

The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Academic Stress of Chinese Undergraduates

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[Abstract] With the Academic Stress Questionnaire and the Chinese Revised Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDMSE-SF), this study explored the relationship between academic stress and career decision-making self-efficacy of undergraduates. Responses from 736 undergraduates revealed that the subscales of CDMSE, i.e., Self-appraisal, Information gathering, Goal selection, Planning, Problem-solving were all significantly and negatively correlated with Academic stress. Especially, Goal selection and Planning significantly and negatively predicted undergraduates' academic stress. It indicates that undergraduates' high ability and skills in job-searching can effectively moderate their Academic stress.

[Keywords] Career decision-making self-efficacy; academic stress; mental health; undergraduate

Introduction

In recent years, the mental health of undergraduates has been increasingly emphasized. Many undergraduates have been suffering from serious mental problems, due to all kinds of stressors in the school (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, et al., 2000). Prior researches have found that academic stress is very high (Zhu, 2007; Liu, 2007), or even the highest in all stress confronting undergraduates (Li, Kam, 2002; Che, Zhang, Huang, et al., 2003). Academic stress can effectively predict undergraduates' depression and anxiety (Meng, Yang, 2012), positive and negative emotions (Li, Kam, 2002), as well as self-esteem and health conditions (Li, Kam, 2002). As a result, many researchers have been focusing on undergraduates' academic stress, to provide better counseling for them.

With the development of china's education and especially the implementation of college enrollment expansion since 1999, the number of undergraduates has been rapidly increasing, which results in severe employment problems for graduates. In recent years, it is increasingly difficult for graduates to find a job (Lai, 2001). Many undergraduates have been eager to acquire good academic performance, to hold advantages in job-seeking. Their academic performance plays an important role in scholarship, diploma as well as their career development (Che, Zhang, Huang, et al., 2003). The Exploratory Factor Analysis of undergraduates' academic stressors found that the first factor was the stressor of learning perspective (Chen, 2010). Thus, the increasing employment pressure makes undergraduates suffer greater academic stress. Ruan's (2014) study showed that academic stress is significantly and negatively correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy, of which the factor of planning can significantly and positively predict undergraduates' employment pressure. Career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to implement and adhere to relevant behaviors in career decision-making (Betz & Hackett, 1997). CDMSE changes significantly with the level of the graduates' anxiety in career decision-making (Xiao, Xiong, Ye, 2013). Career decision-making self-efficacy is significantly and positively correlated with problem-solving and rationalization in

coping style, but is significantly and negatively correlated with negative coping style (Yu, Xu, You, 2015). Therefore, individuals with higher career decision-making self-efficacy, will feel less employment stress as well as academic stress. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and academic stress to provide guidelines for career counseling.

Method

Participants

Participants are 736 undergraduates (aged 17-27, mean=20.60, SD=1.51), among which 248, 110, 216, 162 are freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors respectively with 369 males and 367 females.

Measures

The questionnaire of academic stress was revised from Zhu's study (2007). Zhu's research showed that the main stressors of undergraduates included five aspects: social stressor, job-seeking stressor, stressor of love, financial stressor and academic stressor, and there are eight items in academic stressor subscale such as competitive examination and feeling confusion in class. Li & Kam (2002) suggested that the measurement of stress should be designed to measure individual's reaction to stressors, as stress is the evaluation of whether individuals feel stressed for stressors. The stressor is objective, whereas the reaction to stressor is subjective. Therefore, items should be designed in terms of stressor instead of stress. On the basis of proposition of Li & Kam's (2002), this study will measure academic stress from stressors which were proposed in Zhu's study (2007). The instruction is "whether the events listed below make you feel stressed". Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = never stressed, 1 = slightly stressed, 2 = moderately stressed, 3 = seriously stressed). The higher average score indicates higher academic stress. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .81 in this study.

The Chinese Revised Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale in this study was revised by Long in 2013, on the basis of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale- Short Form developed by Betz et al. in 1996. This Chinese revised version includes five factors of Self-appraisal, Information gathering, Goal selection, Planning, Problem-solving. The test-retest reliability coefficients after 2 months of the subscales with the total scale were .723, .759, .863, .788, .681, .851, respectively; and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .895 (Long, 2003). Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = never confident, 2 = slightly confident, 3 = moderately confident, 4 = highly confident, 5 = completely confident). The items were averaged so that higher score denotes higher career decision-making self-efficacy.

Results

Means, standard deviations and correlations of undergraduates' career decision-making self-efficacy and Academic stress

The scores of five subscales in career decision-making self-efficacy are higher than the theorized midpoint ("3"). Means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations and correlations for CDMSE and Academic stress

	Academic stress	Mean	SD
Academic stress		1.34	.634
Self-appraisal	-.281***	3.46	.77
Goal selection	-.293***	3.41	.78
Planning	-.310***	3.21	.81
Problem-solving	-.291***	3.34	.79
Information Gathering	-.298***	3.29	.76

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The regression analysis of CDMSE on Academic stress

In order to explore how CDMSE predict Academic stress, with Academic stress as dependent variable, and the five subscale scores of CDMSE as independent variables for multiple stepwise regression analysis. As shown in Table 2, Planning (Beta = -.210, $p < .001$) and Goal selection (Beta = -.127, $p < .05$) had significantly negative effects on Academic stress.

Table 2 Predictive effects of CDMSE on Academic stress

	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Planning	-.210	-3.676	.000	.096	.096
Goal selection	-.127	-2.223	.027	.102	.006

Discussion

The study found that the academic stress of undergraduates was between slight and medium. However, previous studies indicate that academic stress is the highest in all stressors confronting undergraduates (Li, Kam, 2002; Che, Zhang, Huang, et al., 2003), which seems inconsistent with this study. But the score of academic stress in previous studies was between slight and medium, which suggests that the level of academic stress is not that high. As a result, undergraduates' academic stress is moderate instead of serious, which is consistent with current situation. In China, those who get into colleges would almost get a diploma after graduation, which makes them feel less stressed.

The results showed that undergraduates' career decision-making self-efficacy was moderate, which is consistent with previous studies (Long, 2003; Ruan, 2014; Yu, Xu, You, 2015). However, the scores of career decision-making self-efficacy were higher than 3 (moderately confident), but lower than 4 (highly confident), which suggests that their career decision-making self-efficacy is not very high. The mean scores of Planning and Information gathering were the lowest in five factors of CDMSE, which indicates that these two aspects should be emphasized in undergraduates' career guidance.

Our study found that the subscales of career decision-making self-efficacy were significantly and negatively correlated with academic stress, suggesting that undergraduates with higher career decision-making self-efficacy, will feel less academic stress. Especially, Planning and Goal Selection can significantly and negatively predict undergraduates' Academic stress. In

fact, some researchers proposed that undergraduates are inexperienced in career planning, career orientation or self-realization (Long, 2003). Ruan (2014) reported that the score of Planning was the lowest in the factors of CDMSE. As for the predictive effects of Self-appraisal, Problem-solving and Information gathering on Academic stress being insignificant, it is probably that the undergraduates have high level of self-appraisal, feeling themselves have sufficiently ability to gather information and solve problems in job hunting. Factually, the results of this study show that the scores of those three factors were higher. Therefore, the ability of career planning and goal selection should be emphasized in career guidance for college students, to improve their career decision-making self-efficacy so as to relieve their academic stress.

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