



The use of interest and competence scores to predict educational choices of Chinese high school students[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how interest, perceived competence (i.e., efficacy), and prestige preference, as measured by the Personal Globe Inventory (PGI; Tracey, 2002), contributed to the classification of Chinese high school students with different education orientations. It was hypothesized that interest, efficacy, and prestige would yield a significantly higher correct classification hit rate of students with different educational orientations than would be expected by chance, and that the combined set of the interest, efficacy, and prestige predictors would contribute significantly more variance than interest scores alone or the efficacy scores alone in predicting students' educational orientations. Findings suggested that the interest and competence scores of the PGI based on both the Holland RIASEC model as well as the 4-type (People, Things, Data, and Ideas) model were able to discriminate among students in three educational orientation groups: Arts and Humanities, Business, and Science. The PGI interest and competence scores of students in these educational orientation groups were consistent with the expected theoretical direction. The findings were supportive of the concurrent validity of the PGI for senior high school students in Hong Kong. Theoretical and practice implications were discussed.

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1. Introduction

The Personal Globe Inventory (PGI; Tracey, 2002) is a relatively new interest measure that has the potential to advance career interest assessment. Conceptually, the PGI is anchored in a spherical, 3-dimensional model of interest incorporating the popular RIASEC Holland interest model (Holland, 1997) with additional dimensions found to be important in interest assessment, including the People–Things and Data–Ideas dimensions (Prediger & Vansickle, 1992) as well as an occupational prestige dimension (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981, 2002; Tracey & Rounds, 1996a). The PGI was developed out of systematic research and empirical work through which the conceptual model and items were polished and refined (Tracey, 2010a; Tracey & Rounds, 1996a, 1996b). The PGI has three sections, which are activity preferences, activity competence beliefs, and occupational preferences. Scores are computed in each of these three sections, including 18 basic scales and 13 composite scales (RIASEC scales, Prediger's People, Things, Data, and Ideas scales, dimensional scales of People vs. Things, Data vs. Ideas, and Prestige). The PGI and the spherical model of interest are promising advancements that could be used to guide research in career choice and development.

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Existing research studies on the cross-cultural validity of PGI have focused almost exclusively on the validity of the conceptual structure of the PGI across cultures. For instance, Long, Adams, and Tracey (2005) developed a Chinese translation of the PGI and administered it to both college and high school students. The findings supported the existence of three substantive factors underlying the PGI, which were People/Things, Data/Ideas, and Prestige. The findings also supported the Holland RIASEC interest structure as well as an 8-type octant model (Social Facilitating, Managing, Business Detail, Data Processing, Mechanical, Nature/Outdoors, Artistic, and Helping). Similar findings were reported in studies by Zhang, Kube, Wang, and Tracey (2013) on a diverse high school and college student sample in China using the PGI short form (PGI-S, Tracey, 2010a), by Long, Watanabe, and Tracey (2006) on Japanese college students, by Šverko (2008) on Croatian students (primary, secondary, and university students), by Darcy (2005) on Irish high school students, by Hedrih (2008) on working adults in Serbia, by Wilkins, Ramkissoon, and Tracey (2013) on Caribbean college students, by Akbarzadeh (2010) on Iranian college students, and Caulum, Tracey, Gresham, and McCarty (2011) on Singapore high school students. An important area that has not been adequately addressed in cross-cultural research is the predictive or concurrent validity of the PGI interest (i.e., preferences for activities and occupations) and competence scales. More broadly from a theoretical perspective, the relative contributions of interest and perceived competence in predicting educational and career choices in diverse cultural contexts is still an issue to be resolved through empirical research (e.g., Rottinghaus, Larson, et al., 2003; Tracey, 2010b; Zhou, Leung, & Li, 2012). Accordingly, this study examined the relative contributions of the PGI interest and competence scales on predicting the educational choices of Chinese senior high school students.

The conjoint and simultaneous use of interest and efficacy assessment in career counseling and intervention has been advocated in the literature. Researchers have recommended assessing both interests and perceived efficacy to enrich the interpretation of interest patterns as well as inform intervention, as research studies have shown that sizable portions of respondents fell into the nonmatching quadrants of the interests–efficacy matrix, i.e., the high-interest/low-confidence quadrant and the low-interest/high-confidence quadrant (e.g., Betz, Borgen, & Harmon, 1996; Rottinghaus, Betz, et al., 2003). Indeed, interest–competence congruence and interest–competence development are common and challenging issues in career counseling practice (Betz & Rottinghaus, 2006; Chartrand, Borgen, Betz, & Donnay, 2002). Some of the broad issues are: how to use career assessment to facilitate client's understanding of their career interest and competence, how interest and competence are used in making career decisions, how to help clients who are struggling with issues related to low interest–competence congruence, and how to expand one's interest and competence boundaries. These questions have become increasingly salient in a world in which knowledge are rapidly evolving, and the creative mix and development of competence and interest are instrumental to the design of life and careers in societies and organizations (Savickas et al., 2009).

An important theoretical question is the relative contribution of interest and efficacy in predicting career and educational choices. In decades of career studies at least two differing views of the relationship between interests and efficacy and their relative importance in fostering career and educational choices have been proposed. One is the Holland-based simultaneous model (Holland, 1997) that hypothesized a bidirectional, reciprocal relationship between interests and efficacy. The other is the Social cognitive career theory (SCCT, Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2002), which agrees that efficacy and interests are both fundamental but postulates that self-efficacy beliefs shape interest development which then affects educational and career choice. Regardless of which model used, recent empirical studies based on Western samples have supported the predictive value of including both interest and self-efficacy. For instance, Donnay and Borgen (1999) investigated the incremental predictive validity of the Skill Confidence Inventory – General Competence Themes (SCI-GCTs) over the Strong Interest Inventory – General Occupational Themes (SII-GOTs) among a group of women and men. Using the GOTs, 79% of the variance in the occupational group membership could be explained. When SCI was added, the between-group variance explained increased to 91%. The rate of accurate classification also increased from 25.7% to 37.8%. Rottinghaus et al. (2003) used the Expanded Skills Confidence Inventory (SCI) to measure skill efficacy among college students, along with the SII-GOT as interest measures. Findings from discriminant analyses revealed that both interests and confidence measures brought about additional predictive power over either one measure alone in predicting career aspirations, major, and career preferences job families. The authors suggested that parallel measures of interests and self-efficacy should be used to facilitate interest–competence congruence and development, and to broaden clients' awareness of career options. Similarly, a number of other studies have confirmed that parallel measures of interest and competence added to predicting career and educational choices (e.g., Flores, Spanierman, Armstrong, & Velez, 2006; Larson et al., 2010; Tracey, 2010b; Tracey & Hopkins, 2001).

There are, however, few cross-cultural research studies on how interest and efficacy are used in making career decisions, especially in a Chinese cultural context. Interest and competence appeared to be important but at times competing factors in making career and educational decisions among Chinese students. Hou and Leung (2011) compared the career choice expectations of parents and the career aspirations of their adolescent children and found that parents tended to expect their children to consider occupations that are higher in prestige than their children. The author speculated that parents' were more likely to expect their children to make career choices based on social valuing and competence fulfillment, and their children were likely to consider options based on both interest and competence fulfillment. Zhou et al. (2012) used a prototype research methodology and asked university students in Beijing, China, to report their perceptions of the term “work.” This methodology aimed at identifying indigenous schemas on work that are salient in a Chinese cultural context. The findings revealed that participants perceived a strong association between work and the acquisition and utilization of competence/skills, but work as interest fulfillment was comparatively less salient. Findings from these studies echoed the importance of understanding the dynamic interplay between interest and competence in career counseling research and practice in a Chinese cultural context.

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