

Social, Environmental and Educational Barriers to Academic-Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy in Adolescents: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of the present study was to identifying social, environmental and educational barriers of academic-career decision making self-efficacy in Adolescents.

Methods: The population of this qualitative study included male high school students of Khomeini Shahr. A total of 12 students were selected using purposeful sampling method; A semi-structured interviews were conducted to the extent that the responses were saturated. Data were analyzed using open, axial and central coding based on grounded theory method.

Results: The findings showed that the social dimension includes addiction, unhealthy relationships and external determinism, the environmental dimension includes lack of government support, wrong government policies, difficult economic conditions, and lack of meritocracy and educational dimension including the theory-based education, costly education and lack of talent identification.

Conclusions: Regarding the results can concluded that informing adolescents about the barriers of academic-career self-efficacy can lead to better decision-making. This awareness is best achieved by creating a healthy social environment for nurturing talent and by changing some education policies.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a period of a person's life that begins with puberty (Dumontheil, 2015). This period is called the period of psychological transition, which is associated with growth and important psychological, social and biological changes (Flynn, 2016). Adolescence is in fact the transition period between childhood and adulthood, associated with major physical, cognitive, moral and social changes (Keshavarz & Mirzaei, 2019). Researchers usually divide adolescence into three stages of early adolescence (11 to 14 years old), middle adolescence (14 to 16 years old) and late adolescence (16 to 18 years old) (Berk, 2007; translated by Seyed Mohammadi, 2013). Adolescence is a sensitive and critical period of development in which a teenager faces various transitional events in terms of social, academic and biological roles and meanwhile, must find appropriate solutions to solve the problems and choices he faces. During this period, the person faces critical decisions with regard to his future career, education and life (Alm & Laftman, 2016). One of the factors leading to the success of a teenager when choosing his/her intended field of study and job is the self-efficacy beliefs of the person in this field. According to Bandura's social learning theory, self-efficacy beliefs affect the individual's choice of field of study, career and the activities he/she does (Ghane, 2022). Self-efficacy is a person's belief, ability, and sense of trust to perform behaviors that lead to achieve a specific goal (Valois et al., 2017). To put it another way, self-efficacy is the judgment of people about their ability to perform a certain level of activity. A person who is the same as another individual in terms of abilities, may perform well, exceptionally or poorly in different conditions, which depends on their self-efficacy. Those who have high self-efficacy believe that they can effectively deal with events and situations. Since they expect to successfully overcome the barriers, they persevere and often perform at a high level. Instead of threats, they consider problems as challenges and actively seek for new opportunities. The feeling of high efficiency reduces the fear of failure, raises the level of aspirations and improves the abilities of problem solving and analytical thinking.

One of the concepts related to self-efficacy is career decision-making self-efficacy, which is described as a person's beliefs about his/her ability to perform various career tasks (and behaviors related to academic decision-making) (Sabbagh kermani & Fouladchang, 2023). To put it another way, academic-career decision making self-efficacy means the level of person's belief in his/her abilities to successfully perform the tasks regarding to career (and related educational) decision

makings (Xu & Tracey, 2015). In the cognitive-social perspective, people's self-efficacy beliefs can predict academic progress, successful choice of field of study and career more than other motivational variables and even more than people's talent in some cases (Beghetto, 2006). Few people make their career choices in optimal conditions. Various factors, including economic problems, lack of family support, and educational limitations can restrict the person's career goals and make obstacles to career choice and advancement (Hosseini & Baghbani, 2022). Therefore, those feeling more obstacles, may probably face more problems when they are deciding about their career.

In their study entitled “The Efficiency of Teaching Self-Efficacy on Academic Stress and Social Skills of Girl Students (2018), Keramati and Kushki stated that teaching self-efficacy decreases academic stress and increases social skills. In a study entitled “Factors affecting the Self-Efficacy of Academic and Career Decision-Making (2014), Wright et al. stated that there is a relationship between perceived support and career barriers with attachment and self-efficacy in students, in such a way that the participants who had a secure attachment and received more social support, had fewer career obstacles and had higher performance in the academic and career fields. In addition, in research entitled “Predicting Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy among Non-Profit Female College Students”, Quimby & O’Brien stated that there is a significant relationship between career barriers and social support with career decision making self-efficacy of female students, in such a way that social support increased career decision making self-efficacy in them. The investigations conducted by the researcher demonstrated that so far very limited researches have examined the barriers of academic-career decision making self-efficacy and mostly these researches have been carried out quantitatively. Therefore, there is very little data about these barriers and the way of dealing with them. In addition, quantitative researches have limitations to identify these barriers and it is better to use qualitative research with an exploratory approach. Owing to what has been mentioned and the fact that it is not possible to comprehensively examine all barriers to self-efficacy in one study, the present study scrutinizes the environmental and educational barriers to academic-career decision making self-efficacy in adolescents.

Material and Methods

The present research was a qualitative study that was conducted using the grounded theory method. The population of the present study included all the teenage boys of Khomeini Shahr City who were studying in the second year of high school in the academic year 2020-2021. The second year of high school was chosen so that the students have completed the process of choosing their field of study. In the present study, as in most qualitative researches, purposive sampling was used. The inclusion criteria were: 1- Having a GPA of 18 and above, 2- Passing the field of study selection process, 3- Having at least three months of part-time work experience, 4- Having an average economic level in family, 5- Having a high average in the academic-career decision making self-efficacy questionnaire; and exclusion criteria were having a history of psychological or physical illness and dissatisfaction with participating in the research. These criteria were chosen based on the fact that elite students are selected so that they are placed in the process of academic-career decision-making and have the necessary experiences. Based on the logic governing the qualitative researches, it was attempted to have the maximum diversity in sampling based on the variety of the field of study and work experience, so as to increase the richness of the interviews. The number of samples was chosen in such a way that the maximum qualitative content of the barriers of academic-career decision-making self-efficacy can be extracted and the interviews reach the so-called saturation state (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; translated by Mohammadi 2017). In the present study, after interviewing 12 male students and recording and analyzing the data from their interviews, their answers reached saturation and the interviews were stopped. In order to reach the criterion of reliability in this research, three common and conventional techniques were used, including: A) Control by members; in which the participants of the study were asked to evaluate the general findings and comment on its accuracy; B) Analytical comparisons meaning that the data is evaluated and compared; C) Using the audit tactic, in which the several people who are expert at grounded theory were asked to supervise the various stages of coding, conceptualization and extraction of categories. (Hosni et al., 2014). During the data collection and analysis, it was considered that the previous familiarity would not lead to creating mental and formal assumptions, orienting the data and disturbing the analysis. To ensure the reliability of coding, extracted categories were approved by four interviewees. Also, after completion, the coding procedures were confirmed by three faculty members and their comments were applied.

Measures

A) Interview: In the present study, a semi-structured interview was used to collect data and knowing the barriers to academic-career decision making self-efficacy. However, due to the conversational nature of the interview, the interviewer is free to make changes in the questions or change their order and sequence in a more appropriate way (Biabangard, 2007). In fact, the main focus of a semi-structured interview is on issues and matters that must be followed up or covered, in such a way that the order of questions is not the same for all interviewees and it depends on the interview process and each person's answers during the interview (Homan, 2012). Based on the purpose of the study and to find the barriers to academic-career decision making self-efficacy, interview questions were designed. Finally, using the opinions of knowledgeable experts and to ensure content validity, 8 questions were chosen for the interview. A pilot study was conducted on two of the samples and according to the feedback obtained from them, the necessary changes were made in the questions. The questions scrutinized the social, environmental and educational barriers to the academic-career decision making self-efficacy, directly or indirectly. Owing to the fact that the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewer asked follow-up questions for further investigation after each question. In order to preserve the profile of the interviewees, numerical codes were used for them. Also, having secured the consent of participants, their conversations were recorded using audio recorders. The interviews were lasted 30 to 45 minutes. During the interview, people were free to discuss other topics that they mentioned during the conversation. After the conversation, the interviews were written down for further investigation and analysis of the conversations.

B) Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (CDMSE-SF): Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Questionnaire was used to choose students with high career decision making self-efficacy, which was among the inclusion criteria of the research. Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Questionnaire evaluates people's beliefs about their capacity to make career-related decisions. The shortened form of the questionnaire was used in the preset study. This questionnaire was compiled by Betz, Klein and Taylor in 1996 and has 25, 5-choice questions based on a 5-point Likert scale. The choices are not sure at all, a little sure, almost sure, and completely sure, scored with 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. This questionnaire includes 5 scales: 1) Appropriate self-evaluation; 2) Gathering career data; 3) Choosing the goal; 4) Planning for the future; 5) Problem-

solving. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was obtained to be .93, using Cronbach's alpha method and the construct validity was .59 using factor analysis (Betz et al., 1996). Those whose average score in this questionnaire was more than 62.5, could enter the interviews and in fact, they had the condition to enter the research, i.e., having high self-efficacy.

Results

The participants of the study were 12 male students, between 16-17 years of age, who were studying in the 10th and 11th grades on high school; 5 of them are studying mathematics, 3 of them are studying experimental science, 3 of them are studying humanities and 2 of them are studying electronics. Each of them had at least three months of work experience in Computer Shop, Shopping Center, Café, Supermarket, Aluminum Making, Toreutics, Copper smithing, Photography and project work. Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the conducted interviews, the barriers to academic-career decision making self-efficacy include 3 social, environmental and educational dimensions, each of which is explained in a separate table.

Table 1. Social Dimension

Statements	Concepts	Sub-categories	Main category
One of the problems can be social media, such as Telegram, or Instagram. When someone is occupied with them, he/she loses the track of time.	Addiction to social media	Addiction	Unhealthy Social Environment
I am addicted to computer games, especially this year, when I get home, I start using computer until seven in the evening. Afterwards, I go to gym, drive around and then, go home. That's my daily routine, which I cannot control.	Addiction to computer games		
Drug addiction is the biggest problem that can arise. Many of the adolescents tend to smoke cigarette or hookah in the parties.	Drug addiction		
Most of my friends study in the field of experimental sciences, just like me. I know that they are lying and saying they have not studied their lessons, so that they could deceive their friends and they could get better marks.	Unhealthy competition	Unhealthy relationships	
There are many friends who cause you to fail and create obstacles for you. For instance, they make you busy with things you should not do.			
Sometimes, there are friends who act like a barrier. I need to be able to stop thinking about them and focus on my studies and my goal.	The effect of culture on friend		
Not having a friend to compete with, so as to achieve a position. The most important thing that a friend can do is encouraging you. Secondly, financial support is also important.	Not having a supportive friend		
Well, there is much difference between the person who grows in a rich environment, compared to the one who is in a poorer environment.		External constraints	

A: Social Dimension

From the analysis of the obtained data, it was found that one of the factors that can be a barrier to students' self-efficacy is the society the person lives in, here called as the Social Dimension. This dimension includes the main category of unhealthy social environment. Human is a social being and lives on account of social interactions and relationships, and also affects and is affected by the environment. The positive effects of the environment on a person can cause him to grow and flourish, and the negative effects may harm him/her. The main category obtained in open coding in the social dimension was called unhealthy social environment, which includes three categories of addiction, unhealthy relationships, and external constraints, as described in Table 1.

Table 2. Environmental Dimension

Statements	Concepts	Sub-categories	Main category
In our country, the government does not support the employment of young people. For instance, when a young person comes up with an idea and wants to start something new, the government prevent his/her plans from succeeding, instead of supporting him/her. As a young person, when I see such things in the society, I feel that I don't have enough motivations to continue.	Lack of government support for the employment of youth	Lack of government support	Lack of job security
We have a lot of genius students, but the government doesn't support us. For example, a country like America doesn't have any resources, but unlike us, they are constantly moving forward. The US government provides the capital for those who have new ideas. Bout our government doesn't provide us with these facilities. The teams who are going abroad for competitions either have a lot of money, their parents have supported them or pulled up the string for somebody, so they can go compete for foreign teams.	The lack of government scientific support for young elites		
Now, our country is under sanctions and these sanctions have badly affected our economy. The government support domestic production. For instance, if someone wants a lone for his/her job, they should give them without negotiations and the banks should participate in the process, but unfortunately, that is not the case now. The banks interests are high, they don't give loans to people and the producers suffer lose.	Lack of financial support from the government	Wrong policies of the government	
Everyone says that there are no job opportunities for young people in the society. People cannot be employed in governmental positions. For example, we all go to study and want to become teachers, but we won't be employed by the education organizations or other organs. There are no job opportunities for us.	Limited job opportunities		
I planned to study nuclear physics until the 9th grade, but despite the current situation in the country, I completely struck it from my though, because it depends on the government's decisions. For example, a government opposes this, and the other one concludes the same contract.	Wrong decisions of the government		
Well, in addition to my studies, I am doing Toreutics. When I look at the works of other artists of this field in another countries, I see that they works are not that much professional. However, they are value them a	Failure of the government to value some special jobs		

lot. But we are living in a society where a worker is paid way better than an artist doing Toreutics.			
In developed countries, everything is sorted out for the students and they know what they are going to do in the future. For example, a student says that if I don't become a doctor, there is another job that will be more profitable, but in Iran, the student says that if I don't become a doctor, then shame on me.	Uncertainty about the future career		
In our country, the person studies in a field and works in a completely different field. For instance, he/she studied nuclear engineering but works in the wastewater industry.	Incompatibility between academic field and career		
There are various financial problems. Well, my father can't provide some of the things that he should do so. I have to work on my own and this will damage my studies if I don't try.	Financial problems	Difficult economic conditions	
There has been inflation recently and this puts a lot of pressure on people. For example, when everything is expensive, it becomes difficult for a person to buy clothes and food to live a more prosperous life and he/she should try hard constantly.	The difficulty of providing for the basic needs		
Inflation is very high now. Well, many families cannot afford paying 300-400 thousand Tomans for some notebooks. They often do not send their children to school.	Inflation		
Nowadays, you must pull up the string for somebody, wherever you want to go.	Pulling the string for somebody	Lack of meritocracy	
Nowadays, a mafia governs everything. For instance, we can produce a series of parts that are even better than the foreign sample. But, those at the head do not want it to happen, because they import these parts and they will benefit from it.	Mafia		
If there is a university entrance exam, it should at least be the same for everyone, not that, for example, someone whose father was a sacrificer has a quota. It is true that we might respect the sacrificers, but the conditions might be the same for everyone.	Discrimination in entrance exam		

B: The Environmental Dimension

This dimension includes a main category called "job insecurity". Choosing the right career and stability in that job depends on many factors. According to the analysis of the collected data, job insecurity can be divided into 4 categories of: lack of government support, wrong government policies, tough economic conditions, and lack of meritocracy, and each category has its own subcategories, which are described in Table 2.

Table 3. Educational Dimension

Statements	Concepts	Sub-categories	Main category
At this time when I come to school, I don't find any of the lessons they teach us useful for me to get the job I want.	Ineffective education	Theory-oriented education	Wrong education policies
The lessons should be practical. We should be able to use what they teach us later in the future. For example, I want to study in the field of nuclear energy and work in the nuclear industry, but knowing literary devices will not help me. Knowing these subjects, as much as I can talk and read and write an article, would be enough.	Inapplicability of education in schools		
The school should provide the students with the opportunity to study so that the students can study better. The tools and equipment that should be provided for better education of all students are not available. For example, there are the best teaching tool in a school, but it another one, there isn't even a blackboard and the teacher teaches in a difficult condition.	Lack of similar educational facilities		
In other countries, many things are free for students and they can use them, including learning another language or going to a sports field. But if we want to learn something else here, we have to go to class. With these high costs that we have to pay and the bad economic situation of the country, it is not possible to do many things. But the students of other countries can easily learn another language without paying extra because the school is giving them proper education for free.	Cost effectiveness of education	Cost effective education	
University Entrance Exam is something unfair. On the one hand, it is the marketing side of the aspect for selling books and classes. For example, the one who wrote our geometry book is the biggest shareholder of Gaj (one of the publishers of school books). He eliminates some parts of our school book so as to add it to the supplementary books. Now, anyone who wants to be admitted to a good university has to pay a lot of money for books, tests and private classes.	Cost effectiveness of university entrance exam		
Schools do not pay the same attention to literature, experimental sciences and mathematics. We have to try hard so that they could take us on a school trip, but it is not the same for them. They take them on these trips easily even though our rank is higher than them. They let us down and even the students who study experimental sciences gloating over us and say that they have biology, physics and chemistry.	Discriminating between study fields	Failure to identify talents	
The entrance exam prevents the development of people's talents. For example, someone who likes dentistry must study hard to get a two-digit rank in the university entrance exam. If he can't, then of course he can't study dentistry. When you don't have enough money to go to Azad University, you have to choose another field.	Loss of talents through university entrance exams		
In our school, there was no counselor who was sympathetic and came to tell us about the majors. Not that we didn't have a consultant, we had, but he didn't tell us anything. For example, I wanted to go to the electronics academy, well, I really liked this field, but our advisor kept saying that the academy is for lazy students and you shouldn't go.	Lack of career counseling in schools		

Education is one of the most important and influential factors on the success and progress of students in a country. Using open coding, the main category obtained in the education dimension was called "wrong education policies". The decisions and policies taken in education sector can lead to the growth and development of the talents and abilities of the children of that society, and if these policies are adopted unwisely and without considering the goals and infrastructure of that society, children of that society face many problems, the results of which directly affect the future of that society. In open coding, according to the analysis of the obtained data, the wrong education policies include categories such as theory-based education, costly education, and lack of identification of talents, which are mentioned in Table 3.

Based on the barriers obtained from the experience and the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews with the students, a paradigm model was designed, consisting of causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies and actions. Finally, its consequences are shown separately in the model below. Job insecurity is considered as the core and main focus of the model, because job insecurity is the main barrier for students to achieve career success.

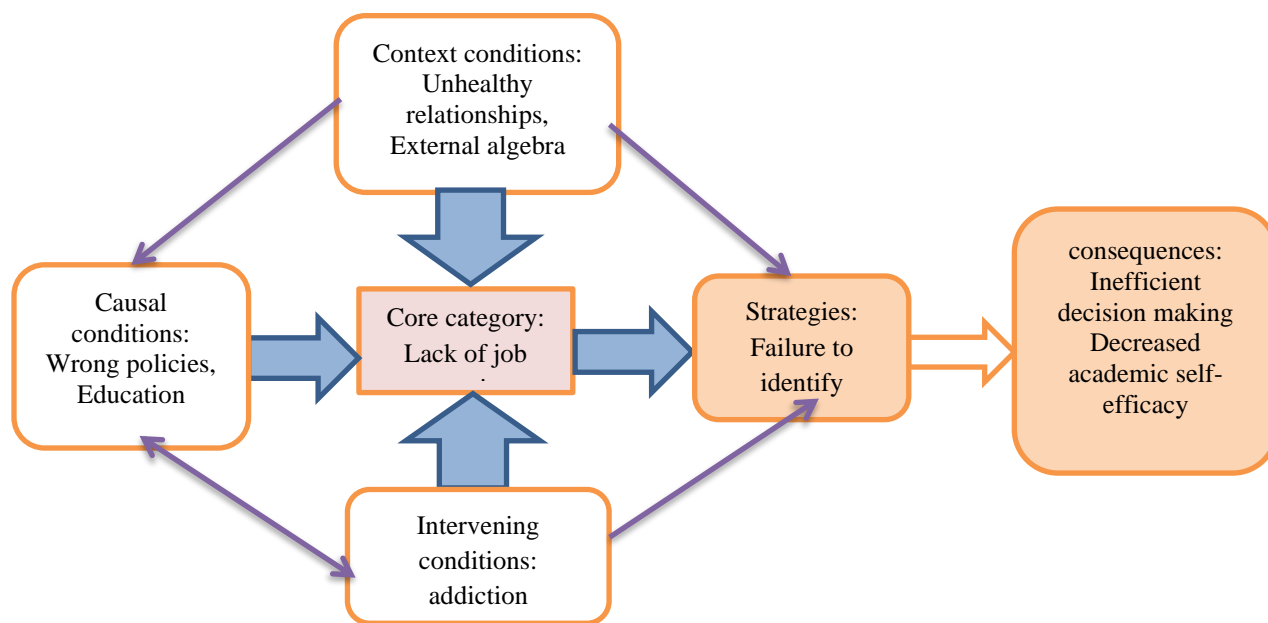


Figure 1. The effect of social, political and educational factors on the decision-making self-efficacy of adolescents (Paradigm model)

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the conducted interviews, the barriers to academic-career decision making self-efficacy include three dimensions of social (unhealthy social environment), environmental (lack of job security), educational (wrong education policies), explained in detail below.

One of the categories obtained from the interview with the participants of this research in the social dimension was named unhealthy social environment. The reason for emphasizing on the role of unhealthy social environment is that people are dependent on their social environment and the basis of career-related issues are both individual and environmental variables. On the other hand, both self-revelation and environment revelation help convey the effects of the quality of social communication on the decision-making self-efficacy of adolescents (Chan, 2017; Jiang, 2017). Career decision-making self-efficacy is defined as psychological characteristics that are affected by psychological and social factors, which together form the composition and career path of people throughout their lives (Patton & McMahon, 2014). On the other hand, empirical findings demonstrate that peer group are effective in the career decision making self-efficacy (Cinamon & Dunn, 2010; Flouri et al., 2015; Oren et al., 2013). If a child or teenager gravitates to inappropriate social groups due to inappropriate social conditions, whether in virtual space or in person, it will affect his self-efficacy in future decisions. Researches have focused on friends and peers as factors affecting academic-career decision making self-efficacy and have stated that children's experiences in the field of social communication and social networks affect their future professional self-efficacy (Rani, 2014). Unhealthy social environment, addiction to social media and etc. make the teenager unable to manage issues related to academic-career fields. When social support is stronger, academic-career self- efficacy increases. On the other hand, addiction to the Internet, etc., can distance adolescents from the real world and affect their ability to recognize and analyze, solve problems, and finally make decisions due to the wrong image they have drawn of themselves. In his research, Rahmati (2018) stated that addiction to internet has a direct and negative effect on self-efficacy, in such a way that people who have high self-efficacy show a deeper interest in the activities they participate in and feel more commitment to their activities. Therefore, when they are exposed to negative events or stressful situations, a high sense of self-efficacy helps them manage those events and situations, therefore, they will be safe in in dealing

with many psychological problems, including addiction to internet. These people will also be more academically successful, since many of the people addicted to internet sacrifice most of their useful academic time to fruitless and impractical use of the internet. From among the barriers found in the environmental dimension that affects the academic-career decision making self-efficacy was called job insecurity. Nowadays, it is difficult to find a job that both brings inner satisfaction and provide the people with their financial needs and like any other purposeful action, it requires seriousness and unceasing effort (Haqshan, 2018). Consequently, when job conditions are not safe and a person cannot have a safe career in his favorite field in the future, his/her self-efficacy is affected, giving him/her a negative attitude towards his/her abilities in the fields of interest. In their study, Xin, Tang, Li & Zhou concluded that the economic status and family income affect students' decision-making self-efficacy. Being under difficult economic conditions decrease the people's career decision making self-efficacy. Carter (Carter, quoted by Shafiabadi, 2007) believes that indecisiveness is a learned phenomenon, that is, those who have never been allowed to make independent decisions in their lives will face doubts in choosing a career and making decisions in the future. Therefore, if a teenager lives in an environment where various career and educational opportunities face him with an insecure future, and he/she chooses only based on the current state of job opportunities and their limitations, rather than freely based on his/her interests, it will result in inefficiency in decision-making. Poursaeed et al., (2016) demonstrated that ordinal regression model showed that the variables of age, structural and political, economic and personality characteristics have the greatest effect on the probability of career decision making of graduates and predict 58% of its changes. Adolescents cannot act properly in their academic-career decisions without the existence of a suitable career atmosphere in the society, and as a result, it can be said that a safe work environment in any society is one of the important elements in the development of academic-career decision making self-efficacy. Also, a suitable working atmosphere can help in promoting self-efficacy in people's career decisions in the future, make them more confident in their career decisions, affects their motivation, makes them act more willingly and have a higher career self-efficacy.

Another barrier that affects the career decision making self-efficacy in adolescents, which was classified in the educational dimension, was called the wrong educational policies. Educational institutions, by using new constructive approaches of psychology such as constructivism, can

develop learners' interests, values and experiences through the revelation, and in this way, they get a positive image about who they are and how these internal characteristics shape their future academic-career decisions (Guan et al., 2016). In fact, educational institutions provide the necessary conditions for various work experiences so that learners can express their talents and interests. They were also involved in career games so that they could get acquainted with different job roles and discover themselves and their careers. These findings are indirectly aligned with the results of various researches (Liu et al., 2015). In this regard, if educational institutions focus on teaching only theoretical topics instead of developing students' skills and creating the necessary platform for self-knowledge and improving students' self-efficacy, and education budgets are distributed in the wrong fields instead of investing for the students' future career and education, learners will not have enough efficacy. The quality of the educational environment and the approaches governing the educational environment directly affects the quality of student's educational-career self-efficacy. These findings are in line with the results of the research conducted by Agbinyo and Kalt (2014). According to them, a suitable educational environment is considered a useful source for career-educational decisions (Agbinyo & Kalt, 2014).

All educational systems try to improve the people's career decision-making self-efficacy. Therefore, all educational systems have been determined to identify the factors that cause changes in the progress and job performance of students and try to improve them. In this regard, so as to increase the academic-career decision making self-efficacy, it is better to help the students in the path of growth and development by creating a healthy social environment and a safe work environment for developing talents. By changing some educational policies, this assistance can be done in a better way.

The present qualitative research tried to investigate the barriers to self-efficacy that exists on the way of adolescents' decision making, which affects their choice of field of study and career in the future. By presenting and identifying these barriers, it is possible to create an approach to solve them and advance high educational and career goals. Thus, it is suggested to provide ways to strengthen and improve the self-efficacy of students through the formation of educational workshops in schools, based on the theory of self-efficacy and according to the components obtained from the research, since a high sense of self-efficacy causes more effort, resistance and flexibility, and people with high self-efficacy believe that they are able to be effectively affected

by events in their lives and expect more success in various fields, including academic performance. So as to measure the variables in the present study, a qualitative method was used to collect data, which can have the limitations of qualitative research, including the lack of generalizability of the findings. Also, the statistical population used in this research were male adolescents. It is better to use female adolescents as a statistical population for better generalization of the results in future researches.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Ardakan University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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