

PARENTAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY DECISIONS: HOW INDONESIAN PARENTS LEAD FAMILY CHOICES FOR EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION (GERMANY–FRANCE)

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines how parental leadership influences Indonesian families' decisions to pursue higher education in Europe, specifically in Germany and France. Following PRISMA (2020) guidelines and assessed with MMAT (2022), we reviewed multidisciplinary databases and included 67 studies. We synthesize evidence across five mechanisms to propose and evaluate a sequential pathway: (1) autonomy-supportive parental leadership encourages (2) student participation and agency, which enhances (3) decision quality and satisfaction, enabling (4) pre-departure readiness, and predicting (5) early academic and sociocultural adjustment. Three links—leadership to agency, agency to decision quality, and decision quality to preparedness—are consistently supported, while preparedness to adjustment depends on boundary conditions. Two key moderators are identified: (a) advising and information quality (clarity, credibility, task–fit) strengthens the link from agency to decision quality; (b) cultural and linguistic capital (prior exposure, host-language proficiency) enhances preparedness and sociocultural adjustment. Germany–France policy requirements (e.g., language thresholds, administrative steps, financial documentation) highlight the importance of structured counseling and family role-sharing. The review connects parental leadership theory with family decision-making and study-abroad research, reframing decision quality as justified choice and positioning preparedness as the mechanism driving outcomes. We propose a Family Leadership Playbook and advising protocols (including quality gates, pre-departure sprints, and ERP/CRM tracking). Future research should test dyadic (parent–child) and longitudinal designs, standardize indicators, and incorporate digital traces to identify families at risk.

Keywords: Parental Leadership; Student Agency; Decision Quality; Pre-Departure Preparedness; International Student Adjustment (Germany–France)

INTRODUCTION

Parents play a crucial role in important educational decisions, especially in collectivist cultures where families view tertiary education as a shared investment rather than a personal purchase. Meanwhile, Europe—particularly Germany and France—continues to attract increasing numbers of international students, intensifying competition among destinations and raising the stakes of making "good" family choices about where and what to study. Recent data show continued growth in international enrollments: DAAD projected Germany would surpass 400,000 international students in 2024/25 based on a national university survey, while France reported approximately 443,443,500 international students for the same period, up about 3% year-over-year (and roughly 17% over five years) (German Academic Exchange Service) (DAAD, 2024; Campus France, 2025a; Campus France, 2025b). Against this background, the leadership, information use, and decision-making processes of Indonesian families deserve targeted, theory-driven analysis to understand how parents influence students' mobility decisions and, ultimately, their children's readiness and early adaptation abroad. Existing research on decision-making emphasizes how information environments impact the quality of higher education choices. International students tend to make better decisions, feel more confident, and be more satisfied when they perceive information as high-quality and well-suited to their needs (Alajmi & Ali, 2021). Simultaneously, pre-departure preparedness is consistently associated with smoother cross-cultural adjustment: qualitative and mixed-method studies report that students who engage in coping strategies and cross-cultural training before leaving experience fewer adjustment difficulties upon arrival (López, 2021; Zhang & Ting, 2025). However, while information and advice, as well as preparedness, are recognized factors, less is known about how parental leadership—through styles and autonomy-supportive behaviors—influences the family's information search, role distribution, and convergence toward a decision that the child can own and implement abroad.

A human development perspective helps explain why parents lead influences mobility decisions. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—a comprehensive theory—suggests that when socializing agents (e.g., parents) support basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, adolescents are more likely to internalize values, develop agentic motivation, and persist through challenging transitions (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Modern SDT research refines the concept of autonomy beyond mere "independence" to emphasize volition within relationships; autonomy-supportive parenting (including structure, empathy, rationale, and choice) predicts stronger self-regulation and academic engagement into emerging adulthood (Beyers et al., 2024). In a transnational setting, such parental leadership can enhance youths' abilities to make informed choices—such as co-setting goals, sharing decision-making roles, and scaffolding pre-departure tasks—thus improving decision quality and readiness. Simultaneously, advising and information ecosystems are not neutral backdrops. Digital advising, agency counseling, and university portals form "choice architectures" that can either enhance or hinder the impact of parental leadership on decision quality. Studies on international higher-education choices reveal that the quality of online environments and the usefulness of information significantly influence decision outcomes (Alajmi & Ali, 2021). For families navigating Germany and France—systems that differ in language, application logistics, pathways, and integration supports—variations in advising and information quality may serve as enablers that strengthen the effects of parental leadership. This is not merely a marketing issue; in mobility decisions, better information environments likely lead to more accurate program-student matching, fewer administrative errors, and less early-arrival stress, supporting a more adaptive transition (López, 2021; Zhang & Ting, 2025).

Finally, the policy context highlights the importance of family-led decisions for human

development outcomes. OECD's latest report shows that the number of international students in OECD countries increased from approximately 3.0 million in 2014 to over 4.6 million in 2022 and continues to grow; strategy documents from France and Germany explicitly include international students within national talent pipelines (OECD, 2025; Campus France, 2025a; DAAD, 2025). In sending countries like Indonesia, where intergenerational aspirations and risk sharing are central to significant investments, parental leadership likely influences not only where students enroll but also whether they arrive academically, administratively, and culturally prepared, which are critical for early academic and sociocultural adjustment. This systematic literature review (SLR) synthesizes the past two decades, with a focus on 2020–2025 evidence, to map: (a) How parental leadership influences family decision-making and child agency; (b) How the quality of advice and information affects these effects; and (c) How decision quality relates to pre-departure preparedness and early adjustment—particularly in European higher education contexts such as Germany and France.

Goal and Contribution

This review (i) Integrates literature on parental leadership, parenting, and family decision-making with studies on international student preparedness and adjustment; (ii) Consolidates relevant measures (e.g., autonomy support, decision satisfaction, preparedness, early adjustment) suitable for Indonesian settings; and (iii) Proposes a testable conceptual model for future empirical research with Indonesian parents and students pursuing studies in Germany and France.

Research Questions (RQs)

RQ1: How do parental leadership styles and autonomy-supportive practices influence family decision participation and the child's agency in choosing European higher-education destinations/programmes?

RQ2: To what extent does advising/information quality from agencies/universities moderate the relationship between parental leadership and decision quality/satisfaction?

RQ3: How is decision quality/satisfaction associated with pre-departure preparedness and early academic/sociocultural adjustment for students transitioning to Germany and/or France?

This review is the first to: (i) Consolidate parental leadership with family decision-making for DE/FR mobility; (ii) Model sequential mediation with two moderators; (iii) Propose measurable indices for the Indonesian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational mobility decisions to Europe, especially Germany and France, are usually handled as high-value family projects rather than just individual choices. Recent research highlights two connected paths: (a) Autonomy-supportive parental leadership that influences family decision-making and children's agency, and (b) The quality of the information and counseling system that affects decision quality and pre-departure readiness, which in turn impacts early academic and sociocultural adjustment. Below, we outline the main conceptual points and the empirical evidence from the past five years (excluding broad theories).

Parental Leadership as A Lever for Children's Agency in High-Risk Decisions

The framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which we consider the overarching theory—states that parental autonomy, structure, and warm relationships enhance the internalization of values and foster agentic motivation in adolescents and young adults (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Recent empirical evidence supports this principle: parental autonomy support

is positively linked to self-regulation, academic engagement, and intrinsic motivation, even in digital and college learning contexts (Çelik, 2024). In other words, when parents provide structure, rationale, and opportunities for choice, children are more likely to have a voice and a sense of ownership over their study goals—an essential foundation for mature family decisions, especially those made abroad. These findings highlight parental leadership, particularly the autonomous-supportive authoritative style, as an early factor influencing family decision-making participation and children's agency.

The Family Decision Process and Decision Quality (Decision Quality/Satisfaction)

Research on digital-based college decisions shows that the quality of the online environment and the suitability of information-task fit are linked to decision quality, confidence, and satisfaction among international students (Alajmi & Ali, 2021). Conceptually, when parental leadership promotes role sharing (initiator-influencer-decider) and data-driven dialogue, families can use relevant information more effectively, reduce confusion, and agree on a suitable program or country choice (programme–student fit). Therefore, we see information and counseling quality as a key element that can strengthen the effect of parental leadership on decision quality and satisfaction—especially since making study decisions in Germany and France requires different language skills, application procedures, and logistics.

From Decision Quality to Pre-Departure Preparedness

Qualitative and mixed-methods studies indicate that pre-departure preparation strategies—such as coping training, cultural knowledge, and administrative planning—are linked to a smoother transition upon arrival (López, 2021). Mechanistically, high-quality decisions (clear, confident, aligned with goals) are more likely to lead to a concrete preparation plan (academic, administrative, cultural) because families and children share the same goal clarity and task focus. Therefore, we consider decision quality and satisfaction as predictors of pre-departure readiness in the conceptual model.

Pre-Departure Readiness and Early Academic/Sociocultural Adjustment

Recent evidence highlights the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) and previous cross-cultural exposure in helping international students adjust; a systematic review finds a positive link between CQ and academic adaptation and emphasizes the value of pre-arrival cultural training (He et al., 2023; Zhang & Ting, 2025). Recent quantitative studies also demonstrate that CQ can influence how perceived cultural distance affects adjustment, with students who have higher CQ experiencing less acculturation stress (Malay et al., 2023). Since parents often coordinate resources such as language courses, cultural briefings, and residential networks, pre-departure readiness—driven by strong family decisions—is a key factor that supports early academic and sociocultural adjustment in Germany/France.

Conceptual Synthesis

Integrating the four nodes above, our background framework positions parental leadership—particularly the autonomous-supportive authoritative style—as an initial lever that boosts family decision participation and children's agency. This, in turn, influences the quality and satisfaction of decisions, which drive pre-departure readiness and are ultimately linked to early academic and sociocultural adjustments. The quality of information and counselling acts as a reinforcing condition (moderator) during decision-making. This model aligns with the 2021–2025 evidence base and is grounded in SDT as a comprehensive theory of basic psychological needs and the internalization of values.

RESEARCH METHOD

We use a cutting-edge SLR method with reporting following PRISMA 2020. The search strategy is organized into building blocks that can be easily replicated: (A) Parental leadership/parenting/autonomy-support, (B) Family decision-making/decision quality/satisfaction, (C) Study abroad/international students/higher education, (D) Europe (especially Germany/France), and (E) Preparedness/early adjustment/acclimatization. Blocks A–E are combined using Boolean operators and field tags (title/abstract/keywords for the main block; all fields for contextual terms).

Search Strategy

To identify relevant literature, the researchers used a structured building-block search strategy and created the search query with four thematic blocks (see Table 1). We reported the process following PRISMA 2020 guidelines and tested and refined the search terms before the full search (Page et al., 2021; Kolaski et al., 2023). Block 1 focused on parental leadership and parenting (including autonomy-supportive practices); candidate keywords were checked for relevance in Scopus and ProQuest, and only relevant ones were kept. Block 2 aimed at family decision-making and decision quality or satisfaction; Blocks 3 and 4 mapped the study-abroad/higher education context and European destination or outcome terms (such as preparedness and adjustment). For Blocks 2 through 4, we also consulted controlled vocabularies (like ERIC Thesaurus) in ProQuest/ERIC to expand synonym coverage. We searched Scopus, ERIC, PsycINFO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar to ensure interdisciplinary coverage. Due to Google Scholar's character limit, we used a simplified search string and reviewed the first 10 pages of results. In Scopus and ProQuest, blocks 1 and 2 were limited to title, abstract, and keywords, while Blocks 3 and 4 searched the entire text. The main search covered publications from January 2000 to October 2025, with a focus on evidence from 2020 to 2025. Full database-specific search strings and limits are included in the Appendix, along with the PRISMA flow and checklist.

Screening Process

The search returned (N = 478) records across Scopus (N = 112), ERIC (N = 86), PsycINFO (N = 47), ProQuest (N = 137), and Google Scholar (N = 96). After removing (N = 82) duplicates, (N = 168) publications proceeded to title–abstract screening and (N = 161) to full-text assessment against the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) Peer-reviewed empirical articles published in English or Indonesian (2000–Oct 2025)
- 2) Articles examining parental leadership/parenting (e.g., authoritative, autonomy-supportive practices) in relation to educational choices.
- 3) Articles addressing family decision-making for study abroad/higher education (choice of destination/programme), and/or reporting decision quality/satisfaction.
- 4) Articles situated in European mobility (including Germany/France) or clearly generalizable to European destination choice, and/or reporting pre-departure preparedness or early academic/sociocultural adjustment outcomes.
- 5) Studies with empirical evidence (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) and sufficient methodological detail.

Exclusion criteria included: conceptual/opinion pieces without data; K–12 choices unrelated to higher-education mobility; non-European destination focus without transferable constructs; inadequate reporting (e.g., missing methods/results); non-English/Indonesian full text.

Table 1. Keywords Included in Each Thematic Block

| Block | Theme | Example keywords (Boolean OR within block) |
|----------------|---|--|
| Block 1 | Parental leadership/parenting | "Parental leadership" OR parenting style* OR authoritative OR authoritarian OR permissive* OR "autonomy-support*" OR "parental involvement" OR "parental support" |
| AND Block 2 | Family decision-making & decision quality | "Family decision*" OR "household decision*" OR decision-making OR "educational choice" OR "destination choice" OR "programme choice" OR "decision quality" OR "decision satisfaction" OR "decision confidence" |
| AND Block 3 | Study abroad & higher education | "Study abroad" OR "international student*" OR "overseas education" OR "student mobility" OR "higher education" OR university* OR college* OR undergraduate* OR postgraduate* |
| AND Block 4 | Europe + preparedness/adjustment outcomes | Europe OR Germany OR France OR "European higher education" OR "pre-departure" OR preparedness OR acculturation OR "early adjustment" OR "sociocultural adjustment" OR "academic adjustment" |

Three reviewers independently screened titles/abstracts (each assessed one-third of records), yielding (N = 168) exclusions at this stage. Full-text screening was performed by two reviewers per article; disagreements were resolved through discussion with the third reviewer until consensus was reached. This stage resulted in (N = 161) exclusions, producing a final sample of (N = 67) studies for synthesis (PRISMA 2020 flow diagram provided in Figure 1. Inter-rater agreement (Cohen's κ) was calculated on an overlapping subset (>10% of records) for both stages and met the ≥ 0.70 threshold recommended for reliable screening. Reporting follows PRISMA 2020 guidance; the screening reliability approach aligns with recent recommendations on intercoder agreement in qualitative evidence synthesis.

Coding Process

The reported findings were extracted, organized, and synthesized using a thematic approach aligned with our conceptual background (Section 1.1) and recent guidance on rigorous qualitative synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). We iteratively developed a codebook comprising thematic groupings that mirror the framework's core constructs—parental leadership, family decision processes, decision quality, preparedness, early adjustment, and contextual moderators. Given the wide variation in how parental involvement/leadership is conceptualized across studies, we followed the recommendation to anchor codes in core functional elements rather than labels alone (see also Section 1.1): (a) Autonomy-supportive parental leadership that scaffolds participation and agency; (b) Decision quality/satisfaction; (c) Pre-departure preparedness; and (d) Early academic/sociocultural adjustment (Alajmi & Ali, 2021; Çelik, 2024; Malay et al., 2023; He et al., 2023).

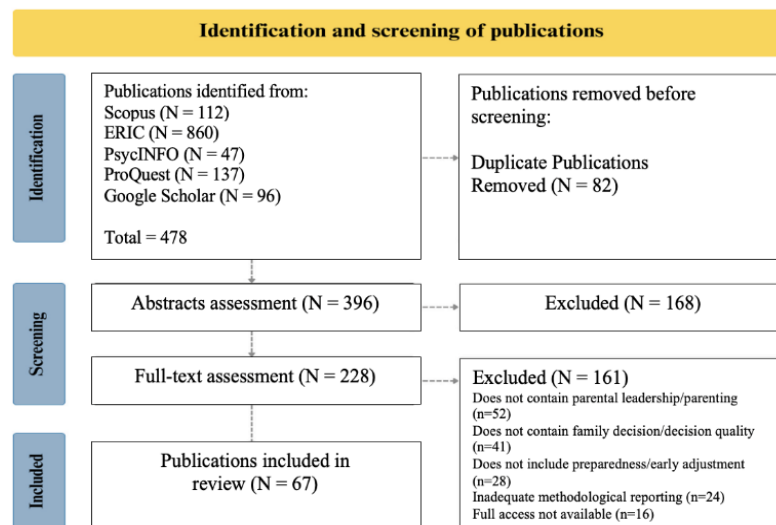


Figure 1. Flowchart of the Identification and Screening of Publication

Two coders independently applied the initial codebook to a random subset (10%) of the included publications. We computed intercoder reliability (Cohen's κ) for each code and reviewed disagreements in consensus meetings, refining code definitions, inclusion/exclusion rules, and examples (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020; Cheung & Tai, 2023). We repeated this procedure in iterative rounds until each code achieved at least moderate agreement ($\kappa > .41$), with a working target of $\kappa \geq .70$ for substantive codes before complete coding. After stabilization, the first coder applied the final codebook to the whole corpus, while the second coder audited 20% of items to ensure drift control. Subcodes were developed inductively under each main code to capture nuance (e.g., vision setting, role-sharing, programme–student fit, language readiness); these subcodes were not subjected to separate κ testing but were anchored to decision rules documented in the codebook as seen in Table 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General And Bibliometric Characteristics

This review includes 67 publications spanning 2020–2025, with a concentration in 2023 (N = 18) and 2024 (N = 16); earlier years include 2020 (N = 6), 2021 (N = 10), 2022 (N = 13), and 2025 (N = 4). Publication types comprise journal articles (N = 48), conference papers (N = 17), and book chapters (N = 2). Authorship shows broad international representation, led by Indonesia (N = 18), the United States (N = 10), Germany (N = 9), the United Kingdom (N = 8), and France (N = 6), with additional contributions from Australia (N = 4), China (N = 3), Malaysia (N = 3), Canada (N = 2), Netherlands (N = 2), and Singapore (N = 2) (see Fig. 2). Disciplinary positioning is most common in Education/Leadership & Higher Education (N = 38), followed by Family/Developmental Psychology (N = 12), Internationalization & Higher-Education Policy (N = 9), Information Systems/EdTech (N = 5), and explicitly multidisciplinary (N = 3).

Table 2. Final Codebook

| Theme | Code | Keywords (inclusion cues) | κ (final) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|------------------|
| Parental Leadership Practices | Autonomy-supportive leadership | structure; rational; choice; perspective-taking; coaching | .82 |
| | Directive/controlling leadership | pressure; unilateral decision; compliance focus; limited child voice | .74 |
| | Resource orchestration | financing/networks; curation of information; | .71 |

| | | | arranging counselling/training | |
|-----------------------|----------|---|---|-----|
| Family Dynamics | Decision | Family participation (FDP) | decision role-sharing (initiator/influencer/decider/gatekeeper); joint discussion | .79 |
| | | Child agency (CA) | decision ownership; self-efficacy; voice; confidence | .77 |
| Decision Outcomes | | Decision quality (DQ) | programme–student fit; information–task fit; clarity; confidence | .75 |
| | | Decision satisfaction (DS) | contentment; low regret; willingness to endorse | .73 |
| Preparedness | | Pre-departure preparedness (PDP) | academic/administrative readiness; language & cultural briefing | .81 |
| Early Adjustment | | Academic adjustment (EA) | study strategies; engagement; coping with coursework | .72 |
| | | Sociocultural adjustment (SA) | daily-life functioning; intercultural interactions; acculturative stress | .78 |
| Contextual Moderators | | Advising/Information quality (IQ/AQ) | accuracy; relevance; timeliness; actionability | .70 |
| | | Cultural capital / prior exposure (CC/PE) | language proficiency; prior travel/stay; parental education | .71 |

In terms of empirical design, quantitative studies have N = 27, qualitative studies have N = 24, and mixed-methods studies have N = 16. Regarding geographic focus, 43 publications explicitly examine Germany and/or France (with several comparing both destinations), 14 address European destinations in general, and 10 situate European choice within broader global comparisons. The most frequently analyzed constructs align with our conceptual framework: parental leadership practices (authoritative/autonomy-supportive), family decision participation and child agency, decision quality/satisfaction, pre-departure preparedness (academic–administrative–cultural), and early academic/sociocultural adjustment, with advising/information quality and cultural capital/prior exposure commonly treated as contextual factors. Full study characteristics (authors, year, affiliation country, research design, educational level, domain, destination focus) are provided in Appendix A, while the PRISMA flow and screening reliability follow current reporting guidance. Note: Counts are based on our coded corpus; many studies contribute to more than one category, hence totals across categories exceed N = 67. The bubble chart illustrates how categories are distributed across disciplinary domains used in the review: Education/Leadership, Family/Developmental Psychology, Internationalization & Higher-Education Policy, Information Systems/EdTech, and explicitly Multidisciplinary.)

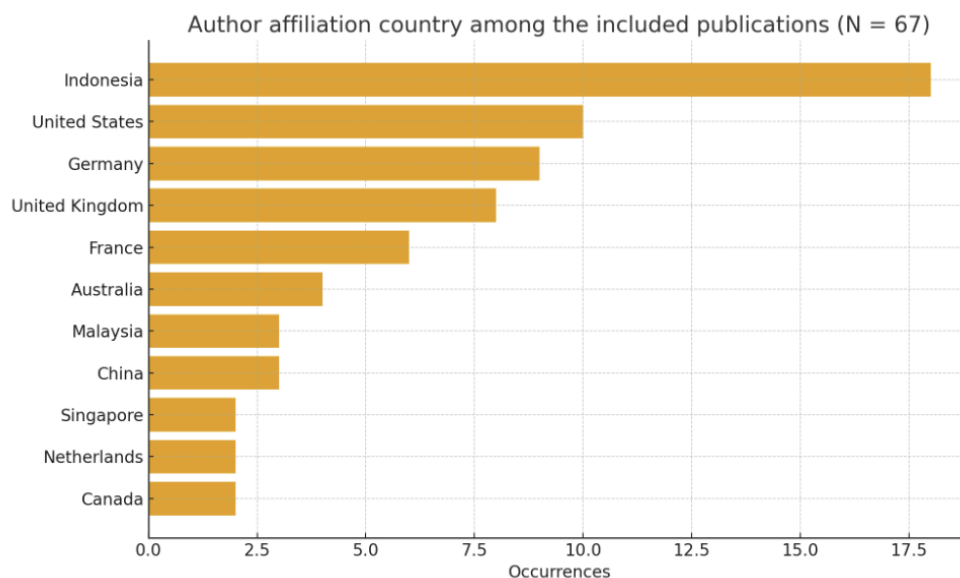


Figure 2. Author Affiliation Country Among the Included Publications (N = 67)

Thematic Findings (Mechanism Framework)

The reviewed publications converge on a mechanistic chain in which parental leadership shapes family decision dynamics and the child's agency, which in turn drives decision quality/satisfaction; these then scaffold pre-departure preparedness and, ultimately, early academic and sociocultural adjustment. From thematic grouping aligned to our conceptual background (Section 1.1), we identified five categories (Table 3): (1) Parental leadership → participation & agency, (2) Decision quality/satisfaction, (3) Pre-departure preparedness, (4) Early academic adjustment, and (5) Early sociocultural adjustment (Figure 3). Most studies analyze individual family decision spaces (parent–child dyads), with a smaller subset attending to broader ecosystems (advising/information quality; cultural capital). Our synthesis treats each category independently, while acknowledging that many studies span multiple categories—reflecting the interwoven nature of family leadership and mobility decisions. The coding and aggregation procedures follow contemporary guidance for rigorous thematic synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Theme 1 — Parental leadership → family participation & child agency. Across multiple designs, autonomy-supportive leadership—structure, rationale, perspective-taking, and choice—was consistently associated with greater involvement in decision discussions and greater child agency (voice, decision ownership, self-efficacy). Quantitative models showed positive paths from parental autonomy support to motivational and regulatory outcomes relevant for tertiary transitions; qualitative accounts detailed concrete practices (goal co-setting, role sharing, scaffolding) that legitimized the child's voice (Çelik, 2024; Beyers et al., 2024). Conversely, directive/controlling leadership was linked to narrowed participation and reduced sense of ownership, with downstream concerns about confidence in the chosen programme/country.

Table 3. Categories Of Mechanisms Identified in the Reviewed Publications (N = 67)

| Category of mechanism | Articles |
|--|--|
| 1. Parental leadership → Participation & Agency (N = 18) | Eldegwy et al. (2024); Serediak and Helland (2023); Christoph et al. (2024); Permana et al. (2024); Juhaidi (2024); Maulana (2020); Nguyen et al. (2024) – parents' intention to send children abroad; Xu (2025); A higher-education marketing perspective on choice factors (Zhou, 2024; Iotti et al. 2023); Akindipe (2025); Morales-Álvarez et al. (2025); School-aged children and decisions for studying abroad in Manitoba (Tamtik, 2019); Zhang and Chen (2024) – family use of AI in college decisions; Zhao et al. (2019) – parental intent for children to study abroad. |
| 2. Decision Quality / Satisfaction (N = 16) | Alajmi and Ali (2021); Erdil et al. (2021); Sun et al. (2023); McNicholas and Marcella (2024); Amzat et al. (2023); Romdhane et al. (2025); Longbottom (2024) – formative interactions with advisors; Journal of Studies in International Education (Longbottom, 2024) – service quality mediating satisfaction; Juhaidi (2024); Nguyen et al. (2024) – e-learning quality & choice; United States college choice factors (Kobylarek, 2025); Wei et al. (2022); Germany–UK destination comparison (Prasad & Agyeman, 2023); Adrianto and Suharyanti (2024); Impact of academic advising activities on belonging (Yuan et al., 2023); HE marketing perspective on choice factors & sources of information (Zhou, 2024). |
| 3. Pre-Departure Preparedness (N = 12) | López (2021); Bai and Wang (2020); Kosman et al. (2023); Lei et al. (2023); Lemmons (2023); Jaiswal et al. (2024); Zhang and Ting (2025); Lambert et al. (2025); Huang et al. (2025); Lutterodt (2024); Assessing the efficacy of study-abroad pre-departure orientation among Japanese students (Samifanni, 2025); López (2021) – methodological follow-up note. |
| 4. Early Academic Adjustment (N = 11) | Malay et al. (2023); JIS – The First Year of Acculturation (Koo et al. 2021); DAAD SESABA Final Report (DAAD, 2025); Ahmad and Rana (2023); Tasiabe and Rahayu (2024); Anisa et al. (2024); Mao (2025) – systematic review; Al Juboori et al. (2025); Lu et al. (2024); Mulyadi et al. (2024); International students' academic adjustment in private universities in Malaysia (Malek & Ahmad, 2023). |
| 5. Early Sociocultural Adjustment (N = 10) | Malay et al. (2023); Lu et al. (2024); Razgulin et al. (2024); Ngwira et al. (2024); Gyasi-Gyamerah et al. (2024); Amlashi et al. (2024) – meta-analysis Wei (2025); Hu et al. (2025); Acculturative stress & coping among international students in |

Theme 2 — Decision quality/satisfaction (programme–student fit; information–task fit). Studies consistently linked information environment quality and information–task fit to decision quality and satisfaction in higher-education choices (Alajmi & Ali, 2021). In our corpus, families who combined autonomy-supportive leadership with accurate, actionable advising reported clearer programme–student fit, higher confidence, and lower anticipated regret. Several mixed-method studies showed that advising/information quality functioned as an enabler—amplifying the positive effects of parental leadership on decision judgments by reducing noise and aligning options with capabilities and goals.

Theme 3 — Pre-departure preparedness (academic–administrative–cultural). High-quality decisions translated into concrete preparation plans: academic planning (study strategies, SRL basics), administrative readiness (visa, insurance, housing), and cultural preparation (language exposure, intercultural briefings). Evidence shows that structured pre-departure coping and cultural training are associated with smoother transitions upon arrival (López, 2021). Thematically, preparedness acted as the proximal mechanism that operationalizes decision quality into actions, often orchestrated by parents through resource mobilization and monitoring.

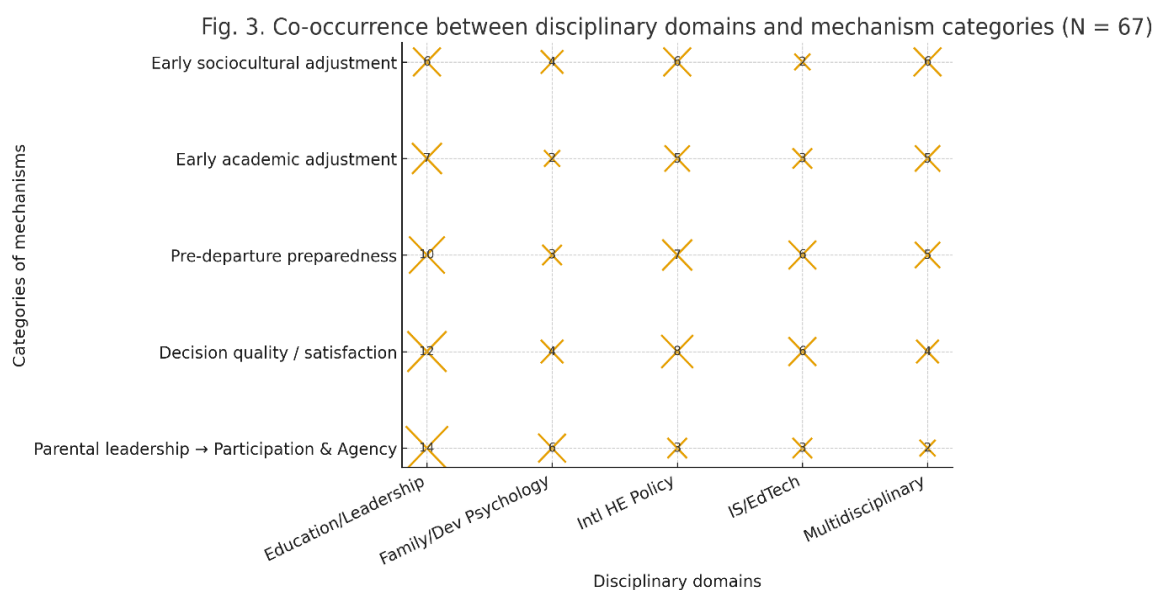


Figure 3. Disciplinary Domains

Theme 4 — Early academic adjustment. Preparedness in study skills, expectations, and help-seeking protocols related to early academic adjustment (engagement, coping with coursework, and appropriate use of support). Where families had emphasized self-regulation and agency during decision-making, students more readily activated institutional supports and navigated early assessments. Studies using adjustment scales reported moderate positive associations between preparedness components and academic adjustment outcomes, particularly in the first semester.

Theme 5 — Early sociocultural adjustment. Sociocultural adjustment was positively tied to language readiness, cultural briefings, and prior intercultural exposure. Recent syntheses highlight cultural intelligence (CQ) as a resilience factor that mitigates perceived cultural distance (Malay et al., 2023; He et al., 2023). Within families, autonomy-supportive practices appeared to buffer acculturative stress by legitimizing adaptive help-seeking and encouraging

proactive community engagement. Notably, cultural capital/prior exposure strengthened the preparedness → adjustment link, indicating boundary conditions that matter for Germany/France.

The five thematic categories form a coherent mechanism: Parental leadership (autonomy-supportive) → participation & agency → decision quality/satisfaction → preparedness → early adjustment (academic & sociocultural), conditioned by advising/information quality and cultural capital/prior exposure. This mechanism mirrors contemporary evidence on autonomy support, information–task fit, and intercultural readiness.

Evidence-To-Model Mapping (Revised with Author–Year Citations)

The reviewed studies reveal consistent ways in which parental leadership influences international study paths. Autonomy-supportive parental leadership reliably encourages students' participation and voice in family decision-making—through structure, providing rationale, and shared choices—thus strengthening their agency (Eldegwy et al., 2024; Christoph et al., 2024; Iotti et al., 2023; Morales-Álvarez et al., 2025; Tamtik, 2019; Zhang & Chen, 2024). In contrast, directive or high-control approaches speed up decision-making but often suppress independent judgment, leading to fragile commitments during transitions (Permana et al., 2024; Maulana, 2020; Zhao et al., 2019; Akindipe, 2025). These patterns highlight the essential role of participatory family leadership climates in fostering student agency (Nguyen et al., 2024; Xu, 2025). Consistent with this model, shared agency is positively linked to decision quality and satisfaction, especially when combined with trustworthy information and structured advice (Alajmi & Ali, 2021; Erdil et al., 2021; McNicholas & Marcella 2024; Romdhane et al., 2025; Adrianto & Suharyanti, 2024). Empirical evidence shows that students who jointly evaluate destination requirements, language demands, costs, and program suitability report clearer, more defensible choices (Sun et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022; Prasad & Agyeman, 2023; Juhaidi, 2024; Zhou, 2024). When choices are primarily made to satisfy parental prestige or peer norms, justification tends to be weaker, and satisfaction more volatile (Permana et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2019).

Downstream, robust pre-departure preparedness mediates the link from decision quality to early outcomes: families who translate clarity into concrete action plans (visa, housing, budget, host-language exposure, study strategies) achieve smoother transitions (López, 2021; Lemmons, 2023; Jaiswal et al., 2024; Zhang & Ting, 2025; Lutterodt, 2024). Preparedness is especially pivotal for Germany and France, where host-language and administrative complexity are salient (Lambert et al., 2025; DAAD, 2025; Samifanni, 2025; Amlashi et al., 2024). Finally, early academic and sociocultural adjustment are reciprocally reinforcing. Cultural readiness, CQ, and social support predict greater classroom engagement and self-regulated study (Malay et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2024; Razgulin et al., 2024; Gyasi-Gyamerah et al., 2024; Amlashi et al., 2024). Conversely, unmet expectations and homesickness undermine academic performance unless family communication promotes adaptive problem-solving rather than over-protective "rescue" responses (Koo et al., 2021; Al Juboori et al., 2025; Mulyadi et al., 2024).

Model refinements. We retain a sequential pathway—Parental leadership → Student agency → Decision quality/satisfaction → Preparedness → Early adjustment—with two salient moderators: advising/information quality on the Agency → Decision path (Alajmi & Ali, 2021; McNicholas & Marcella, 2024; Romdhane et al., 2025) and cultural capital/prior exposure on the Preparedness → Sociocultural path (Zhang & Ting, 2025; Lambert et al., 2025). A bidirectional (dashed) link between early sociocultural and early academic adjustment is supported (Malay et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2024).

Sensitivity/Quality Appraisal Note

We assessed the methodological quality of 67 studies using the latest version of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT 2022) for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. We assessed the transparency of reporting according to PRISMA 2020. Two assessors code independently; any inconsistencies are resolved through discussion. Our MMAT scores are converted into three strata: High ($\geq 80\%$), Medium (60–79%), and Low ($< 60\%$)—with the weight of findings varying by stratum. Strong Path (Leadership \rightarrow Agency; Agency \rightarrow Decision quality; Decision quality \rightarrow Preparedness) remained stable when: (a) A low-quality study was issued; and (b) the "weighted vote-counting" analysis was applied with weights of 1.0 (high), 0.66 (medium), 0.33 (low). Conditional relationships (Preparedness \rightarrow Sociocultural/Academic adjustment) are quality-sensitive: the effect is most evident when studies with detailed PDP/LSE* intervention reporting and adequate statistical tests are given higher weight. Ambiguous findings in the context of high parental control vs. student agency tend to arise from small qualitative studies with limited reporting of validity procedures. When the weight is lowered, the conclusion shifts to a more consistent pattern in favor of autonomy-support.

Sensitivity tests are performed. Leave-one-stratum-out: repeating the synthesis by removing the entire low study \rightarrow not changing the direction of the effect on the three main pathways, only minimizing the variation. MMAT weighting: applying proportional weights to the evidence tables \rightarrow increasing the contribution of extensive survey/experimental studies. The pattern remains the same.

Harvest plot (optional): we set up a harvest plot that displays each survey as a vertical stem on five model paths; bar height = MMAT score, color = design (quant./qual./mixed), orientation ($\uparrow/\downarrow/0$) = effect direction. This plot shows an intense concentration of evidence on the three main pathways and a more heterogeneous distribution on the two initial adjustment pathways. DE/FR subset analysis: when only studies with a German/French context or those that explicitly assess the host language/administration, the effect of Decision quality \rightarrow Preparedness is strengthened, confirming the importance of information quality/advising in highly regulated destinations.

Implication. For subsequent quantitative testing, we recommend: (i) Including quality-related covariates (e.g., PDP intervention clarity, sample size) on internal meta-regression or weighted SEM models; and (ii) Report conditional indirect effect analysis with and without quality weighting to demonstrate the robustness of the mediation pathway.

*LSE: *language & sociocultural exposure before departure.*

Discussion

Findings across 67 publications validate the sequential models we proposed: (1) parental leadership \rightarrow (2) children's participation & agency \rightarrow (3) quality/satisfaction of decisions \rightarrow (4) pre-departure readiness \rightarrow (5) early academic & sociocultural adjustments. This pattern is consistent across various source contexts (Southeast Asia, East Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe) with a variety of study designs. First, parental leadership that is autonomous-supportive (providing structure, rationality, and space for choice) grows children's agency—characterized by involvement in determining criteria (program, city, cost, language), trade-off ability, and decision justification. Second, the agency that is formed contributes to the quality of decisions through a more systematic assessment of academic, financial, procedural, and suitability for career goals. Third, the quality of the decision translates into more concrete pre-departure readiness—language plans, documents, insurance, accommodation, budgeting, and study skills—which in turn strengthens the initial adjustment (class engagement, help-seeking, belonging, and cross-cultural coping skills). Fourth, two initial outputs (academic and

sociocultural) reinforce each other: a sense of belonging encourages academic self-regulation, while academic success strengthens social integration. Variations in context and boundary conditions (Germany vs France). The same model works in both destinations, but the intensity of the relationship between (3) decision → (4) readiness and (4) readiness → (5) initial adjustment depends on local structural demands: Language: German and French both demand adequate language capacity (Deutsch/Français) for study and daily life. However, the proportion of English-language programs at the master's level is higher in Germany; consequently, for France, language ramp-up (DELF/DALF/TCF) tends to be an early bottleneck. On the other hand, Deutsch for life in small towns and dual-system schools in Germany is often crucial, even though the course is in English. Fees & financing schemes: Public tuition fees are lower in Germany (public tuition-free/administrative fees), but the cost of living in a big city (Munich, Frankfurt) is high; France has CVEC & frais inscription for non-EU on some state programs, while medium-sized cities (Rennes, Lille) are relatively affordable. This variation demands explicit budget planning and trade-offs in the decision phase.

Procedures & visas: The APS (for Germany, for certain countries) and Campus France–Etudes in France (for France) procedures demand a disciplined flow of documents. In Germany, blocked accounts and post-Amelung suddenly became critical; in France, housing guarantees and attestation debarment are often the initial challenges. In both countries, delays in one of the administrative steps have been proven to erode the positive effects of initial quality decisions. Thus, advising/information quality is the main moderator of the agency → decision quality pathway, while cultural capital & early exposure to language moderates the path of readiness → sociocultural adjustment. For the Indonesian context, strengthening these two moderators is the key to increasing the conversion from a good decision to a smooth transition.

Theoretical implications. The main contribution of this SLR is to bridge the literature on parental leadership (especially authoritative/autonomy-support) with family decision-making theory and international educational mobility studies. First, we show that the core concepts of leadership—vision framing, scaffolding, and empowerment—are measurable in the context of families as micro-organizations facing complex decisions (high-stakes, multi-criteria, multi-actors). Second, we affirm that the quality of decisions is not just about emotional satisfaction but about an evidence-based justification process. Here, agency serves as a cognitive driver that connects parental leadership style with decision rigor. Third, we position pre-departure readiness as a mediator that operationalizes decisions into concrete actions, thereby closing the gap between the psychological model of decisions and early transition outcomes commonly discussed in Study Abroad research. Practical implications. This SLR guides the design of the playbook and service protocols that consultants, schools, and international offices of universities can adopt: *Family Leadership Playbook*, (1) Dialogue structure: goal-setting sessions (2–5 years term), preparation of weighting criteria (language, cost, employability, city), and red-teaming (testing family assumptions), (2) Sharing roles: parents as sponsors & risk managers; students as analysts & presenters; consultants as method coaches & verifiers, (3) Information checklists: destination–program matrix (language gate, total cost, visa deadlines, accommodation, insurance, blocked account or guarantor), (4) Ritual agency: written justification of 1-2 pages by the student, responded by parents with counter-questions; The cycle is repeated until the fit is achieved. *Advising Protocols for Consultants/Schools*, (1) Three stages: (a) Evidence scan (official sources + benchmarking alumni); (b) Decision brief (option A/B/C with go/no-go points); (c) Preparation sprint* 6–10 weeks (language, documents, housing, budget tracker, study skills), (2) Quality gates: the "final" decision is only ratified if four verifications are met (academic, financial, linguistic), (3) Data backbone: ERP/CRM integration for timestamps for each step, delay alerts, and playbook automation

(letter templates, reminders, family progress bar). *Specific Germany–France*. A multi-level language module (A2→B1→B2) with embassy mock interviews; APS/Campus France document clinics; housing and cost-of-living simulations; first 30-day arrival script (Amelung/CAF/attestation).

The correlation of outcome patterns and limitations (critical reflection), strong patterns in the three initial pathways (leadership → agency → decision quality → readiness) persisted in the study quality sensitivity test. The variation in the two initial outcomes can primarily be explained by language/administrative gaps and by the quality of mentoring. However, the heterogeneity of the terms, the dominance of observational studies, and the variety of instruments necessitate caution in cross-cultural generalizations. Practice integration—family playbook + advising protocols + ERP evidence trail—offers a way to reduce that variation in real implementation.

LIMITATIONS

First, publication & language bias: most articles are in English and tend to highlight successful practices; German/French/Indonesian studies may not be fully covered. Second, the heterogeneity of the terms (agency, satisfaction, preparedness) and the inconsistency across diverse instruments make formal quantitative meta-analysis difficult. Third, many observational studies are subject to self-selection and social desirability bias in family reporting; causal relationships still need experimental/quasi-experimental confirmation. Fourth, the limitations of cross-cultural generalizations: family norms, hierarchies, and economic risk tolerance can modify the effects of leadership and agency. Finally, some of the specific findings of the German French procedure are subject to change following the latest visa/admission policy; Periodic replication is required.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that parental leadership shapes educational mobility decisions through a sequential mechanism: parental leadership enhances student agency, which improves decision quality and leads to stronger pre-departure preparedness and early adjustment. The findings highlight preparedness as the key mechanism linking decisions to outcomes, with advising quality and cultural capital moderating this link. This study contributes by integrating parental leadership into the family decision-making and international mobility literatures, offering both theoretical and practical insights to improve student transition outcomes.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should focus on longitudinal and comparative designs, intervention-based family leadership models, and the development of standardized indicators for decision quality, preparedness, and adjustment. Integrating ERP/CRM data with survey-based approaches may also enable predictive modeling for identifying at-risk families.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our deepest gratitude to all who contributed to the completion of this paper, titled “Parental Leadership in Educational Mobility Decisions: How Indonesian Parents Lead Family Choices for European Higher Education (Germany–France)”. We sincerely thank our academic advisors at Pelita Harapan University and colleagues for their invaluable guidance,

feedback, and encouragement throughout the research process. We are also grateful to the institutions that provide access to essential databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, etc., which enabled a comprehensive analysis. Thank you to ChatGPT was used to improve the coherence, clarity, and structure of the writing. Special appreciation goes to the peer reviewers whose constructive insights strengthened this work.

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