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Psychometric properties and validity of an instrument measuring lower secondary students' perceived competence in educational decision-making process

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Abstract

Making decisions about school or career is a very important task for young people since these choices can have long-term consequences. The main purpose of this study is to examine psychometric properties and construct validity of Perceived Competence in Educational Decision-making Process Questionnaire (PCEDPQ). A multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) is performed to test the scale theoretical structure and the metric invariance across gender. Results of MCFA are consistent with the hypothesized scale structure and show measurement invariance across gender. The reliability of the scales in terms of internal consistency ranged from .74 to .79.

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Keywords: Multi-group confirmatory factor analysis; Educational Guidance; Perceived competence; decision-making process

1. Introduction

Making decisions about school or career is a very important task for young people since these choices can have long-term consequences, such as the commitment of a student to a particular career path involving very long periods of education and training (e.g., Creed, Patton, Prideaux, 2006). According to developmentally focused theories of

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guidance (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981; Super, 1957), the process of educational decision making begins in primary school and continues throughout the life span and implies many factors and abilities (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005).

One of the most used approaches to analyze the complex process of educational decision making process is the model proposed by Crites (1974). This theory distinguished between two aspects of this process: the content, which is referred to, for example, the type of school chosen, and the process, that is the way through which young adolescents get to an educational choice. Crites (1974) identified also a number of choice competencies relating to the process of decision making, such as goal selection, gathering information, problem solving and self-appraisal. Taylor and Betz (1983), consistently with the social cognitive approach, maintained that an effective decision making process involves not only the development of abilities but also the confidence in one's own perceived ability to successfully complete the tasks necessary for educational decisions. Some studies showed for example that the sense of confidence in the decision making process influenced the exploration of educational options: people with high self-confidence had higher probability of being actively involved in seeking information about available choices (Hackett, 1995). Moreover, the decision making process was associated with anxiety when the self confidence was low (Matsui & Onglatco, 1992). The evaluation of these perceptions has been considered useful to understand the decision making process and the difficulties that could interfere with the success of this process (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

In the Italian context, the end of the lower secondary school (ISCED level 2) constitutes the first important step in the educational decision making process. Here students have to decide between different types of upper secondary schools (e.g., lyceum, technical and professional education). Moreover, the organization of the upper secondary schools has been recently changed, and new types of school are now available. Therefore, instruments that could help lower secondary students in the educational decision making process are especially needed in the Italian context. However, there is a lack of instruments measuring the perceived competence on educational decision making process of the students' in lower secondary school (Nota & Soresi, 2000). As a matter of fact, several instruments have been developed for measuring the self-efficacy in career decision making but they are mostly directed to students attending upper secondary schools and university (e.g., Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form, Betz, Klein, Taylor, 1996). In the present study a questionnaire for measuring the perceived competencies in educational decision making process of lower secondary students is proposed and its psychometric properties are analyzed. The questionnaire was developed on the base of the theoretical approaches proposed by Crites (1974) and Taylor and Betz (1983).

1.1. Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to develop the Perceived Competence in Educational Decision-making Process Questionnaire (PCEDPQ) and to examine its factor structure and measurement invariance across gender in the Italian Context.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedures

Subjects were 348 Italian students (49% females and 51% males) who attended the last year of four lower secondary schools which were involved in a project about educational guidance. The PCEDPQ was administered collectively in classroom at the beginning of the project, in the first term of the school year.

2.2. Instrumentation

The development of the PCEDPQ was based on the theoretical approaches proposed by Crites (1974) and Taylor and Betz (1983) and was conducted through a four steps process. In the first step, the items were generated by a committee of professors and researchers experienced in guidance. They were asked to generate items in line with the conceptual definition of the choices competencies relating to the process of decision making process proposed by

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