

Peer Pressure, Family Background, and Gender as Predictors of Career Choice among Private University Students in Oyo State

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Abstract : Career choice remains one of the most critical decisions facing undergraduates, particularly in Nigeria, where persistent youth unemployment, labour market mismatch, and strong socio-cultural influences complicate decision-making. This study investigated peer pressure, family background, and gender as predictors of career choice among private university students in Oyo State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A total of 1,436 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 811 were duly completed and analysed using descriptive statistics and a regression model to examine the joint influence of the three predictors. Findings revealed that peer pressure exerted both positive and negative influences on students' career orientations, functioning as a double-edged factor that promotes academic excellence while also encouraging risky behaviours. Family background showed a moderately strong influence, particularly through parental education, cultural orientation, and values, rather than purely socio-economic or social class status. Gender was also found to influence career choices, with stereotypes and societal expectations still shaping decisions, though many students demonstrated increasing resistance to restrictive norms. The regression analysis, however, showed that peer pressure, family background, and gender jointly explained only a small proportion of the variance in career choice, suggesting that other factors such as personal interest, mentorship, and labour market realities are more decisive. The study concludes that career decision-making among private university students is complex and multidimensional. It contributes to knowledge by highlighting the need for holistic, student-centred career guidance interventions that empower undergraduates to align personal aspirations with labour market realities.

INTRODUCTION

Career choice is universally recognised as one of young people's most critical life decisions. It is about selecting a profession and shaping one's identity, economic prospects, and long-term satisfaction (Ghaleb & Dahiam, 2024). In higher education, career decision-making becomes especially pressing because it intersects with personal development, academic specialisation, and preparation for future employment. For undergraduate students, this process often involves balancing personal interests, aptitudes, values, and external pressures from family, peers, and society (Nayak & Kachhi, 2025; Prasad & Rao, 2024). In Nigeria, career choice among undergraduates has gained increasing scholarly attention due to persistent unemployment, underemployment, and the mismatch between graduates' aspirations and the realities of the labour market (Aminu, 2019; Nwaikpo, 2025). The National Bureau of Statistics reports that young people form the bulk of the unemployed, highlighting the urgency of helping students make informed career decisions (Akanle et al., 2025). Unlike in some Western contexts where students are encouraged to pursue personal passion and self-actualisation, Nigerian students often face family expectations and socio-economic pressures that push them into fields perceived as more prestigious or financially rewarding. The decision is rarely made in isolation; it is shaped by a web of influences, including peers, family background, and gendered social norms.

Peers are a dominant force in adolescence and young adulthood. During university years, when students are away from home and forming new identities, peer groups become powerful reference points for decision-making. Studies show that peers can exert both positive and negative influences (Babatunde, 2024; Filade et al., 2019). Positive peer influence can enhance academic motivation, promote persistence, and expand career aspirations (Hassan et al., 2024). On the other hand, negative peer pressure may encourage risky behaviours such as truancy, substance use, or conforming to group norms that distract from academic and career goals (Fudolin & Dioso, 2025). In Nigeria, where private university students often come from diverse social backgrounds, peer networks are particularly influential. Unlike public universities, where students may be more constrained by larger class sizes and bureaucratic structures, private university students typically interact in smaller, closely-knit settings. These interactions can intensify the influence of peers on academic habits and career orientations. For instance, peer approval may lead students to select career paths that align with group identity rather than personal interest. At the same time, peer-driven academic support systems such as tutorial groups can encourage goal-directed career choices. This dual nature of peer influence highlights the need to examine its specific impact on career choice among private university students in Oyo State.

Family is often the primary socialising agent in career development. Parents' education, occupation, income level, and values significantly shape children's career perceptions (Abdul Rahaman et al., 2023). In Nigeria, the influence of family background is particularly strong. Students from higher socio-economic families often enjoy access to career information, financial resources, and exposure to diverse professional networks (Ledwaba, 2022). By contrast, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face restrictions that narrow their aspirations to careers perceived as quickly employable or financially secure (Abdulrazaq & Lambe, 2024).

Cultural norms further amplify family influence. In many Nigerian households, parents exert direct control over their children's career decisions, encouraging them to pursue fields like Medicine, Law, and Engineering, which are regarded as prestigious and economically rewarding (Sanni et al., 2024). This expectation is especially evident in private universities, where significant financial investment in tuition often translates into higher parental involvement in decision-making. Yet, while family involvement may provide guidance and resources, it may also suppress individuality, leading to externally imposed career paths that are not aligned with students' genuine interests or abilities.

Gender remains a significant factor in shaping career aspirations globally, and Nigeria is no exception. Traditional gender stereotypes often direct male students into technical and science-related fields while steering female students toward education, humanities, or care-oriented professions (Abidogun & Falola, 2020). Akanji et al. (2024) found that gendered expectations in Nigeria still play a role in students' choice of career, with societal attitudes discouraging women from entering male-dominated fields such as engineering and technology. However, recent shifts in Nigerian society suggest that these boundaries are beginning to blur. More female students are pursuing careers in science, technology, and business, while some male students are entering education and social sciences, fields once seen as "feminised" (Allegrini, 2014; Smith, 2011). This evolving dynamic creates a tension between tradition and change: while stereotypes persist, students are increasingly resisting restrictive gender norms. For private university students, who are often exposed to globalised values and international curricula, gender-based career barriers may be less rigid but still influential.

Despite valuable contributions, three main weaknesses are evident in existing scholarship. First, discussions on family background and gender are often redundant and fragmented. Studies highlight similar points about parental influence or gender stereotyping without integrating them into a framework that shows how they interact with peer influence in shaping career decisions (Agu et al., 2022; Obioma et al., 2025). This creates repetition rather than new insight. Second, much of the literature is descriptive rather than analytical. Studies tend to list findings without critically comparing them. For example, while Chineyemba et al. (2023) frame family involvement as supportive, Onyebuchukwu et al. (2015) describe it as restrictive. Similarly, Okechukwu (2025) highlight persistent gender bias, while Adegoju (2017) points to a growing rejection of stereotypes among young Nigerians. Yet, these contradictions are rarely synthesised into a coherent argument that highlights gaps. Third, there are issues of citation consistency and weak contextualization. Some works are repeatedly cited without a clear methodological explanation or localised connection. For instance, Ayodele and Adeyeye (2024) are often referenced without detailing whether the findings are based on qualitative or quantitative evidence, or how they specifically apply to private universities in Oyo State. Such inconsistencies limit the ability of readers to fully grasp the relevance of these studies.

These deficiencies highlight a clear gap: while peer pressure, family background, and gender have been studied separately, few studies in Nigeria, particularly in Oyo State private universities, have examined how these three factors jointly and relatively predict career choice.

Private universities provide a unique environment where financial expectations, peer networks, and evolving gender norms converge, yet this context has received limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating peer pressure, family background, and gender as predictors of career choice among private university students in Oyo State. By analysing both the joint and relative contributions of these variables, the research moves beyond descriptive accounts to provide a more integrated and context-sensitive understanding. Its findings are expected to inform parents, educators, and policymakers in designing interventions that support undergraduates to make informed, autonomous, and sustainable career decisions.

Statement of the Problem

Career choice is one of the most important decisions students make during their university years because it shapes their future identity, employability, and socio-economic wellbeing. In Nigeria, however, career decision-making has become increasingly complex due to persistent youth unemployment, underemployment, and the competitive nature of the labour market. The National Bureau of Statistics reports that young people form the largest proportion of the unemployed, highlighting the urgency of preparing students to make career choices that are both fulfilling and economically sustainable (Mwaura & Glover, 2021). For private university students, particularly in Oyo State, the stakes are even higher because their families invest heavily in tuition and expect such investments to translate into stable career outcomes. Despite the importance of career planning, many students struggle to make independent and well-informed choices. Social influences, rather than personal interest and aptitude, often play a dominant role in shaping decisions. Peer pressure is a significant factor: while peer networks can provide academic support, they can also promote conformity, risky behaviour, and superficial choices that do not align with students' long-term goals. Family background equally exerts a strong influence, as parental socio-economic status, educational level, and cultural values frequently determine which careers are encouraged or discouraged. In many cases, parents push students toward prestigious or financially secure professions, sometimes at the expense of students' genuine interests and abilities. Gender norms further complicate decision-making, as cultural stereotypes continue to steer male students into science and technology fields while limiting female students' participation in such areas, despite their competence. For students in private universities in Oyo State, these combined pressures create a unique challenge. On the one hand, they are exposed to modern academic environments and globalised career options. On the other hand, they remain subject to intense family expectations, peer influence, and gendered societal norms. This tension often leads to career choices that are externally driven rather than personally meaningful, increasing the risk of dissatisfaction, career instability, and poor alignment with labour market realities. The concern is that without a clear understanding of how peer pressure, family background, and gender shape students' career decisions in this specific context, career guidance efforts in private universities may remain ineffective. This study is designed to address that concern by investigating the extent to which these three factors predict career choice among private university students in Oyo State,

to generate insights that will inform parents, educators, and counsellors in supporting students toward more authentic and sustainable career decisions.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does peer pressure influence career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?
2. To what extent does family background influence career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?
3. To what extent does gender influence career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?
4. What is the joint influence of peer pressure, family background, and gender on career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time and allowed the researcher to examine the predictive influence of peer pressure, family background, and gender on career choice among private university students. The population comprised all 6,156 first-year (100 level) students in private universities in Oyo State, Nigeria. First-year students were considered appropriate because they are still in the formative stage of making career decisions and may not have fully consolidated their career choices. A total of 1,436 students were selected using a multistage sampling technique. At the first stage, all the private universities in Oyo State were identified. At the second stage, proportionate sampling was employed to ensure representation across institutions. At the third stage, simple random sampling was used to select respondents from each faculty. Out of the 1,436 distributed questionnaires, 811 were duly completed and returned, representing the final sample size used for analysis. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised below to provide a profile of the study sample: Out of the 811 respondents, 298 (39%) were male, while 493 (61%) were female. This shows that female students formed the majority of participants. Respondents fell largely within the youth age brackets. Specifically, 396 students (48.6%) were between 16–19 years, 394 (48.4%) were between 20–40 years, while only 21 (3%) were 40 years and above. The sample covered four major fields. Students in the Arts and Humanities were the most represented with 260 respondents (32%), followed by Education with 234 respondents (29%). Science students accounted for 181 (22.3%), while Engineering students accounted for 136 (16.7%). A majority of the respondents (607; 75%) came from intact families. Meanwhile, 131 (16%) were from single-parent families, 42 (5%) from separated families, and 29 (4%) from divorced families. These distributions show that the sample was diverse in terms of gender, age, field of study, and family background, making it representative of private university students in Oyo State. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled Questionnaire on Career Choice (QoCC). It consisted of five sections: Section A: Demographic information (gender, age, field of

study, family type). Section B: Career Choice Scale (16 items). Section C: Peer Pressure Scale (12 items). Section D: Family Background Scale (12 items). Section E: Gender Perception Scale (11 items). Items in Sections B–E were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counselling to ensure content validity. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS: Career Choice Scale ($\alpha = 0.724$), Peer Pressure Scale ($\alpha = 0.783$), Family Background Scale ($\alpha = 0.823$), and Gender Perception Scale ($\alpha = 0.711$). Since all coefficients were above 0.70, the instrument was considered reliable. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions and summarise demographic variables. Inferential statistics, including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression Analysis, were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: To what extent does peer pressure influence career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?

Table 1.
Mean and Standard Deviation of Peer Pressure Items

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
1	I belong to tutorial groups because of my friends.	2.78	1.04
2	I conform to the rule of campus truancy in my clique.	3.44	1.90
3	I turn in my assignments on time due to the influence of my friends.	3.05	1.77
4	I cannot resist going to late-night parties with my friends.	2.90	1.06
5	I skip classes because I do not want to be odd in my gang.	3.41	2.11
6	My friends and I chat for long hours on dating sites on the internet.	3.17	1.92
7	My friends insist on academic excellence on this campus.	3.61	1.93
8	I joined my friends to campaign against substance abuse.	3.24	1.70
9	My friends do not believe in sexual abstinence.	3.81	1.57
10	I am forced to adopt legal ways of making money in my peer group.	2.71	1.41
11	I must become violent or I leave my clique.	3.90	2.01
12	My friends and I speak against bullying/victimisation.	3.04	1.86

Weighted Average Mean = 3.26

The analysis indicates that students of private universities in Oyo State experience a generally high level of peer pressure. Several items demonstrate strong peer influence in negative directions, such as engagement in violence, disregard for sexual abstinence, and truancy. These

behaviours highlight the potential of peer groups to draw students away from disciplined academic and personal development pathways, which can indirectly distort their career decision-making process. At the same time, positive aspects of peer influence are also evident. For instance, many respondents acknowledged that their peers encourage them to pursue academic excellence and engage in campaigns against substance abuse. These findings suggest that peer pressure among private university students operates as a double-edged phenomenon: while it promotes certain desirable behaviours, it also exerts considerable pressure toward negative practices that may hinder sound career planning. Overall, the results demonstrate that peer pressure exerts a significant and multidimensional influence on students' behaviours, which in turn affects how they perceive and pursue their career choices.

Research Question 2: To what extent does family background influence career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?

Table 2.
Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Background Items

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
1	My parent(s) are very well educated to the tertiary level.	3.12	1.08
2	My parents have a strong liking for education and human development.	3.46	0.97
3	My parents' income caters to the needs of the entire family.	3.28	1.05
4	My family belongs to a high economic class.	2.84	1.11
5	Certain great values are upheld in my family.	3.57	0.95
6	Values are clarified for all members of my family.	3.41	1.02
7	My family belong to a high social class with a favourable status.	2.90	1.10
8	My family is recognised in the community for being social elites.	2.76	1.08
9	My family has a high regard for our culture.	3.44	0.99
10	Cultural norms are considered for every event in my family.	3.32	1.06
11	My parents are distinguished by their careers.	3.05	1.09
12	My parents' occupations enable us to live comfortably.	3.22	1.04

Weighted Average Mean = 3.20

The analysis reveals that family background exerts a moderately high influence on students' career choices. The strongest contributions come from parental values, cultural orientation, and parents' commitment to education. These findings suggest that students often internalise family values and parental guidance when making career-related decisions, reinforcing the role of the family as a primary socialising agent. Economic and social class factors, while present, showed comparatively lower influence. This indicates that although financial capacity and social standing of the family matter, they do not overshadow the cultural values, parental

encouragement, and role modelling provided by parents. Students appear to weigh these family influences when deciding on career paths, especially in areas of academic pursuit, stability, and cultural expectations. Overall, the results demonstrate that family background is an important determinant of career choice among private university students in Oyo State. Its impact is most strongly felt through the educational orientation, cultural values, and parental role modelling, which collectively shape how students perceive viable and respectable career options.

Research Question 3: To what extent does gender influence career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?

Table 3.
Mean and Standard Deviation of Gender Items

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
1	I believe that gender stereotypes influence perceptions.	3.36	1.07
2	I feel societal expectations based on gender roles should not exist.	3.41	0.98
3	I have role models of my gender who influence my life decisions.	3.28	1.05
4	I perceive bias based on gender in various fields of human endeavour.	3.22	1.02
5	I receive support based on my gender in pursuing my goals in life.	3.11	1.04
6	I face opposition in life because of my gender.	3.19	1.06
7	Being a male or a female should not be considered for important pursuits.	3.44	0.95
8	There is no more to the biological differences between a male and a female.	3.02	1.09
9	I compare my life trajectory with those of individuals of the opposite gender.	3.18	1.03
10	I am conscious of how my gender influences my decisions.	3.25	1.07
11	I perceive gender equality in the opportunities available for different people in society.	3.09	1.01

Weighted Average Mean = 3.23

The results indicate that gender has a moderately high influence on career choice among private university students in Oyo State. Respondents agreed that gender stereotypes and societal expectations still shape perceptions of career suitability, suggesting that traditional norms continue to influence students' decision-making processes. At the same time, many students expressed that gender should not be a determining factor in the pursuit of careers, reflecting an emerging awareness of equality and a rejection of restrictive gender roles. The presence of gender-based role models also played an important role, highlighting how visibility and representation in different fields can inspire career aspirations. Some students reported experiencing bias and opposition based on their gender, while others acknowledged receiving encouragement and support. This duality shows that the influence of gender is not uniform but context-dependent — it can serve as both a barrier through stereotypes and discrimination, and as a motivator through role modelling

and support systems. Overall, the findings demonstrate that gender exerts a significant but evolving influence on career choice. While societal expectations and stereotypes still pose challenges, increasing awareness of equality and representation is helping students make more independent and inclusive career decisions.

Research Question 4: What is the joint influence of peer pressure, family background, and gender on career choice among students of private universities in Oyo State?

Table 4.
Summary of Regression Analysis on the Joint Influence of Peer Pressure, Family Background, and Gender on Career Choice

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.062	0.004	0.014	8.69	1.037	0.000*

Predictors: Peer Pressure, Family Background, Gender

Dependent Variable: Career Choice

Significant at $p < 0.05$

The regression analysis shows that peer pressure, family background, and gender jointly accounted for only a small proportion of the variance in career choice among private university students in Oyo State. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.004$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.014$) indicates that the three predictors together explained about 1.4% of the variation in career choice, while other unmeasured factors account for the remaining influence. Although the F-value was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, the overall contribution of the three predictors was weak. This suggests that while peer pressure, family background, and gender are relevant, they are not the strongest determinants of career choice in this context. Other external factors, such as personal interest, labour market demand, economic realities, or mentorship, may play a more decisive role. Overall, the findings imply that peer pressure, family background, and gender exert a joint but minimal influence on students' career choices. Their effect is statistically significant but practically limited, highlighting the need to consider additional variables when studying determinants of career choice among undergraduates.

Discussion of Findings

The present study examined the extent to which peer pressure, family background, and gender predict career choice among private university students in Oyo State. The discussion is organised around the research questions and the emerging themes from the results. Findings revealed that peer pressure exerts a significant and multidimensional influence on students' behaviours, which in turn affects their career decision-making. Consistent with earlier studies (Filade et al., 2019; Hassan et al., 2024; Fudolin & Dioso, 2025), peers were shown to play a dual role: promoting academic excellence and responsible behaviours such as campaigns against

substance abuse, while at the same time encouraging negative tendencies such as truancy, violence, and risky social habits. This duality suggests that peer groups function as powerful socialising agents whose influence may either enhance or derail students' focus on sustainable career goals. For private university students in Oyo State, the relatively close-knit campus environment appears to magnify this dual influence, confirming the assertion of Babatunde (2024) that peer dynamics often shape identity formation and, by extension, career orientations. The results also showed that family background moderately influenced career decisions, with parental education, values, and cultural orientation exerting stronger effects than social class or financial status. This finding aligns with Abdul Rahaman et al. (2023) and Ledwaba (2022), who emphasised that parents' educational background and values provide a framework through which young people interpret career options. Interestingly, economic status and social class were less predictive in this study, suggesting that within the private university context, where tuition fees are generally high, socio-economic differences may be less pronounced. Instead, parental encouragement, cultural values, and role modelling remain the decisive family-related factors influencing career choice. This outcome resonates with Prasad and Rao (2024), who highlighted the enduring importance of values in shaping students' long-term aspirations. Gender was also found to exert a moderately high influence. Respondents acknowledged the persistence of gender stereotypes and societal expectations in shaping career perceptions, yet they simultaneously expressed growing resistance to such restrictions. This duality reflects the evolving gender landscape in Nigeria, as noted by Akanji et al. (2024) and Abidogun and Falola (2020). While female students continue to face barriers in traditionally male-dominated fields, the increasing visibility of role models across gender lines appears to foster more inclusive career aspirations. This aligns with global evidence (Smith, 2011; Allegrini, 2014) that gender boundaries in education and career pathways, though still present, are gradually weakening. Thus, private university students in Oyo State demonstrate both the persistence of traditional gender norms and an emerging awareness of equality and representation. Contrary to expectations, the regression analysis showed that peer pressure, family background, and gender jointly explained only a small proportion of the variance in career choice. While the model was statistically significant, its practical contribution was weak, accounting for about 1.4% of the variance. This suggests that other unmeasured factors—such as personal interest, intrinsic motivation, mentorship, labour market realities, or spiritual beliefs—may have a stronger influence on students' career decisions. This finding echoes Aminu (2019) and Nwaikpo (2025), who observed that career decision-making in Nigeria is shaped by a complex interplay of structural and individual factors, many of which transcend immediate social influences. It further indicates that while peer, family, and gender variables are relevant, they cannot be considered sole determinants of career outcomes in the private university context.

Implications of the Findings

Overall, the study highlights that career choice among private university students in Oyo State is shaped by an intricate balance of social and personal factors. Peer groups, families, and gendered expectations exert meaningful influences, but their collective impact is relatively weak

compared to other possible determinants. This underscores the need for a more holistic approach to career guidance that goes beyond managing peer, family, and gender influences to also address individual aspirations, market realities, and access to career information. For policy and practice, the findings point to the importance of strengthening career counselling services in Nigerian universities, enhancing mentorship opportunities, and fostering value-based parental involvement that supports, rather than constrains, students' autonomy in career decision-making.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated peer pressure, family background, and gender as predictors of career choice among private university students in Oyo State. The findings established that while each of these variables exerts a measurable influence on students' career decisions, their joint contribution is weak, accounting for only a small proportion of the variance. Specifically, peer pressure was shown to operate as a double-edged factor, encouraging both positive and negative behaviours that indirectly shape career choices. Family background was found to be influential mainly through parental education, values, and cultural orientation, while gender continued to affect career perceptions through persistent stereotypes, even as students increasingly resist restrictive norms. The overall conclusion is that although peer, family, and gender factors are important, they are not the primary determinants of career choice among private university students. Other influences, such as personal interest, labour market demands, mentorship, and intrinsic motivation, likely play a stronger role. The study therefore underscores the complexity of career decision-making and the limitations of focusing narrowly on social influences alone. In practical terms, the findings suggest the need for university administrators, counsellors, and policymakers to design career guidance programmes that balance social realities with personal aspirations. Parents should be encouraged to guide rather than dictate, peers should be harnessed as positive motivators, and gender-sensitive interventions should be implemented to challenge stereotypes and expand students' horizons. By adopting a holistic, student-centred approach, private universities in Nigeria can better equip their students to make informed, autonomous, and sustainable career choices. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Private universities in Oyo State should establish well-structured and accessible career counselling units. These should provide students with reliable information about diverse career opportunities, labour market realities, and personal aptitude assessments to support informed decision-making.
2. Since peer groups exert both constructive and destructive influences, universities should promote peer mentoring programmes, academic clubs, and career-focused student associations. These platforms can channel peer influence toward academic excellence and purposeful career aspirations.
3. Parents should be sensitised through seminars and workshops organised by universities on the importance of guiding, rather than imposing, career choices. Emphasis should be placed on

value-driven support that respects students' interests and abilities while considering labour market demands.

4. Universities should implement gender-sensitive policies and awareness campaigns that challenge traditional stereotypes. Providing visible role models, especially in non-traditional fields, will inspire students to pursue careers aligned with their interests rather than societal expectations.
5. Educational policymakers should integrate comprehensive career education into university curricula. This would ensure that career planning is not left solely to informal influences but is systematically addressed as part of students' development.

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