Determinants of School Orientation in Urban and Rural Areas of Analamanga Antananarivo, Madagascar

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ABSTRACT

School orientation constitutes a decisive stage in students' educational trajectories, influencing their motivation, academic achievement, and future professional prospects. Although this choice should ideally be guided by each student's personal aspirations, abilities, and interests, it is often shaped by a range of external factors, notably familial, economic, cultural, and geographical influences. In many contexts, orientation decisions do not result from a free and informed process but rather from sometimes constraining influences exerted by parents, teachers, or the social environment. This study examines the dynamics of school orientation in two contrasting contexts: urban and rural settings. It aims to highlight the impact of variables such as family income, parents' level of education, their educational attitudes and expectations, as well as students' perceptions of their own abilities and career prospects. Through a comparative analysis, the study seeks to understand how these factors, depending on the context, contribute to either enhancing or constraining students' freedom of choice in their educational pathways.

Keywords: *School Orientation, Educational Trajectories, Motivation, Family Influence, Socioeconomic Status, Career Prospects.*

1.INTRODUCTION

School orientation constitutes a decisive stage in a student's educational pathway, influencing both their academic trajectory and future professional integration. At the international level, numerous studies show that this choice results from the interaction of social, economic, and personal factors, including family resources, parents' level of education, motivation, self-confidence, social stereotypes, peer influence, and the role of teachers (Duru-Bellat, 2002; Lahire, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Viau, 2009; Dubet & Martuccelli, 1996; Meirieu, 2007). These factors contribute to directing students toward certain educational tracks, sometimes independently of their actual aspirations.

In Madagascar, the dynamics observed at the international level take on specific forms. Economic constraints and social inequalities often push students toward technical or vocational tracks, perceived as a rapid means of accessing income, rather than toward choices based on vocation (Rakotoarisoa, 2018; Razafiarivony, 2018; Ranaivoson, 2020). Social stereotypes further reinforce these trajectories: certain tracks are considered reserved for the more privileged, while others are viewed as "default pathways" (Randriamanantena, 2021). Limited family support, a lack of familiarity with the implicit codes of schooling, and perceptions of career prospects also influence orientation decisions, affecting students' motivation and academic success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Rayou, 2010; Andriamananjara, 2017; Rabearivelo, 2020).

In this context, this study examines the factors determining students' choice of educational tracks in urban and rural areas of Madagascar, testing the hypothesis that social and personal dimensions significantly influence these decisions. The survey was conducted in two contrasting contexts: rural high schools in Ankazobe and urban high schools in Ampefiloha, in order to assess the combined impact of socio-economic, geographical, and cultural contexts on school orientation. However, the limited sample size and the subjectivity of responses constitute constraints on the generalizability of the results.

2. METHODS

The survey was conducted in secondary schools located in rural areas of Ankazobe and urban areas of Ampefiloha. This choice of sites allows for a comparison of school orientation dynamics according to geographical and socio-economic contexts. These two settings have distinct characteristics: the urban area is more industrialized, while the rural zone has only two major companies, JIRAMA and STAR Andranovelona. This configuration provides an opportunity to examine several questions: do students from rural areas make the same choices as those from urban areas? Do low-income families orient their children differently? Do local opportunities and constraints influence the educational paths chosen?

The study targeted students in the 11th and 12th grades of secondary school. A purposive sampling method was used to ensure the representativeness of different opinions, and a total of 160 questionnaires were distributed.

The main data collection tool was a self-administered questionnaire, structured into several sections: socio-demographic data, perceptions of educational tracks, factors influencing orientation choices, and perceptions of career prospects.

The collected data were coded and entered using SPSS 20. The analysis consisted of descriptive statistical treatments and cross-tabulations of variables. The hypothesis that "personal and social factors influence the choice of educational tracks" was tested by comparing urban and rural settings and by evaluating various factors, including family-related factors, peer relationships, the role of teachers, and personal factors.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Family Factors Influencing School Orientation

3.1.1. Economic Resources

Table 1: Financial resources

Place / Choice / Income	urban			
	Freedom of choice	%	Imposed choice	%
Low	8	10	4	5
Medium	32	40	18	22,5
High	13	16,25	5	6,25
Total	53	66,25	27	33,75
Rural				
Low	10	12,5	13	16,25
Medium	23	28,75	27	33,75
High	5	6,25	2	2,5
Total	38	47,5	42	52,5

The majority of urban students (66.25%) have the freedom to choose their educational track, while one-third (33.75%) have their orientation imposed. This autonomy is particularly high among students from middle-income families (40%), followed by those from high-income families (16.25%) and low-income families (10%). Conversely, choice is more often imposed in low-income families (22.5%) than in high-income families (6.25%).

In rural areas, the dynamic is reversed: 52.5% of students experience an imposed choice, compared to 47.5% who have the freedom to choose their educational track. Middle-income families remain the most likely to grant this freedom (28.75%), although their proportion is lower than that observed in urban areas. Low-income families more frequently impose their children's orientation (16.25%) than allow them to choose freely (12.5%).

3.1.2. Parents' Educational Level and Transmitted Educational Values

Table 2: Level of Education

Location/level/orientation	Urban			
	Oriented	%	Not oriented	%
Primary	4	5	16	14
Secondary	22	23	18	15
University	25	31	19	13
Total	27	59	53	42
Rural				
Primary	9	15	6	16
Secondary	21	15	18	29
University	12	6	13	19
Total	42	36	37	64

In the urban context, 59% of students report being guided by their parents, while 42% do not experience direct parental influence. The degree of parental involvement appears to be strongly correlated with parents' educational level: 31% of parents with a university degree participate in their child's orientation, compared to 23% of those with a secondary education and only 5% of parents whose education is limited to the primary level. These data indicate that the higher the family's educational capital, the greater the involvement in school orientation.

In rural areas, the trend is markedly reversed: only 36% of students are guided by their parents, compared to 64% who have greater autonomy or are left to make their own choices. Here again, parental influence is linked to educational level. The majority of parents have low educational attainment (75%), but only 30% of them participate in orientation. University-educated parents, who are fewer in number (25%), are even less involved (6%), reflecting an overall lower level of parental involvement regardless of educational capital.

3.1.3. Parental support and involvement

Table 3: Parental involvement

Location / Parental Attitude / Student Orientation	Urban		
	Encouraging	Permissive	Authoritarian
Guided by others	5	7	15
Free to choose	35	14	4
Total	40	21	19
Rural			
Guided by others	10	8	24
Free to choose	25	10	3
Total	35	18	27

In urban areas, parental attitudes appear closely linked to the degree of autonomy granted to students in their orientation. Parents with an encouraging attitude (40 cases) mostly favor freedom of choice, as reflected by the 35 students who were able to decide their educational track themselves. Authoritative parents (19 cases) tend to impose orientation, with 15 students from these families reporting that their track was decided by others. Permissive parents (21 cases) occupy an intermediate position, with a slight predominance toward freedom of choice (14 students), reflecting a more flexible but less structured involvement.

In rural areas, the dynamic differs significantly. Authoritative parents (27 cases) are mostly associated with imposed orientation, affecting 24 students. Encouraging parents (35 cases) also support freedom of choice (25 students), but to a lesser extent than in urban areas, suggesting a context where overall autonomy is more limited. Permissive parents (18 cases) show a relative balance between freedom and imposed orientation, with a slight tendency in favor of free choice (10 students).

3.1.4. Family and Social Networks

Table 4: Influence of Family and Social Networks

Location / Parental Expectations / Guidance / Motivation	Urban			
	Mandatory guidance	Free choice	Motivated student	Demotivated student
Very high	15	22	25	12
Reasonable	7	19	17	8
Low	5	12	12	6
Total	27	53	54	26
Rural				
Very high	26	10	16	20
Reasonable	12	18	13	17
Low	4	10	5	9
Total	42	38	34	46

In urban areas, parental expectations differently influence students' decision-making autonomy and motivation. When expectations are very high, 15 students report an imposed orientation, compared to 22 who enjoy freedom of choice. Despite this pressure, a majority (25 students) remain motivated, while 12 show signs of demotivation. When expectations are considered moderate, freedom of choice clearly predominates: 19 students choose their track, versus 7 subjected to parental orientation. Motivation remains relatively high (17 students), with only 8 reporting demotivation. Finally, in families with low expectations, the tendency toward autonomy is confirmed (12 free choices versus 5 imposed), with a majority of students motivated (12) and a smaller proportion demotivated (6).

In rural areas, parental expectations have a stronger impact on imposed choices and student motivation. When expectations are very high, orientation is predominantly imposed (26 cases), with only 10 autonomous choices. Demotivation is particularly pronounced (20 students), exceeding levels of motivation (16 students). For moderate expectations, a more balanced distribution emerges: 18 students retain freedom of choice, compared to 12 subjected to imposed orientation. However, demotivation (17 students) remains slightly higher than motivation (13 students). In families with low expectations, freedom of choice becomes more frequent (10 cases versus 4 imposed orientations), but motivation remains moderate (5 students), with demotivation more pronounced (9 students).

3.2. Peer Influence, Social Network and Personal Factors

3.2.1. Peer influence, teachers and social pressure

Table 5: Influencers

Location / Guidance	Urban	%	Rural	%
Family	12	44	10	24
Friends	10	37	13	31
Teacher	5	19	19	45
Total	27	100	42	100

In urban areas, the family constitutes the main source of influence in the school orientation process, accounting for 44% of cases. Peer influence also remains significant (37%), reflecting the weight of social dynamics in educational choices. In contrast, teachers intervene in only 19% of cases, indicating a relatively secondary role in orientation support in the urban context.

In rural areas, the configuration is reversed. Teachers become the predominant actors in the orientation process (45%), playing a major role due to more limited or less informed family guidance. Peer influence remains important (31%), confirming the central role of social interactions in orientation decisions. The family, on the other hand, intervenes in only 24% of cases, reflecting a more limited role in guiding students' educational choices in rural settings.

3.2.2. Motivation

Table 6: Future Plan by Motivation

Future Projection	Urban		Rural	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Motivated	39	15	23	11
Unmotivated	10	16	17	29
Total	49	31	40	40

Among motivated students, a majority of 79.6% (39 out of 49) express a clear outlook toward the future, suggesting a strong link between academic motivation and students' future vision. A significant proportion of 61.5% of unmotivated students (16 out of 26) report having no future projection, highlighting the lack of prospects as a factor contributing to demotivation.

In rural areas, only 57.5% of motivated students (23 out of 40) report having a future outlook, indicating a weaker connection between motivation and future projection compared to urban areas. Among unmotivated students, 63% (29 out of 46) perceive no future projection, reinforcing the idea that the lack of prospects significantly contributes to demotivation in this context.

3.2.3. Self-Esteem and Confidence in One's Abilities

Table 7: Le niveau d'estime et de confiance en soi

Self-Esteem / Sense of Personal Effectiveness and Type of Guidance Choice	Urban			
	Self-Esteem	Perceived Effectiveness	Free Choice	Influenced Choice
High	19	17	16	20
Medium	18	12	13	17
Low	8	6	5	9
Total	45	35	34	46
Rural				
High	27	10	25	12
Medium	14	11	17	8
Low	10	8	12	6
Total	51	29	54	26

Students with high self-esteem and high personal efficacy:
- o In rural areas: Among the 27 students with high self-esteem and the 10 with high perceived efficacy, 25 made a free orientation choice, while 12 were influenced in their choice.
- o In urban areas: Among the 19 students with high self-esteem and the 17 with high perceived efficacy, 16 opted for a free choice, while 20 experienced external influence in their decision.

Students with average self-esteem and average perceived efficacy:
- o In rural areas: Among 14 students with average self-esteem and 11 with average perceived efficacy, the majority made a free choice (17) compared to 8 who were influenced.
- o In urban areas: Among 18 students with average self-esteem and 12 with average perceived efficacy, 13 chose freely, while 17 were influenced.

Students with Low Self-Esteem and Low Perceived Efficacy:
- o In rural areas: Among 10 students with low self-esteem and 8 with low perceived efficacy, 12 made a free choice, while 6 were influenced in their orientation.
- o In urban areas: Among 8 students with low self-esteem and 6 with low perceived efficacy, only 5 made a free choice, while 9 were influenced in their decision.

3.2.4. Perception of career prospects

Table 8: Awareness of Career Prospects

Perception of Career Opportunities	Urban			
	Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation	Free Choice	Influenced Choice
Very Favorable	25	12	25	12
Moderately Favorable	16	9	17	8
Low/Uncertain	9	9	12	6
Total	50	30	54	26
rural				
Very Favorable	23	13	16	20
Moderately Favorable	25	5	13	17
Low/Uncertain	9	5	5	9
Total	57	23	34	46

Urban area
- o Perception of very favorable opportunities: among students with a very favorable perception of career prospects, 25 exhibit strong intrinsic motivation, leading them to make a free choice, compared to 12 whose motivation is extrinsic. This dynamic indicates a high level of decision-making autonomy linked to a positive view of their professional future.
- o Perception of moderately favorable opportunities: A decrease in intrinsic motivation is observed, with an increased number of influenced choices (8), suggesting greater hesitation or a higher reliance on external opinions in decision-making.
- o Perception of low or uncertain opportunities: When career prospects are perceived as low or uncertain, the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation weakens, leading to more uncertain orientation. In this case, influenced choices increase (6), likely due to decisions made by default or under pressure.

Rural area
- o Perception of very favorable opportunities: Students perceiving very favorable career prospects exhibit strong intrinsic motivation, leading them to make a free choice (16). This perception of opportunities appears to enhance their engagement and autonomy in the decision-making process.
- o Perception of moderately favorable or low opportunities: When career prospects are perceived as less favorable, the opposite phenomenon occurs, with an increase in influenced choices, reaching 17 and 9, respectively. These choices are mainly guided by family or influenced by social pressures, suggesting lower autonomy in decision-making in rural areas.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Family Factors Influencing School Orientation

4.1.1. Economic resources

The observed results confirm the hypothesis that personal and social factors influence the choice of educational tracks. Indeed, family income and place of residence appear as major determinants of school orientation. In rural areas, families more frequently impose the choice of track, often due to economic constraints, cultural limitations, or restricted access to information. This situation reduces students' decision-making freedom and may steer their choices toward options perceived as safe or immediate, at the expense of their personal interests and motivation.

Conversely, in urban areas, families with middle or high incomes generally provide greater freedom in choosing educational tracks, allowing students to align their decisions more closely with their personal aspirations and interests. These observations are consistent with the work of J. Workman (2022), which shows that income inequalities create disparities in the quality of the family and school environment, affecting both academic performance and orientation opportunities.

Thus, social and geographical inequalities strongly shape students' decision-making power, affecting their autonomy, motivation, and ultimately their academic success. Economically stable families can provide support and freedom of choice, whereas economic constraints often direct decisions toward tracks perceived as safer or more immediately accessible. These results therefore highlight the decisive role of social and personal factors in school orientation.

4.1.2. Parents' Educational Level and Transmitted Educational Values

Orientation is more frequent in urban areas (59%) than in rural areas (36%), largely due to parents' educational level. In urban settings, more educated parents actively participate in their children's orientation by providing guidance, monitoring, and support, thereby promoting more informed choices and enabling students to pursue longer or more ambitious educational tracks (Nurnisaa & Mugi Lestar, 2025; Xiaoman Zo, 2023).

In rural areas, parents' low educational level and limited access to information reduce their ability to effectively support students, who then rely more heavily on the school and social representations to guide their educational paths. The cultural capital transmitted by parents plays a crucial role: advantaged families possess knowledge, educational practices, and networks that facilitate school orientation, whereas disadvantaged or less educated families lack guidance and resources, sometimes leading to default choices (Bourdieu, 1979; Rabearisoa, 2020).

Thus, parents' educational level and cultural capital strongly determine students' ability to make autonomous and informed choices, explaining the observed differences between urban and rural settings. This finding illustrates that school orientation does not depend solely on students' personal interests but is closely linked to social and family factors, confirming the initial hypothesis.

4.1.3. Parental Support and Involvement

An encouraging parental attitude is strongly correlated with autonomous orientation, especially in urban areas, where parents place greater value on listening to and actively involving their children in decision-making. Conversely, in rural areas, more authoritative attitudes limit students' decision-making freedom and may steer choices toward options perceived as safe or imposed.

This dynamic can be explained by the direct impact of parental attitude on the child's self-confidence and perception of their abilities. Positive support, based on encouragement and recognition of the student's individuality, promotes orientation choices consistent with their interests and capabilities (Guichard & Huteau, 2006). Conversely, a directive or normative attitude can generate stress, demotivation, and even early reorientations (Lannegrand-Willems & Lecigne, 2009).

In the Malagasy context, empirical studies confirm these trends: students from families that value autonomy exhibit greater stability in their educational pathways, whereas those strongly subjected to parental choices often develop a gradual disengagement from their chosen track (Randrianasolo, 2019; Rakoto, 2021).

Thus, parental attitude constitutes a key social factor that shapes students' freedom of choice and motivation, confirming the hypothesis that social factors significantly influence school orientation.

4.1.4. Family and social networks

Students' motivation is closely linked to the nature of parental expectations and the degree of freedom granted in their choices. In urban areas, high expectations can be perceived positively when students retain the freedom to choose their track, fostering active engagement consistent with their interests. In contrast, in rural areas, overly high expectations or imposed orientation can generate significant demotivation, limiting students' investment in their educational pathway.

Parental expectations exert explicit or implicit pressure on students' choices, influencing their orientation even when it does not align with their abilities or personal motivations (Montandon & Perrenoud, 1996). In Madagascar, Ranaivoson (2021) observes that in public high schools in the Analamanga region, many students are directed toward prestigious tracks to meet family ambitions. While this guided orientation can enhance academic success in some cases, it can also lead to disengagement and demotivation when the chosen pathway does not match the student's aspirations.

Students' motivation depends on both personal factors and family social influence, confirming that parental expectations and freedom of choice are key determinants of school orientation. These results highlight the importance of fostering a balanced dialogue between family aspirations and the student's personal goals.

The family plays a central and multidimensional role in the school orientation process. Economic and cultural resources, transmitted values, and explicit or implicit parental expectations interact to shape students' educational choices. Successful orientation depends on a balance between parental support and the child's autonomy. It is therefore essential to raise families' awareness of the importance of non-directive support, allowing students to develop their identity, make informed decisions, and pursue an educational path aligned with their skills and aspirations. Such an approach not only promotes individual success but also contributes to a better alignment between trained human resources and the needs of national development.

4.2. Peer Influence, Social Networks, and Personal Factors

4.2.1. Peer Influence, Teachers, and Social Pressure

In urban areas, the family plays a predominant role in orientation decisions, whereas in rural areas, teachers are the main influencers, reflecting social and geographical inequalities in access to informed guidance.

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Siccard (2025) emphasizes that in the rural context, teachers' representations and practices, along with material conditions, largely determine students' choices, demonstrating that orientation does not depend solely on individual variables such as motivation or academic performance.

Peer influence and social networks constitute another key factor. Students, especially during adolescence, seek to belong to a group and may adopt orientation choices aligned with their peers' decisions, sometimes at the expense of their own interests or abilities (Randrianasolo, 2019; Fleury-Bahi et al., 2009; Rakoto, 2021). These mechanisms of identification and social pressure confirm that school orientation results from complex interactions between individual, familial, institutional, and social factors.

These observations support the idea that orientation cannot be understood solely through the student's personal characteristics: the social, familial, and school environment plays a decisive role in educational choices and underscores the need for individualized support, enabling students to develop autonomy and resist social influences that may limit their academic and professional development.

4.2.2. Motivation

The data confirm the hypothesis that personal and social factors influence school orientation, showing that students' ability to envision their future is a key determinant of their motivation and engagement. In urban areas, students with clear goals related to their studies or future careers demonstrate high academic engagement, suggesting a direct link between future projection and involvement in their educational pathway. In rural areas, although this relationship exists, it is less pronounced, likely due to limited access to information, insufficient guidance, and perceived fewer opportunities, thereby reducing students' ability to project themselves effectively.

These results are consistent with the work of Amoadu et al. (2025) in Ghana, which shows that motivation and academic resilience are significant predictors of school engagement, regardless of urban or rural context. Thus, future projection acts as a key personal factor, capable of stimulating motivation and guiding educational choices. However, the social and geographical context, particularly in rural areas, can modulate the strength of this effect, highlighting the importance of enhanced support to help students envision their future and give meaning to their educational pathway.

4.2.3. Self-esteem and confidence in one's abilities

Self-esteem and the sense of personal efficacy strongly influence students' autonomy in choosing their educational track, thus validating the hypothesis that personal and social factors play a determining role. In both urban and rural contexts, high self-esteem enables students to make decisions aligned with their interests and actual abilities (Bandura, 1997; Rosenberg, 1965). This link is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where confident students, often a minority, receive targeted support and manage to exercise significant autonomy despite limited resources.

In urban areas, even with higher perceived efficacy, students are more exposed to direct influence from their family and social environment, indicating that self-confidence alone is not sufficient to ensure fully autonomous choices. These observations are consistent with the work of Rosenberg (1965) and Eccles & Wigfield (2002), who emphasize that self-esteem and motivational beliefs, reinforced by family and school support, facilitate future projection, academic engagement, and thoughtful orientation choices. In Madagascar, Rasoanirina (2018) shows that students benefiting from a stimulating family climate exhibit greater confidence in their academic decisions, whereas a less supportive environment can generate doubt and passivity (Drouin, 2014).

Self-esteem constitutes a major lever for decision-making autonomy and academic success. Promoting a positive family and social environment is essential to support students in building their identity and making informed and sustainable orientation decisions.

4.2.4. Perception of career prospects

The perception of career prospects constitutes a key social and cognitive factor in the orientation process, thereby confirming the hypothesis that students' choices depend not only on their interests or abilities but also on socially constructed representations. In both urban and rural areas, many students direct their choices toward tracks perceived as "promising" or socially valued, such as medicine, management, or law, regardless of their actual vocation (Lemoine, 2017; Rakotomalala, 2019). This logic of "educational profitability" is amplified in contexts where information on career prospects is limited, partial, or biased by family, school, or media influences (Giret, 2015).

In Madagascar, socio-economic constraints and the structure of the labor market amplify this trend. Students from modest backgrounds, facing pressure for immediate returns and possessing low cultural capital, are more often directed toward "practical" tracks to secure quick employment, whereas students with greater resources can afford to pursue pathways aligned with their aspirations (Boudon, 1973; Razafindrakoto & Roubaud, 2020). Moreover, the lack of individualized guidance and reliable information about careers limits students' ability to make informed choices, potentially leading to demotivation, reorientations, or school dropouts.

These results highlight the importance of structured and personalized guidance systems, enabling students to reconcile personal interests, abilities, and socio-economic realities. An accurate and well-supported perception of career prospects thus becomes a key lever for sustainable and appropriate school orientation, confirming that the social and institutional environment plays a central role in orientation decisions.

5. CONCLUSION

School orientation appears as a complex, multidimensional process closely linked to students' social, familial, and personal contexts. The results of this study confirm that the family environment is a key factor: economic and cultural resources, transmitted values, and parental expectations directly influence students' perception of their abilities and possible pathways. Likewise, the social environment, including peers and teachers, plays a determining role by consciously or unconsciously guiding students' choices, while motivation, self-esteem, and perception of career prospects shape their engagement and ability to make autonomous decisions.

The comparative analysis of urban and rural contexts illustrates the impact of social and geographical inequalities: in urban areas, more flexible family support, higher parental education, and greater economic resources promote more autonomous orientation aligned with students' interests. In contrast, in rural areas, orientation is often imposed by parents or the school, constrained by low cultural capital and economic limitations, which hinders the expression of personal aspirations and compromises motivation.

The confirmation of the hypothesis that social and personal factors significantly influence orientation choices underscores the need for a comprehensive and contextualized approach.

To promote informed and equitable orientation, it is essential to strengthen family and school support, foster the development of students' self-esteem and motivation, and improve access to information on educational tracks and career prospects. Such an approach contributes not only to individual success but also to sustainable educational and socio-economic development.

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