

The Impact of a Life Design Counselling Program on the Level of Vocational Self-Efficacy and Career Guidance Skills of Second-Year High School Students

Sofiene Mnadla¹, Wael Zoghلامي^{1*}, Zaineb Zerai³, Hbib Rayani¹, Ali Elloumi²

¹ Higher institute of applied studies in humanities, Zaghouan, Tunis University. LIGUE Laboratory, University of Mannouba, Tunisia.

² LARIDLAME Laboratory, University of Sfax, Tunisia

³ Department of Education Sciences and Pedagogy, High Institute of Sport and Physical Education of Ksar Said, Manouba University, Tunisia.

*Corresponding Author: alielloumi62@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research study measures the level of vocational self-efficacy of Tunisian second-year high school students as an indicator of their career guidance skills. This study also assesses the influence of academic, gender, and environmental variables on this level. To this end, a reduced version of the Career Choice Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSESSF) was initially administered to a population of 731 students to determine their level of professional self-efficacy. The same questionnaire was then reused to assess the effect of a life design counseling program on their sense of self-efficacy in career choice, the choice of a major, and career guidance skills in a sample of forty students. The main results showed that the level of self-efficacy in career choice is average and is not affected by the gender variable. However, it is strongly influenced by the environment ($F = 10,90 / p < 0,001$) and the academic paths ($F = 10,62 / P < .001$) of the high school students. The life design counseling program had a positive impact on the decision-making and orientation skills of the participants.

Keywords: Career decision; Design Counselling Program; Vocational Self-Efficacy High-school; Students

INTRODUCTION

Decision-making and career choices in the Tunisian educational context are marked by numerous challenges faced by students and guidance and counselors. This reflects the shortcomings of the guidance system and its inability to manage the phenomenon of reorientation. The consequences of this phenomenon are reflected in academic failure and dropouts, mainly due to flaws in the process of choosing a branch or section of study. Furthermore, among the main causes of this problem is the reliance of our education system's guidance practices on traditional approaches. In short, these traditional practices have not kept pace with developments in the world of guidance and academic counseling until 2023.

In 2023, the Tunisian education system adopted the concept of continuing education in guidance, which considers the career guidance process as a personal project for each student, part of a complex curriculum. In this context, the Tunisian circular on academic guidance of 2024 emphasizes the idea that students are at the center of the guidance process and an active participant in building their own academic and career plans. They have the right to choose their path or adapt it according to their academic and professional interests, their skills, and the national or international labor market. With this in mind, Beltrame Fabian (2023) confirmed the growing interest in self-guidance skills and the initiatives of contemporary education systems to guide them toward a competency

framework. This framework can transform guidance from an individual adventure full of risks within the learning path into a comprehensive competency. This competency diversifies into minor skills that can be developed through various learning activities. Thus, the concept of self-guidance has become closely linked to that of professional self-efficacy.

A study by Batz and Taylor (2001) demonstrated that understanding the level of self-efficacy helps guide guidance programs toward the concept of self-construction, an element of a new guidance paradigm based on support for self-construction. In this same context, Cohen-Scali et al. (2021) added that this new paradigm has emerged as a renewal initiative in the field of school guidance. Consequently, student self-guidance must be based on a central concept: "self-construction." This idea is consistent with the views of Mahrez Al-Drissi (2024), who considered guidance and personal development education as the path to humanizing schools, as self-knowledge, as part of learning and guidance activities, allows for the exploration and mobilization of the energies and capacities necessary to develop planning and problem-solving skills with students.

In line with this new approach, we tried, through this study, to capitalize on these developments and adapt them to the Tunisian and Arab educational context, despite their origins in different educational and cultural contexts. This research aims, through measurement, diagnosis and experimentation, to study the level of professional self-efficacy of second-year secondary school students in Tunisian institutions and the variables that influence it. This study also evaluates the impact of a life-oriented guidance intervention program on the development of students' self-guidance skills and the improvement of their level of professional self-efficacy.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

This study targeted second-year secondary school students from the Medenine Regional Education Delegation during the 2023-2024 school year. These students are enrolled in thirty-three secondary schools across six regions. The recruited high school students belong to the five secondary education streams (arts, sciences, economics and services, sports and computer sciences). All participants are involved in academic guidance and the choice of streams. The total number of students volunteering to participate in this study was 731 (36.5% boys and 63.5% girls). Eighty-five students are enrolled in arts, 236 in science, 161 in computer science, 236 in economics and services, and 13 in sports. Forty volunteer students were then recruited to form a pilot sample. A volunteer expert specializing in school and university guidance was recruited to develop and lead a school and career guidance program for students with low levels of professional self-efficacy. This 53-year-old volunteer is a specialist in the field (information and guidance counselor) and has been active for three years.

2.2. Career Self-Efficacy Measurement Instrument

The shortened version of the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSESSF) was adapted for higher education students by Jean-Philippe Gourdon (2013). It represents the French translation of the original English scale developed by Taylor and Betz (1983). The original version was developed by Betz, Klein, and Taylor (1996). It was designed to measure individuals' confidence in their ability to perform a range of tasks related to career decision-making. The shortened version of this questionnaire consists of 25 items and five dimensions (self-assessment, goal setting, information search, planning, and problem-solving) related to career decision-making self-efficacy. The psychometric properties of this tool were verified by administering it to a sample of 1,832 volunteers (Betz, Hammond, & Multon, 2005). Cronbach's alpha values for the scale dimensions ranged from 0.78 to 0.87. Responses to the items in this scale follow a five-point Likert scale (1; no confidence / 2; very little confidence / 3; moderate confidence / 4; great confidence / 5; complete confidence).

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

Two complementary stages were designed for the data collection and analysis of this study. The first stage was devoted to assessing the level of professional self-efficacy of an initial sample of 731 students using the short version of the Professional Self-Efficacy Scale. We explained the study objectives to the students and teachers before distributing the questionnaire (a paper version). Each volunteer completed the questionnaire individually. The time taken to complete the scale items ranged from 14 to 26 minutes.

In the second phase, a second sample of volunteer students (forty students), with a proven low level of professional self-efficacy and who had encountered selection difficulties, was recruited to participate in the life design counseling program. The average professional self-efficacy score was less than 2 (the maximum average was 5, according to the Likert scale) for all participants in this intervention phase, led by a school counseling and guidance specialist. The students participating in this guidance and counseling program were from the computer science and economics and services majors.

The guidance intervention program was designed based on the theories that established the life design paradigm in academic and career counseling. Field experiences and previous studies that had designed guidance interventions in the field of life design were also consulted. The content, objectives, and timing of the intervention were determined according to the four main stages of life design. At this same stage, the school guidance specialist

prepared the intervention activities and tools, as well as the facilitation methods, digital slides, and publications that would be used throughout the program.

This program consists of 12 mentoring sessions for two groups, each with six sessions. The program runs over three weeks. Two sessions are led by the school guidance counselor for each group per week. The opening and closing sessions last 50 minutes, while the subsequent orientation and information sessions last 90 minutes. The first session was dedicated to introducing the program to the participants, setting objectives, and establishing a timeline. The students' professional self-efficacy was also measured to compare the levels from the first assessment with those from the final assessment. At this same stage, the students' satisfaction with the guidance and counseling program was assessed.

Table 1: *Guidance and counseling program (sessions, objectives and means of achievement)*

Program Sessions	Objectives	Tools and means of achievement
- First Session : « introducing guidance and counseling program »	- Introducing students - introducing guidance and counseling program - contracting on stages and goals - Pre-measurement of professional self-efficacy	- Career decision Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (CDSESSF) - Digital and interactive display of the program content.
- Second session : « Know yourself first »	Motivating students through: - Exploring personal privacy and getting to know our self well. - Reviewing principles and values and enhancing the ability to self-evaluate. - Evaluating personal characteristics through identifying strengths, weaknesses, threats, and incentives.	- Digital presentations and interactions - SWOT analysis matrix - Profile printouts
- Third session : « Define your ambitions and dreams »	Motivate students to generate ideas by: - Encouraging dreaming and defining the characteristics of an ideal life. - Enhancing the ability to plan and assess potential. - Creating a schedule for life goals.	- Digital presentations and interactions - Positive thinking activity - Mind mapping activity
Session 4: « what can I do? »	- Review representations of the professional world. - Identify areas that match ambitions and abilities. - Enhance the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, and search for information.	- Digital presentations and interactions - Profile printouts - Modal thinking activity - Positive thinking activity
Session 5: « how can I do? »	- Setting goals and alternative plans. - Controlling personal and objective resources. - Classifying expectations and planning to address them. - Enhancing the ability to plan, solve problems, and set goals.	- Digital presentations and interactions - Positive thinking activity - Profile printouts - Design thinking activity - Mind mapping activity
Session 6: « program evaluation »	- Evaluating the program and benefiting from students' opinions. - Conducting a post-test of career decision self-efficacy level	- Questionnaire of guidance program satisfaction. - Career decision Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (CDSESSF)

All program sessions were conducted throughout April 2024, prior to the introductory orientation process undertaken by Tunisian second-year secondary school students. This selection process is generally made during the first week of May of each academic year.

The collected data were processed using SPSS statistical software (IBM 25). A series of tests were conducted with this software, including descriptive statistics, Student t-tests, Bravon-Pearson correlation tests, and a one-way ANOVA test.

RESULTS

We present, consecutively, the results of the self-efficacy levels of career decisions for students in the exploratory group according to region and field of study. Subsequently, we analyze the results of career guidance and counseling program effects on the self-efficacy levels of experimental group student's regarding career choices.

Table 2: Levels of self-efficacy in career choice according to study fields

Rapport							
Study Paths		Self-assessment	Information Search	Goals setting	Planning	Problem Solving	Career Decision Self efficacy
Arts	Mean	3,41	3,14	3,34	3,19	3,02	3,21
	N	85	85	85	85	85	85
	SD	,64	,64	,68	,60	,68	,49
Sciences	Mean	3,67	3,40	3,63	3,53	3,32	3,51
	N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	SD	,70	,66	,90	,90	,65	,49
computer sciences	Mean	3,41	3,18	3,29	3,17	3,00	3,38
	N	161	161	161	161	161	161
	SD	,79	,76	,72	,67	,68	,51
Economics and Services	Mean	3,45	3,11	3,32	3,19	3,05	3,24
	N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	SD	,96	,75	,69	,77	,64	,55
Sports	Mean	4,06	3,72	4,06	3,38	3,15	3,65
	N	13	13	13	13	13	13
	SD	,47	,37	,43	,42	,60	,26
Total	Mean	3,52	3,23	3,43	3,30	3,12	3,36
	N	731	731	731	731	731	731
	SD	,81	,72	,78	,79	,67	,52

The table above shows an average level of professional self-efficacy of the population studied, with a mean score of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 0.52. Descriptive statistics also showed that the values of the five dimensions of the scale were average, with a relative superiority for the self-assessment dimension (Means = 3.52 / SD = 0.81). On the other hand, the lowest level was recorded for the problem-solving dimension (M = 3.12 / SD = 0.67).

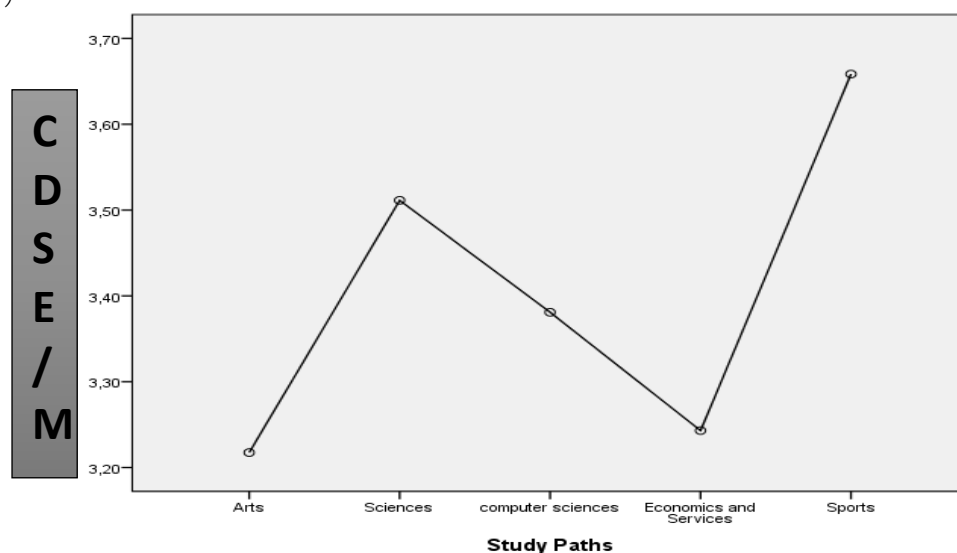


Figure 1 Career decision self-efficacy levels of different academic tracks

Based on the gender variable, girls showed a relatively higher level of professional self-efficacy ($M = 3.37 / SD = 0.51$) than boys (mean score = $3.35 / SD = 0.54$). This slight superiority of the female gender was also recorded on the five dimensions of the scale (self-assessment, information search, planning, problem solving and goal selection). Referring to the academic paths, the table above also showed a superiority of students in the sports stream in terms of professional self-efficacy ($M = 3.65 / SD = 0.26$) and all its dimensions compared to other academic streams. The lowest level of professional self-efficacy was recorded among students in the "letters" stream ($M = 3.21 / SD = 0.49$).

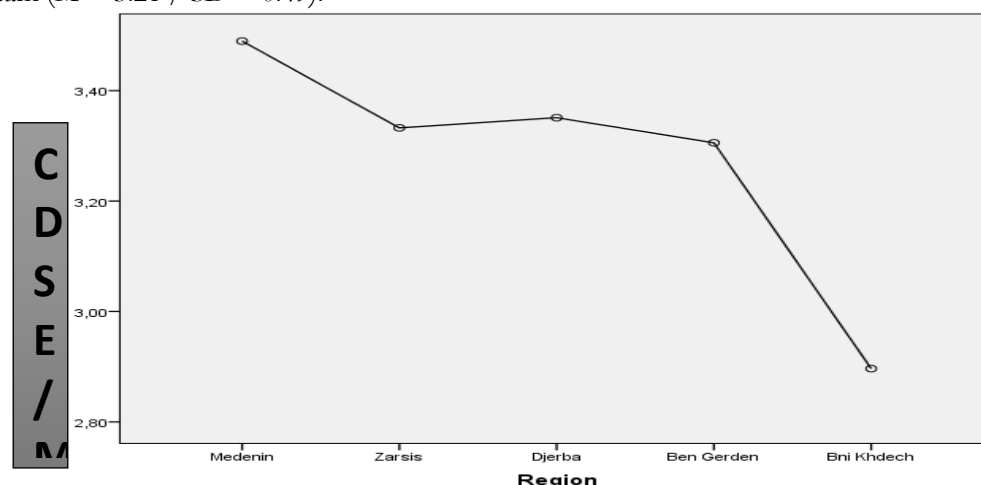


Figure. 2 Career decision self-efficacy levels of different regions

The graph above shows that the level of professional self-efficacy of students belonging to the Medenine region was the highest ($M = 3.48 / SD = 0.49$). While high school students in the BeniKhedache region recorded a lower level ($M = 2.89 / SD = 0.36$) compared to the rest of the regions. The levels of professional self-efficacy of students in the rest of the regions were close, as the mean scores varied between 3.35 ($SD = 0.49$) in the Djerba region, 3.33 ($SD = 0.60$) in the Zarzis region and 3.30 ($SD = 0.57$) in the Ben Guerdane region. Referring to the size of the study population (731), school guidance specialists in the southwest region of Tunisia can rely on the graph as a guide map to know the level of professional self-efficacy or as a starting point for designing and developing guidance and counseling programs to develop students' self-guidance skills.

Table 3 The one way Anova test of career decision self-efficacy differences between academic tracks

ANOVA						
		Sum of squares	ddl	Mean square	F	Sig.
Self-assessment	Between-groups	13,71	4	3,42	5,22	,000
	Within-groups	476,13	726	,65		
	Total	489,84	730			
Information Search	Between-groups	13,97	4	3,49	6,85	,000
	Within-groups	370,15	726	,51		
	Total	384,12	730			
Goals setting	Between-groups	20,70	4	5,17	8,73	,000
	Within-groups	430,35	726	,59		
	Total	451,05	730			
Planning	Between-groups	19,26	4	4,81	7,96	,000
	Within-groups	438,75	726	,60		
	Total	458,01	730			
Problem Solving	Between-groups	14,06	4	3,51	8,02	,000
	Within-groups	318,20	726	,43		
	Total	332,26	730			
Career Decision Self-efficacy	Between-groups	11,57	4	2,89	10,96	,000
	Within-groups	191,66	726	,26		
	Total	203,24	730			

The one-way ANOVA test confirmed the existence of statistically highly significant differences ($F = 10.62 / P < .001$) between academic fields (arts, computer science, economics and services, science and sports) in terms of students' levels of career self-efficacy. We also noted the presence of statistically significant differences between study sections for the five dimensions of career self-efficacy; self-assessment, information search, goal selection, planning and problem solving ($P < .01$ for all dimensions of career self-efficacy).

Table 4. The variation of career decision self-efficacy differences between regions

ANOVA					
CDSE					
	Sum of squares	Ddl	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between-groups	11,518	4	2,879	10,903	,000
Within-groups	191,727	726	,264		
Total	203,245	730			

The one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) demonstrated the variation in professional self-efficacy levels from one region to another. This variance is statistically highly significant ($F = 10.9 / p < 0.001$).

After assessing the levels of professional self-efficacy of students from different fields of study in five regions of the Southeast, we can make some inferences. First, we observed significant differences between the levels of professional self-efficacy according to regions and fields of study. This significant difference was observed in all dimensions of professional self-efficacy according to the variables regions and academic fields. Next, we found that the lowest levels were recorded in the fields of Economics and Services, Arts, and Information Sciences.

Following these results and in order to ensure the development of guidance skills in students who showed low levels of professional self-efficacy, a guidance and counseling program was developed for a pilot sample of forty volunteer students. This program was delivered by a volunteer specialist in school and university guidance.

Table 5 dimensions levels of career decision self-efficacy (experimental groups)

Measures		Self-assessment	information search	Setting Goals	Planning	Problem solving	Career decision self-efficacy
Pre-measurement	Means	2,7950	2,8000	3,0600	2,3800	2,8950	2,7860
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
	SD	,59655	,50230	,56786	,67452	,64369	,40190
Post-measurement	Means	4,0900	3,1350	3,9950	3,1300	3,7150	3,6130
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
	SD	,34179	,70367	,46517	,67109	,57448	,35632
Total	Means	3,4425	2,9675	3,5275	2,7550	3,3050	3,1995
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80
	SD	,81112	,63041	,69809	,76769	,73328	,56175

Following the career guidance and counseling program, the students' level of professional self-efficacy improved from an average of 2.78 ($SD = 0.40$) at the first measurement to a score of 3.61 ($SD = 0.35$). These values indicate a significant improvement in the participants' level of professional self-efficacy. The results also demonstrated a significant improvement in all dimensions of professional self-efficacy, especially self-assessment, which reached an average of 4.09 ($SD = 0.34$), compared to approximately 2.79 ($SD = 0.59$) before participating in the sessions and activities of the guidance and counseling program aimed at strengthening the autonomy and decision-making skills of the students in the experimental sample. Therefore, we infer that the guidance program had a greater impact on the participants' level of self-assessment. The results of the pre- and post-tests also showed a significant improvement in the level of self-efficacy among high school students in the computer science major, with the average score reaching 3.59 ($SD = 0.35$) compared to 2.82 ($SD = 0.40$). An increase in the level of professional self-efficacy was also observed among students in the economics and services major. The pre-test results showed a mean of 2.75 ($SD = 0.40$). After the intervention of the school guidance counselor, the mean for the same group reached 3.63 ($SD = 0.35$).

To better verify the impact of the guidance skills development program on students in each major (economics and services and computer science), a single-sample Student's t-test was used. The results showed a clear impact of the guidance and counseling program on students in the first group, in the computer science major. The p-value reached 5.36, with high statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). This indicates a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-participation measures of professional self-efficacy.

In parallel with the previous results, we tested the impact of the guidance program on the second group, in the economics and services major, using a Student t-test on the same sample. The results demonstrated a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-participation levels of professional self-efficacy, with a t-value of 6.88 ($p < 0.05$). These results confirm the program's positive impact on developing autonomy and decision-making skills among students in the economics and services major.

We also assessed participants' satisfaction with the guidance and counseling program. A question was added to the main scale (CDSESSF) assessing their level of satisfaction (responses on a six-point Likert scale). Descriptive statistics showed a high level of satisfaction in both groups, with a relative superiority among students in the computer science major ($M = 4.65 / SD = 0.48$) compared to students in the economics and services major ($M = 4.40 / SD = 0.75$).

The impact of the guidance program on the career decisions of participating students was assessed. The preliminary guidance session determined the career selection and reorientation rates of students who participated in the career skills development program. The administrative file documenting the students' career choices indicated that 70% of them received their first career choice. In contrast, 30% of students were assigned other career choices.

DISCUSSION

The exploratory study among a population of 731 Tunisian second-year secondary school students confirmed that their level of professional self-efficacy was average. They did not possess the high levels that would allow them to make academic and professional decisions with confidence and to design their life projects without risk of error. Although the level of competence is higher in the dimensions of self-assessment and goal setting, its weakness in other dimensions renders this partial increase ineffective as long as it is not linked to the ability to plan, solve problems, and seek reliable information. These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework of self-efficacy developed by Bandura (1986). This theoretical model assumes that individuals develop their self-efficacy through success experiences and indirect learning experiences acquired by imitating role models they consider successful. The lack of these experiences among students in the Medenine region, as well as the absence of training or development programs throughout their school career, has a direct impact on their limited professional self-efficacy. This is mainly due to the lack of training programs dedicated to the academic and cognitive development of students.

Students in sports and science majors demonstrated superiority over those in other fields of study. This superiority is mainly explained by the fact that these students chose their specialization based on their physical and mental skills and abilities. Consequently, they demonstrate great conviction in their specialization and a greater ability to plan and set goals than students in other fields. In this context, Bandura (1997) confirmed, by studying the links between self-efficacy levels and certain fields or disciplines, that the higher the learners' sense of self-efficacy, the more they choose stimulating activities and allow them to develop their skills. Similarly, the same study demonstrated low interest in activities for which they feel inadequate.

The lowest levels were recorded in the dimensions of problem solving and information seeking, confirming that the main difficulties encountered by Tunisian students in making decisions about their professional and academic futures are primarily due to a lack of reliable information. Students' lack of information and their inability to seek it often lead them to fall into a vicious cycle of conflicting information from unreliable sources such as friends, family, and social networks (Lane et al., 2002).

We note that our study confirmed that levels of professional self-efficacy varied by region. This means that students' professional and academic choices are influenced by their social and family environment. This idea is consistent with the findings of Wu et al. (2025), who confirmed that a student's social and family situation influences their decisions. Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds encounter difficulties in choosing their career path. Also within this framework, the Euroguidance-France network (Michel Jouini et al., 2025) offers young people aged 15 to 30 a program called "One Young Person - One Solution." This plan aims to provide a solution for every young person aged 15 to 30. It leverages a range of resources: hiring assistance, career guidance, training, support, housing, and financial aid for young people facing difficulties. The goal is to address every situation without leaving anyone behind.

After implementing the decision-making and career guidance program, it was found that the level of career self-efficacy increased significantly among all members of the study sample. This improvement affected all dimensions of this scale, with the self-assessment dimension being the most strengthened compared to the other dimensions. Cardozo et al. (2014) demonstrated the positive impact of the career guidance and information program on life construction, career adjustment, career efficacy, and confidence in an experimental group compared to a control group.

Wang and Liu (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of a life coaching program in developing four levels of career competence: career mastery, career curiosity, self-confidence, and career adaptability. Several other studies (Obi, 2015) have demonstrated the effectiveness of certain coaching trainings in reducing professional hesitation and developing professional maturity and self-efficacy.

The high level of satisfaction among students in the pilot sample participating in the guidance program reflects an urgent need for guidance approaches that move away from traditional media-based approaches and favor approaches that meet the needs of the "VUCA" world, as Damien Canzittu (2022) indicates, referring to what characterizes today's complex world. Bernaud et al. (2013) explain that the need for support in building one's life requires an approach that is not based on the realization of a professional project, but rather on understanding past and future choices and their connection to different areas of life.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the level of professional self-efficacy of Tunisian and Arab students, targeting the second-year secondary school level and tracking the variables that influence it. It was found that students demonstrated average levels of professional self-efficacy due to the limited resources available in the Tunisian environment, particularly experiences that contribute to the development of these skills. Official Tunisian curricula prioritize cognitive and intellectual achievement over the development of skills and expertise through experience and training.

This first part of the study revealed disparities in professional self-efficacy levels among high school students by region. In short, students from less privileged social backgrounds in terms of economic and cultural development displayed lower levels of professional self-efficacy than other students. This supports the influence of social and family context on professional competence levels. The results also confirmed variations in students' professional self-efficacy levels based on their academic specializations. This is primarily due to social representations and perceptions rooted in the minds of Tunisian students regarding academic specializations. In summary, there is a classification and preference for academic programs based on their nominal value and financial profitability.

After identifying the professional self-efficacy levels of the exploratory population, we developed a guidance and counseling program for volunteer students who demonstrated low professional skills during the second phase of the research. This program was based on modern theoretical foundations that approach the career path as a self- and life-building project. The life-building guidance experience demonstrated its suitability to the Tunisian learning context and its compatibility with the reality of academic guidance in particular. The sessions and guided activities also had a positive impact on the professional self-efficacy levels and self-guidance skills of Tunisian high school students, two essential pillars for making successful career and academic decisions and eliminating any form of confusion and hesitation. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a theoretical analysis of the concepts and practices prevailing in the Tunisian guidance system and their suitability to the needs of learners at different stages of their learning. In addition, the use of the life construction paradigm in the Tunisian educational context can be a starting point for providing proposals and field experiences to all students interested in developing their self-guidance skills.

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