

УДК 378

CAREER DECISION MAKING DIFFICULTIES, CAREER DECISION MAKING SELF-EFFICACY AND AUTONOMOUS FUNCTIONING AMONG FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

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Abstract

University students often experience difficulties in the career decision-making process, which are related to internal and external factors of decision making. The article focuses on the difficulties of career decision making suggested by Gati, Osipow, Krausz (1996). Lack of readiness, lack of information and inconsistent information are the main categories of difficulties that could be influenced by many personal factors, like lack of motivation, dysfunctional beliefs, internal or external conflicts, etc. The study sample consisted of 127 first-year undergraduate students at Ilia State University. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between career decision making difficulties and career decision self-efficacy, interest taking and sustainability to control. Correlation was not found between career decision making and authorship - the third facet of autonomous functioning. It should be noted that career decision self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of career decision-making difficulties. The comparison of students who received career counseling scored higher on career self-efficacy. Based on this findings, I suggest that it is important for students to enhance their self-knowledge, self-confidence, occupational exploration in order to make the transition process from high school to university less stressful.

Key words: *Choosing a profession, difficulties in choosing profession, career decision, self-efficacy, authorship, self-awareness, interest taking, sustainability to control, career counseling, career guidance.*

Introduction

Low-productive labor market in Georgia is caused by the so-called horizontal mismatch between education and employment, which occurs when an individual is not employed by his/her profession [19]. Apart from that, the "World Bank" report ("Skills Mismatch and Unemployment, Labor market challenges") highlights the problems that young people face after school graduation in Georgia [22]. On the one hand, there is no demand for their profession in the contemporary job market and on the other hand, their work qualification does not meet the requirements of employer. This analysis illustrates the significance of the link between school and university, university and the labor market in order to provide students a tangible opportunity to make one of the most crucial decisions in life. This research focuses to explain the importance of making right career choice and find out why they make wrong professional choices.

First-year students face a number of challenges, including the career decision making difficulties. The majority of them lack the self-confidence to overcome difficulties associated with choosing major. Data from several sources have identified the significant relationships between decision making and other external or internal factors, including cultural influences, as well as locus of control, self-concept, peer pressure, emotional intelligence, personality traits etc. [10] [20] [23]. The present study aimed to determine whether self-efficacy is an important predictor of career decision making difficulties, as well as to assess the autonomous functioning of students,

specifically, to find out whether a person's self-congruence, interest taking, and susceptibility to control affect the decision making process.

According to Career Decision making Difficulties model suggested by Gati, Crausz, Osipow (1996), indecisiveness emerges before the decision-making process [13]. People with this difficulty experience different psychological problems such as high anxiety, low self-esteem. One of the longitudinal research has shown that decision making difficulty had a negative impact on high school students' choice of University and profession [16]. It has been demonstrated that students with CDDQ had lower Career decision self-efficacy and negative thoughts than those who did not experience difficulties [7]. Previous study confirms that career decision making self-efficacy decreases dysfunctional beliefs (other facet of CDDQ model), which means that the more confident they feel in terms of career-related decision, the less they let their parents, friends, or significant others to take responsibility and they thrive themselves to find accurate, consistent information [8]. Hence, it's less likely to make the wrong decision.

Career Decision Making Difficulties

Lack of readiness, lack of information, and lack of inconsistent information are the categories of difficulties which take place before and during the decision making process. Lack of readiness is the broad category of CDDQ which arises before the process of decision-making. It includes three subcategories: Lack of motivation, general indecisiveness, and dysfunctional beliefs. The second major category can be subdivided into lack of information about the process, the self, the occupations, and the ways of obtaining information. The third category that emerges meanwhile the process of decision making is inconsistent information, including unreliable information, internal and external conflicts [13].

Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE)

According to Career Social Cognitive Theory (SCCT), career decision making is stemmed from three socio-cognitive processes: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectancy, and setting career goals. This theory suggests an idea of how self-efficacy can become an objective indicator of an ability, as well as how students can enhance their interests in their professional choice [18]. Those who have a sense of high career self-efficacy can determine success and seek positive support to achieve their career ambitions [3]. If the belief of self-efficacy is low, it convinces the person that some task is more difficult than it actually is and consequently, she/he shows less resilience and effort towards the task. A large number of studies have shown that there are links between career self-efficacy and career self-awareness [4] [7]. In a meta analytic approach, researchers found out that gender and race are not a critical factors of a process domain self-efficacy, however it correlates significantly with self-esteem, vocational identity, vocational outcome expectations and peer support and career indecision variables [8].

Autonomous Functioning

Considering internal motivational factors of choice and decision making, it is necessary to review the theory of self-determination. According to this theory, the individual cannot attain a sense of competence/effectiveness unless his/her actions are emerged from a sense of autonomy [15]. As stated in Deci and Ryan's theory of self-determination, the three psychological needs are considered the source of motivation and well-being of an individual, they are competence, autonomy, and relatedness. How it might be related to making a decision? An individual who makes a choice about the profession with his or her own preferences and not by external contingencies, including social pressures, they obtain high self-autonomy. The understanding of competence is very similar to the concept of self-efficacy, which can be defined as the experience of an individual when he succeeds in interacting with the environment and achieves the desired result. Autonomous individuals are open to and interested in self-exploration and are aware of their values, feelings, and needs. Using a growing interest in this phenomenon, researchers have developed and

validated the index of Autonomous Functioning (IAF), which provides a measure of trait autonomy based on three facets assessing authorship/self-congruence, interest taking, and low susceptibility to control [24]. Authors suggest the definition of self-congruence - "individual experience him or herself as the author of behavior and fully assents to the actions he or she undertakes" [24, p.398]. Self-congruence assesses the individual as the "author" of behavior when she/he is responsible for the undertaken actions. Interest-taking guides a person to find out the motives of an action and feelings, despite positive or negative experiences. The last facet of IAF - susceptibility to control is a tendency of individuals to be influenced by attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others and they often pressure themselves in order to avoid the feeling of shame.

Research questions: (1) What is the relationship between Career Decision Making Difficulties and Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy? (2) What is the relationship between Career Decision Making Difficulties and the facets of Autonomous functioning? (3) Does the level of CDDQ and CDMSE differ depending on whether the students have received career counseling?

Hypothesis: (1) Career Decision Making Difficulties correlate negatively with Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy. (2) Self-congruence/authorship, Interest taking, as well as susceptibility to control correlate positively with CDDQ. (3) Students who have received career counseling, experience less difficulty in the decision-making process, and have a sense of high self-efficacy.

Method

Participants

The participants were recruited from the first-year students of Ilia State University. A total of 127 students participated in the study, the mean age for the participants was 18,5 years ($SD=1.78$), 83.5% of the respondents were female 46,5 % of respondents received career counseling. Research questionnaires were distributed online, the estimated time to complete the questionnaire was 15-20 minutes.

Instruments

Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ). The CDDQ [13] translated into Georgian. The questionnaire consist 3 sub-scales, overall 34 items. The first sub-scale measure "Lack or readiness" (Alpha, $\alpha =.43$) e.g. "I know that I have to choose a career, but I don't have the motivation to make the decision now". Second sub-scale - "Lack of information" ($\alpha = .93$), e.g. "I find it difficult to make a career decision because I don't know what factors to take into consideration". Third sub-scale "Inconsistent Information" ($\alpha =.83$), e.g. " I find it difficult to make a career decision because I am equally attracted by a number of careers and it is difficult for me to choose among them". The answers are presented on a *nine point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (does not describe me) to 9 (describes me well)*,

The Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Karen Taylor and Nancy Betz [6]. A short form of instrument, with 25 statements ($\alpha =.91$) were used in this particular study. Respondents respond to the 5-point Liker scale. The questionnaire assesses a person's ability to obtain information about professions, whether they have the ability to set a goal and work to accomplish it, to identify the readiness to overcome difficulties and solve problems, (e.g. "How much confidence do you have that you could you find information in the library about occupations you are interested in").

Index of Autonomous functioning. The questionnaire of Autonomous functioning is based on three theoretically derived subscales [24]. Authorships refers ($\alpha =.88$), how much an individual sees himself/herself as the author of the behavior ("My decisions represent my most important values

and feelings”). Interest taking ($\alpha = .60$) reflect ones engagement in a continuing process of learning more about him or herself (“I am interested in why I act the way I do”). Susceptibility to control ($\alpha = .84$) regards the action that is performed without the influence of internal and external pressure (“I do things in order to avoid the feeling badly about myself”).

Procedures

Pearson correlation was used to reveal the relationships between variables. After identifying significant relationships between variables, the data was processed by regression analysis (dependent variable – career decision making difficulties, independent variable – career decision making self-efficacy, susceptibility to control and interest taking). In order to examine whether or not there were difference between in groups of participants who received career counseling and who did not, independent sample t test was conducted.

Results

Pearson Correlation Coefficient has exhibited a moderate negative relationship between Career Decision Making Difficulties and Career Decision Making Self-efficacy. A similar result is found for the two CDDQ subscales, lack of information and inconsistent information. A weak negative correlation was detected between lack of readiness and career decision making self-efficacy. Statistically significant, a moderate positive correlation was demonstrated between Career Decision making difficulties and Susceptibility to control. There are a weak positive relationship between CDDQ and interest taking. No relationship was revealed between CDDQ and self –congruence.

Table N1 correlation between variables * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

| | M | SD | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|---|---|---|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. CDDQ | 121 | 41.7 | | | | -.38** | .12 | .32** | .20* |
| 2. Lack of Readiness | 53 | 11.2 | | | | -.18* | .041 | .31** | .20* |
| 3. Lack of information | 39 | 22.8 | | | | -.41** | -.13 | .21* | .12 |
| 4. Inconsistent Information | 28 | 15.8 | | | | -.28** | -.17 | .31** | .20* |
| 5. CDMSE | 103 | 41.7 | | | | | .38** | .07 | .19* |
| 6. Authorship | 19 | 5.1 | | | | | | .09 | |
| 7. Susceptibility to control | 14,4 | 4.09 | | | | | | | .43** |
| 8. Interest Taking | 18,6 | 5.1 | | | | | | | .40** |

Regression analysis was carried out in the second phase of the study to determine whether career decision making self-efficacy, as well as susceptibility to control and interest taking could be considered as predictors of CDDQ. The finding gives a significant negative association of CDDQ with self-efficacy ($\beta = -.43$, $p < .001$), as well as with interest taking ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$). Susceptibility to control is positively related to CDDQ ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$).

Table N2 Regression analysis * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

| | β | p-value | T |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|------|
| CDMSE | -.43 | .00 | -5.6 |
| Susceptibility to control | .28 | .00 | 3.4 |
| Interest Taking | .17 | .03 | 2.8 |
| Total R ² | .29 | | |

Another objective of the study was to determine the importance of career counseling in terms of CDDQ and Career decision-making self-efficacy. Independent T-test has revealed that there are significant differences in-groups with the regard to career decision making self-efficacy, who received any kind of career counseling (M=107, SD=11,6) in the past scored higher than those who did not receive M=100, SD=15,3), $t(124)=2.8$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$. On the other hand, it's notable that there is no between group difference on career decision-making difficulties, relatively (M=115, SD=41,03), (M=125, SD=42,2) $t(161)=-1.41$, $p=.16$, $\eta^2 = .01$

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to determine whether career decision making self-efficacy, as well as susceptibility to control, interest taking and authorship/self-congruence could be considered as a predictor of career decision making difficulties.

The results of study confirmed the first hypotheses that higher career self-efficacy is associated with lower levels of career decision-making difficulties. The finding broadly supports the work of other studies, linking career decision-making difficulties and career decision making self-efficacy [1]. If individuals have self-confidence and have no difficulties in decision-making, they are also capable to find information about professions, labor markets, employers, or professionals of the field. A factual, accurate, and positive belief of self-efficacy is crucial when choosing a profession. Career self-efficacy becomes a "guide" for the individual to handle the tasks related to the profession [5]. According to PIC model (Prescreening, In-depth exploration, and Choice) suggested by Gati and Amir, individuals can be at different points in the career decision – making process. The ones who have higher career decision-making self-efficacy are more likely to be at the implementation – choice stage, while people with low self-efficacy struggling in the process of exploration and prescreening [1].

In contrast to inconsistent information and lack of information, no noticeable difference was found in correlation between lack of readiness and career decision making self-efficacy. Previous research that was carried out between decided and undecided college students explored that lack of readiness does not make decision making process difficult for them, but deficits in information [7].

The second important finding from this study makes contribution to the current literature, as long as autonomous functioning is not tested in many studies in relation with CDDQ. This result provides further support for the hypothesis that there is positive correlation between susceptibility to control and career decision making difficulties. When susceptible to control, individuals force themselves to do what others consider is right in order to avoid feeling of shame and frustration and perform how other's dictate. As a result, they witness difficulties while choosing profession. Saka,

Kally and Gati (2008) are discussing personality – related aspects of career decision making difficulties, where they make emphasis on self-concept and identity. One of the category of self-concept and identity is conflictual attachment and separation which arises from the difficulties related to criticism, lack of support, the excessive need from other's approval or the wish to please parents or significant others and avoid conflicts with them [23]. This approach contributes the importance of emotional and personality factors in the process of forming career decision. Chen (2017) suggests the idea of career autonomy which is an integral expression of people's need to be in control of their general life destination and among them is the will to manage, and master vocational choice [9]. "Being autonomous means to go for career choices and possibilities that are truly making sense and meaningful to a person" [p. 334, 9].

Contrary to expectations, present study found that Interest Taking (one of the sub scale of autonomous functioning) correlates positively with CDDQ. The results may be explained by the fact that when one reflects and observes own actions, he/she considers the decision-making process with great sensitivity and cautious and strives for perfectionism. Therefore at the moment of choosing a career, individual experience lack of readiness. One unanticipated finding was that authorship/self-congruence does not correlates with career decision making difficulties. The results might be related to the fact that Index of Autonomous Functioning questionnaire requires more in depth analysis of values and identity, which could be difficult for first year students. This results encourages me to repeat the study on a big population and conduct it with two groups - first and last year of University students.

The social cognitive career theory offers an effective framework for helping to increase career decision making self-efficacy [4]. The SCCT utilizes Bandura's self-efficacy and the four methods by which it can be increased: Mastery experience, vicarious learning, social persuasion and physiological and affective states. Additionally, according to career self-determination theory, career competence is composed by two categories, one is given capacities which indicates human qualities from birth and second is gained capacities, the skills that are emerged from positive or negative learning experience. Combination of these capacities directs individuals to evaluate whether or not their level of competence is sufficient to make particular career choice [9].

CIP (cognitive information processing) theory is also well adapted in school or university counseling which enables individuals to acquire with self- knowledge and decision making skills that are necessary for career-decision making [11]. For those who have career maturity, career counselors recommend self-help services such as career resource rooms, websites, etc. Those with a moderate level of readiness they are given the recommendation to visit brief staff-assisted services, which includes group and individual counseling. Individuals with low career maturity are sent to case-manages services, where they are helped to overcome particular cases and get individual assistance.

The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to conduct researches in Georgian universities or on a school basis. More broadly, research is also needed to determine if students make an informed choice, including self-knowledge and awareness of professions. Moreover, there are no data about how often they change the major before graduation and after graduation from university. Considerably more work should be taken to define the role of schools and Universities to enhance student's sources of self-efficacy.

The major limitation of this study is related to the generalizability of the results, research was conducted on a small sample (127 students). An additional uncontrolled factor is the possibility that participants would respond to specific statements in their own interpretations, as long as the self-reported method was chosen to collect data. It is unfortunate that the study did not include more qualitatively informative questions in the survey.

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Article received 2020-10-12