not be representative enough of the whole population, which is Chinese high school students, those who are from many places and cultural groups.

Weakness 2: Voluntary Sampling

Sampling technique applied in the study may lower the population validity of the study. Using voluntary sampling, portents volunteered to take part in the questionnaire via WECHAT. This could lead to the circumstance that only people who are interested in the topic for some reasons answered our questionnaire. This could lower the population validity. Specifically, it is possible that, compared to those who didn't volunteered, the majority of the participants in this research have similar experiences of their parents as the decision makers and did not respect their choices. Consequently, the data collected would not be representative of all the students.

Weakness 3: Cultural- biased

Also, another weakness of the sample is that they are mainly students within Guangdong Province in China. Most of them are from the same international school (SCIE). This could cause cultural-biased and lower the population validity of the research. For example, perhaps high school students from traditional Chinese high schools, or from other provinces in China have different points of view. The sample is too limited to be generalised to other societies like another province in China.

- Ethnical issues

Apart from being highly valid and reliable, a research should be carried out ethically as well. According to The British Sociological Association (BSA), certain guidelines should be followed when conducting a sociological research. The figure below gives a brief introduction of these guidelines.
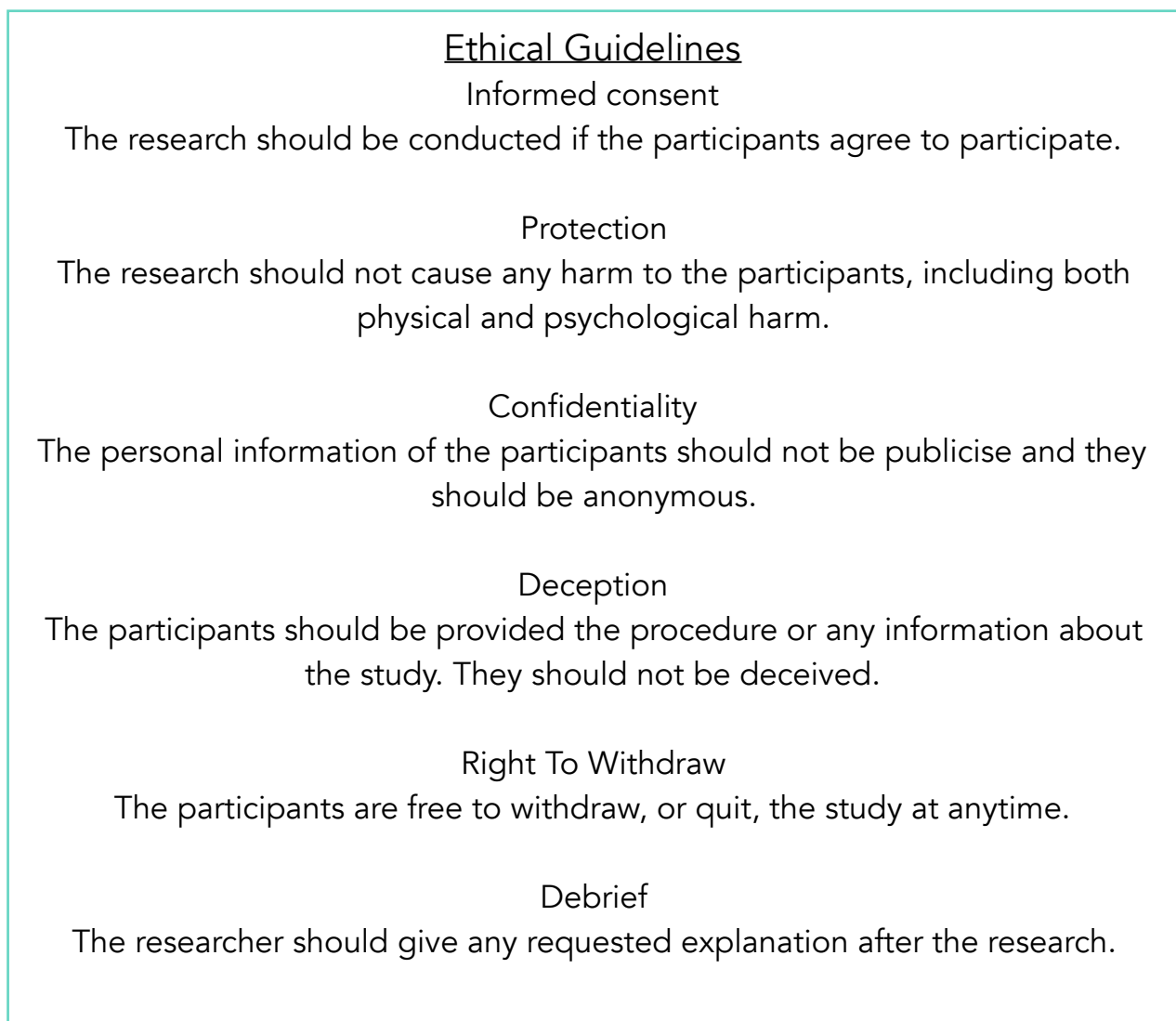
<u>Ethical Guidelines</u>
Informed consent
The research should be conducted if the participants agree to participate.

Protection
The research should not cause any harm to the participants, including both physical and psychological harm.

Confidentiality
The personal information of the participants should not be publicise and they should be anonymous.

Deception
The participants should be provided the procedure or any information about the study. They should not be deceived.

Right To Withdraw
The participants are free to withdraw, or quit, the study at anytime.

Debrief
The researcher should give any requested explanation after the research.

Fig.17 Ethical guidelines

In this research, the methodology applied and the way it was conducted are highly ethical. Further analysis is presented below.

Informed consent
In the first place, we gave consent to all the participants in the study. Both the questionnaire and the interview were carried out with their permission.

Deception
Secondly, there was no deception in the study. All of the participants are told about the true aim of the study and introduced briefly our purpose of the study. Each of them is well- explained of the aim and no one is deceived.

Protection
Moreover, the participants are well-protected. We did not ask personal questions during the interview and the questionnaire in order to protect the participants' feelings and privacy. During the interview, if something was mentioned made the participant uncomfortable or felt offended, we skipped it quickly to another way of asking.

Confidentiality
In addition, the participants are anonymous in the questionnaire. They did not have to provide their names during the questionnaire or the interview. Quotes from some of the participants did not addressed the name of the participants. We maintained confidentiality during the entire study.

Right to withdraw
Participants are able to choose whether to answer the questionnaire or not. Also, they can decide if to participate in the phone interview. If the participants are not willing to take part in the research at any time, they are free to withdraw.

Debrief
After answering the questionnaire or the interview, the researcher would provide any background information that the participants required. For example, the way their responses would be used.

● Improvements

After evaluating the research, several solutions are identified to improve the weaknesses of the research mentioned above.

The first one is that to distribute the questionnaire via varies ways but not only through WECHAT. For example, the sample may be more representative if we also approach high school students in places like libraries since there would be more variety of participants. As a result, the conclusion can be generalised to other people. The research is said to have high population validity.

Also, in order to improve the generalisability of the sample, it would be better if the questionnaire is spread not only in Shenzhen, or, Guangdong province, but also in other provinces in China. Specifically, asking a non-local classmate who is not from the Guangdong province to repost our questionnaire in his or her community. In this way, we could avoid certain cultural bias of the sample and make it more generalisable to other cultural groups and societies. Hence, the research would be higher in population validity.

Furthermore, in order to contact the interview subjects more easily, not only e-mail addresses would be required during completing the questionnaire, but also some more convenient contact information like phone number or WECHAT ID. Since many of the participants do not use e-mail or do not check their e-mails regularly, few of them gave a reply. Requiring more contacting information would make it more easy to access the participants. As a result, a larger sample could be obtain and thus a more valid conclusion could be drawn.

Another improvement of the semi-structured interview is that to ask more open ended questions. During the phone interview, the researcher should avoid expanding an idea too much to turn the question into a leading question. More interpretation should be asked for from the participants to prevent researcher effect. Therefore, the result of the research would be more valid since it would not be influenced by researcher effect.

The last improvement is to use video calls to interview the participants. Because of the restriction of mobility, it would be a bit unrealistic to travel to another city for a face-to-face interview. Alternatively, a phone interview is used to interview the participants. This could made the communication less spontaneous as the interviewer and the interviewee cannot see each other directly. It would be better to use video calls for a face-to-face interview online (like using Skype) so that we could see the participants' facial expressions and talk to them more directly.

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