Behind the mask: The differences and stability of children’s career expectations

Lee, Hung-Chang, Chou, Mei-Ju *

Abstract

The social scientists generally agree that career expectations influence an individual’s career fulfillment. In virtue of cultivating quality early childhood education to meet children’s learning needs, the study aims to explore the differences and stability of children’s career expectations. The participants were kindergarten children and the sixth-grade elementary school children in Southern Taiwan. Their ages are from 5 to 12. The total valid samples were 278 questionnaires. The data was collected by using self-administered questionnaires which was adopted from Holland’s (1997) and Lee’s (2010) career personality category types. The data was analyzed by using percentage and average analysis, regression analysis, as well as the McNemar test of symmetry and Cramer’s V to investigate the relation between the parents’ occupation and the children’s career expectations. The main findings of the study are as follows: (1) Among the categories of careers, police officer, painter, doctor, teacher, and entrepreneurs were the most popular careers from the children’s aspirations. (2) There is a significant gender difference in the children’s career expectations. (3) Children show stable development in career expectations. Nonetheless, there is a gradual declining trend in absolute scores for career expectations. (4) The parents’ careers are often related to their children’s career expectations. According to these findings, some pedagogical implications are proposed, and recommendations for future studies are offered.

Keywords: Children, career expectation, career aspiration, occupational interest;

1. Introduction

The social scientists (Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Spenner & Featherman, 1978) generally agree that career expectations influence an individual’s career fulfillment. They reported that the higher are the individual’s career expectations, the higher are the prestige and salary expectations for the adulthood occupation. This also influences the individual’s future school achievement, cognitive ability and other socio-psychological areas. Becker (1993) claimed that children’s career expectations could be viewed as the early preferences toward their future occupation and planning for a family role. Vondracek & Porfeli (2002) reported that career expectations have been involved with a variety of human development, including physical, cognitive, and socio-psychological perspectives. Savickas (2002) reported that scholars adopting the Development Theory claimed that children’s basic attitudes, imagination, decision making, and ability in exploring the future were based on sufficient necessary experiences which are
related to career expectations. These mentioned abilities were largely built during the early childhood period (Hartung, Profeli, & Vondracek, 2008). Therefore, many occupational theory scholars (McMahon & Patton, 1997) have adopted and considered the pre-school stage as the key stage for children’s future career development.

But from what stage do the children’s career expectations start to be stabilized? From the continuous research with 317 teenagers (age 15), Beal & Crockett (2010) indicated that the children’s ambitions and expectations toward work and education were appropriately developed from teenagers to early adulthood. In addition, Tracey (2002) and Tracey & Ward (1998) revealed that children (ages 10-12) had relatively stable career expectations, and the stability increased gradually with their increasing age. Furthermore, the concepts related to career expectations were explained from a career development viewpoint. With respect to a multi-developed career development theory, different category and viewpoint analysis could be summarized into three groupings: (1) Development and stage theory: process approach (2) Genre and characteristics approach theory: content approach and the (3) Demand and environment approach theory: entirety approach.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theories related to children’s career expectations

Children of various ages differ in career recognition, representing different career expectations and demands (Witko, Bernes, Magnusson & Bardick, 2008). Nelson & Smith (2001) proved that the third grade elementary school children possessed well-developed occupation concepts. Chang (2007) claimed that the stage that he mentioned about the career development mission was to promote the children’s self-identification with the same gender-parent, the children’s understanding of different occupations and the children’s choosing of activities appropriate for individual abilities.

Leung (2008) recommended that Holland’s explanation of career development from personality characteristics and the ability in matching appropriate occupation categories was appropriate in exploring the strong relationship between individual personality stereotypes and the relative behavior or interests. In the elementary and secondary school stages, Kammer (1985) stated that there were significant differences in occupation expectations and development between students of different gender. Yowell (2000) found that Latin-American elementary school children had expectations in the following occupations: doctor (10%), professional athletes (10%) and lawyer (8%). To conclude, boys and girls differed in occupation selection and expectations. Gender is the main factor in the children’s choice of an occupation. However, the results of the research presented an inconsistent phenomenon. Research from Care, Ceans & Brown (2007) demonstrated that four to five year old children of different genders had different career expectations and role playing abilities in fantasizing about the adult world.

2.2 Theory related to career expectation stability

2.2.1 The relative stability of career expectations

Low, Yoon, Roberts, & Rounds (2005) reported that in terms of career expectations, there was instability before one was 16 years old. In contrast, Harmon, Hansen, Borgen & Hammer (1994) argued that some interference before age 16 were not appropriate for school students. However, Low, Yoon, Roberts & Rounds (2005) and Tracey & Robbins (2005) adopted meta-analysis reliability for the sample in different-age groups to discover that between the ages of 12 to 14, children have already obtained moderate stability, and furthermore, the stability reached gradually matured when they were 18 to 20.

2.2.2. The absolute stability of career expectations

Tracey & Robbins (2005) and Tracey, Robbins & Hofseß (2005) examined the Holland RIASEC grade within American representative samples in two period students presented more numbers (quantity) and profound interest (quality) in career expectation categories. The samples of elementary and junior high school students presented different results. Furthermore, Tracey (2002) found that except for the enterprising category, female students exhibited decreasing career interest grades in the other categories compared to male students. Creed, Wong & Hood (2009) adopted 498 students and further revealed that make students devote into investigative occupations; while
girls into conventional ones.

3. Research method

3.1 Research framework

In the current research framework table, the background variables are the children’s gender and age variables for the children’s career expectations. The data was analyzed by using quantitative analysis of descriptive statistics, averages, reliability analysis, F test, and the regression analysis to explore the children’s current career expectations situation, difference, and absolute value of stability. In addition, the McNemar test was adopted to investigate the relative stability between two measurements (reliability). Finally, Cramer’s V value was used to understand the relation between the parents’ career and children’s career expectations. The related research framework is shown in Figure 1.

Based on the research framework and related literature, the related hypotheses stated in the null form are presented.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significance between age and occupation expectations and between gender and occupation expectations.

Hypothesis 2: With children’s getting older, the grades of their occupation expectations are decreasing.

Hypothesis 3: There is no linear relationship between the first time and the second time of their occupation expectation grades.

Hypothesis 4: There is no relationship between the parents’ occupation and the children’s career expectations.

3.2 Research subjects

The subjects were from six kindergartens and elementary schools in Tainan. Their ages are from 5 to 12. The total valid samples were 278 questionnaires.

Table 1. The subjects basic background information table/list

| Item/category n=278 | Times | %  | Item/category n=278 | Times | %  |
|---------------------|-------|----|---------------------|-------|----|
| Gender              |       |    | Gender              |       |    |
| 1. Female           | 124   | 44.6| 1. Kindergarten (age 6) | 134 | 48.2

Figure 1 Research framework of children’s career expectation differences and stability
2. Male 154 55.4 2. The sixth grade in elementary school 144 51.8

| Father’s education          | Mother’s education          |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Below high school        | 1. Below high school        |
| 126 45.3                    | 133 47.8                    |
| 2. College                  | 2. College                  |
| 126 45.3                    | 125 45.0                    |
| 3. Grad school or higher    | 3. Graduate school or higher|
| 24 8.6                      | 20 7.2                      |
| 4. Other                    | 2 0.8                       |

| Father’s occupation          | Father’s occupation          |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Non-technical             | 1. Non-technical             |
| 25 9.0                      | 81 29.1                      |
| 2. Technique personnel       | 2. Technical personnel       |
| 56 20.1                     | 59 21.2                      |
| 3. Businessman               | 3. Businessman               |
| 56 20.1                     | 54 19.4                      |
| 4. Semi-professional         | 4. Semi-professional         |
| 31 11.1                     | 15 5.4                       |
| 5. Professional             | 5. Professional             |
| 110 39.7                    | 69 24.9                      |

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Related instruments

The questionnaire was composed of the children’s basic background and research questions. Concerning the career expectations, Holland’s (1997) occupation personality six categories and Lee’s (2010) occupation categories are popular and in favor by the children. Each category consisted of three to four kinds of occupations, and there were 19 items in total.

3.3.2 Variables measurement

(a) Gender (b) Age (c) Parents’ degree and occupation (d) Career expectations

The data proceeds with data factor analysis, with the main analysis registering a factor of $\lambda > 1$, which adopts Oblimin to enter, which results in six factors. This (e) Stability: There are absolute and relative stabilities. The absolute stability adopted the F test to investigate whether there are differences between the two test occupation categories. In the determination of relative stability, the McNemar test was adopted to investigate the stability of reliability of children’s occupation expectations.

3.3.3 Validity test

In accordance with Table 2 factor analysis, in the validity metric, these 19 occupations could clearly measure our six factors. It explains that the variety value reached 70.439, which indicates construct validity.

| Occupation          | Realistic | Investigative | Social | Conventional | Enterprising | Artistic |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|--------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| Driver              | .750      |               |        |              |              |          |
| Cook                | .729      |               |        |              |              |          |
| Police officer      | .705      |               |        |              |              |          |
| Firefighter         | .596      |               |        |              |              |          |
| Scientist           |           | .843          |        |              |              |          |
| Captain             |           | .732          |        |              |              |          |
| Doctor              |           |               | .573   |              |              |          |
| Teacher             |           |               |        | .835         |              |          |
| Nurse               |           |               |        | .734         |              |          |
| Pastor/Priest       |           |               |        | .349         |              |          |
| Sales clerk         |           |               |        |              | .765         |          |
| Mail carrier        |           |               |        |              | .527         |          |
3.3.4 Reliability

In terms of reliability, an inner insistence Cronbach’s α was adopted. The reliability of these 19 item career expectations was 0.6989. In each, a six factor Cronbach’s α would be “Realistic” 0.656, “Investigative” 0.704, “Social” 0.624, “Conventional” 0.703, “Enterprising” 0.657 and “Artistic” 0.737. From the above results, the reliability of the questionnaire in the current research is good.

4. Findings

First, from Table 3, we found that the police officer, painter, doctor, teacher, and entrepreneur were the children’s most expected careers. While in the second investigation, the children’s career expectations presented small range growth. With the samples’ separate explanations, we found that for kindergarten children (age 5), the most expected careers were doctor, scientist, musician, painter, teacher, judge, sales clerk and police officer. The elementary sixth grade children admired the careers of doctor, scientist, painter, celebrity, teacher, entrepreneur, police officer and cook.

Table 3 The average analysis of different-age-children’s career expectations between two measurements

| Mean (No.) | Total | Sixth grade in elementary school 1st/2nd | 1st/2nd | Kindergarten 5 years old children 1st/2nd | F/ \( \alpha \) |
|-----------|-------|----------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Realistic | Police officer | 3.70(268)/3.63(276) | 3.60(137)/3.36(141) | 3.81(131)/3.92(135) | 2.58* / 5.92* |
|           | Cook | 3.49(264)/3.43(271) | 3.51(134)/3.38(138) | 3.46(130)/3.48(133) | 0.13* / 11.8* |
|           | Firefighter | 3.22(266)/3.10(273) | 2.91(139)/2.79(141) | 3.57(127)/3.42(132) | 22.99* / 8.72* |
|           | Driver | 2.79(257)/2.72(263) | 2.61(136)/2.54(135) | 3.00(121)/2.91(128) | 7.79* / 14.1* |
| Investigative | Doctor | 3.52(264)/3.51(278) | 3.18(136)/3.14(143) | 3.87(128)/3.90(135) | 22.55* / 12.4* |
|           | Scientist | 3.44(249)/3.47(275) | 3.35(134)/3.23(141) | 3.54(115)/3.72(134) | 1.39 / 7.25* |
|           | Captain | 3.06(256)/2.99(271) | 2.84(135)/2.72(139) | 3.31(121)/3.28(132) | 9.59* / 11.7* |
| Artistic | Musician | 3.34(257)/3.32(273) | 3.16(135)/3.07(140) | 3.54(122)/3.57(133) | 6.66* / 8.82* |
|           | Painter | 3.72(260)/3.60(275) | 3.40(139)/3.28(141) | 4.09(121)/3.93(134) | 24.7* / 12.0* |
|           | Celebrity | 3.45(258)/3.30(273) | 3.49(138)/3.23(141) | 3.42(120)/3.37(132) | 0.19 / 6.96* |
| Social | Teacher | 3.49(266)/3.51(274) | 3.25(138)/3.14(142) | 3.76(128)/3.90(132) | 13.1* / 9.47* |
|           | Pastor/Priest | 2.34(223)/2.50(240) | 2.04(128)/2.13(134) | 2.75(095)/2.97(106) | 20.6* / 11.6* |
|           | Nurse | 3.04(263)/2.83(272) | 2.67(137)/2.57(141) | 3.44(126)/3.11(131) | 22.9* / 15.6* |
| Enterprising | Judge | 3.18(246)/3.28(262) | 2.88(139)/2.85(139) | 3.56(107)/3.76(123) | 18.2* / 11.2* |
|           | Entrepreneur | 3.55(263)/3.45(267) | 3.53(140)/3.45(137) | 3.57(122)/3.44(130) | 0.10 / 3.03* |
|           | Government officer | 3.08(230)/3.01(246) | 2.90(130)/2.81(135) | 3.31(100)/3.25(111) | 6.31* / 9.99* |
| Convention | Accountant | 3.14(222)/3.10(239) | 2.85(119)/2.85(128) | 3.49(103)/3.38(111) | 16.9* / 5.72* |
From Table 5, it is obvious that the males had a higher interest in the realistic, investigative, and enterprising categories than the females. While the females received a higher grade in the social and artistic categories than the males. The kindergarten children had higher career expectations in the social, conventional and enterprising categories than the sixth grade elementary school children.
Enterprising
\[
R \text{ Square} = .097
\]
Gender -.335 -.168 -2.098 *
Age -.561 -.279 -3.477 *
Constant 1.378 3.707 *

Artistic
\[
R \text{ Square} = .103
\]
Gender .577 .289 3.538 *
Age -.225 -.110 -1.346
Constant -.492 -1.259

Table 6 McNemar Test of two measurements for different age children

| Mean (No.) | Total McNemar | Kindergarten children (Age 5) McNemar | Sixth grade in elementary school McNemar |
|------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Kindergarten children (Age 5) McNemar | .446*(238) | .389*(099) | .410*(133) |
| Six grade in elementary school McNemar | .463*(249) | .284*(115) | .561*(133) |

Considering different gender children’s stability in career expectations, from Table 7, it reveals that after six months, different gender children presented stability. This illustrates that different gender children’s career expectations remained stable after six months.

Table 7 Reliability analysis of children of different genders

| Mean (No) | Male McNemar | Female McNemar |
|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Male McNemar | .517*(122) | .497*(108) |
| Female McNemar | .441*(138) | .517*(106) |

From Table 8, it reveals that the parents’ occupations were highly related to the children’s career expectations (Cramer’s V value would be .358 and .388 and they are significant.)

Table 8 The relationship between the parents’ occupation and the children’s career expectations

| Father’s occupation & children’s career expectations | Mother’s occupation & children’s career expectations |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Cramer’s V | .358* | .388* |
| N | 263 | 201 |
5. Conclusion

Each child has different career expectations, which offers different opportunities in deciding future careers. Hence, to investigate children’s career expectations would help them in planning their future career selection. From the research results, the categories of police officer, painter, doctor, teacher, and entrepreneur were all highly admired occupations. The results were similar with Lee’s (2010) research in kindergarten children (aged six) where the categories of teacher, police officer, doctor, entrepreneur, and artist were highly admired by children. In the current society, many services are provided by social value exchange, and money exchange plays as the most significant medium in our daily life. Thus, for parents’ expectations for children’s selection of occupations, the job issue is highly related with money exchange value. Parents seem to favor a job which would enable them to create more social value and offer more money. The categories of Musicians and Sales clerks which were favored with kindergarten children were replaced by celebrities, entrepreneurs and cooks. Hence, parents don’t expect children to devote themselves into those challenging careers. Therefore, children are thoroughly influenced by their parents’ guidance and the process of family socialization. This could also be a reason why people (as well as children) are gaining a variety of mediums for easily receiving knowledge every day. Children have greater opportunities to interact with people from various occupations. With the children’s recognition development and large contact with social news, it is obvious that children quickly understand the meaning and the characteristics of each occupation. The children’s fantasy career expectations may turn into realistic understanding. Therefore, after the sixth grade in elementary school, the occupations which are favored by children include entrepreneur, cook, and movie star. This transformation deserves more exploration in further study.

On the whole, compared with different genders, males/boys had a preference for the occupation categories in Investigative, Realistic and Enterprising topics. Alternatively, the females/girls tended to prefer the Artistic and Social categories. Boys prefer Realistic, scientist, police officer and the enterprising entrepreneur; While girls prefer Artistic, musician, painter, celebrity and the social teacher. The results were similar with Birk and Blimline’s (1984) and Mackay and Miller (1982) research. Hence, two topics deserves discussing. First, for kindergarten children (age 6) and the elementary sixth grade children, their career expectations are stable. It is similar with Low’s (2005) research adopting different age groups and Tracey (2002) and Tracey & Ward’s (1998) research adopting elementary school children from 10 to 12 years old. Children from 10 to 12 or children from 12 to 14 already had relatively stable career expectations, and in Table 4, we see that the stability matures with the children growing up. Compared to the two previous measurements of occupation expectations from kindergarten children (age 6) and from the children in the sixth grade of elementary, we found that the children exhibited descending grades for most career expectations. The results were similar with Tracey’s (2002) research adopting junior high school samples. This might be because students in junior/senior high school received more opportunities in peer comparison and competition (Roberts & Petersen, 1992), and physical maturity and recognition resulting in changes in the teenager’s thinking model and social value (Ruble & Seidman, 1996). At last, the conclusions are elaborated as follows. A. Children favored Police officer, painter, doctor, teacher, and entrepreneur. B. There is an obvious gender difference between career preferences. The children in kindergarten had higher expectations in the social, conventional and enterprise categories than the sixth grade elementary school children. C. Kindergarten children (age 6) and the sixth grade elementary school children have stability in their career expectations after six months, but there is a declining trend in the absolute scores for their career expectations. D. The parents’ career are highly related with the children’s career expectations. Due to time and area limitation, future research for the whole period empirical data for the children’s career expectations would be adopted for junior and senior high school subjects.

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