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Hope, Acculturation, and English Language Proficiency in the Career Decision Self-Efficacy of Asian International Students

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Abstract: This study examined how several factors - hope, acculturation to U.S. culture, acculturation to one's home culture, and English proficiency - relate to career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students in the United States from China, South Korea, and Japan. A total of 167 students participated. Using a correlational approach, the study analyzed how these four predictors were associated with students' confidence in making career-related decisions. Results showed that students who reported greater hope, stronger adaptation to U.S. culture, and higher English proficiency also demonstrated higher levels of career decision self-efficacy. Among all variables, hope emerged as the most influential predictor. Additionally, hope and English proficiency together explained 34.8% of the variance in career decision self-efficacy. The study also addresses its limitations, discusses implications for career counseling with Asian international students, and offers suggestions for future research.

Keywords: career decision self-efficacy, hope, acculturation, English proficiency, Asian international students

Introduction

In 2024-2025, international students arrived in the United States from over 200 countries, accounting for approximately 6% of all higher education student populations in the country (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2025). The total number of international students

attending U.S. colleges and universities in 2024-2025 was about 1,177,766, with a substantial proportion coming from Asian countries, including China (265,919), South Korea, and Japan (IIE, 2025). International students contributed nearly \$55 billion to the American economy in 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (IIE, 2025). Not only are international students a significant source of revenue for many higher education institutions in the United States, but they also bring global perspectives as well as cultural and linguistic diversity to U.S. campuses (Young, 2017).

The gap between East Asian international students' career needs and the resistance generated by the barriers mentioned above is obvious. University career centers, however, seem ill-prepared to fill this gap by providing quality career services to this population. Many international students were not satisfied with the services that their university career centers provided (Flores & Heppner, 2002; Shen & Herr, 2004). Given that East Asian international students' lesser satisfaction with the university career services, the importance of following best practices for their career decision-making, and the key role that career decision self-efficacy plays in the career decision-making process (Betz et al., 2005), it is essential for career development professionals to gain a better understanding of career decision self-efficacy among East Asian international students.

Furthermore, the predictor variables in the present study (hope, acculturation, and English language proficiency) were selected based on the extensive theoretical and empirical studies indicating a relationship between personal inputs, contextual factors, and career decision self-efficacy in an individual's career decision-making process. Considering that social cognitive career theory is the main conceptual framework of this study, predictors- including hope, acculturation, and English language proficiency- were selected. Hope and English language

proficiency were considered as personal inputs, and acculturation was regarded as a contextual factor. In addition, this study focuses on examining those Asian international students who choose to remain in the United States to gain work experience after graduation.

Objectives

General objective

To examine factors that influence career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students in the United States.

Specific objectives

To investigate the relationship between hope and career decision self-efficacy

To examine how acculturation to American culture relates to career decision self-efficacy

To assess the role of English language proficiency in predicting career decision self-efficacy

Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent does hope impact Asian international students' career decision self-efficacy?

Research Question 2: To what extent do acculturation to American culture and acculturation to the home culture impact Asian international students' career decision self-efficacy?

Research Question 3: To what extent does English language proficiency impact Asian international students' career decision self-efficacy?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Greater levels of hope will be positively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students.

Hypothesis 2: Greater levels of acculturation to American culture will be positively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students.

Hypothesis 3: Greater levels of acculturation to the home culture will be negatively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students.

Hypothesis 4: Greater levels of English language proficiency will be positively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students.

Theoretical Basis

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Drawing heavily from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, the developers of social cognitive career theory (SCCT), Robert Lent, Steven Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994) extended the original concept into the career development field. They stated, "in formulating SCCT, we tried to adapt, elaborate, and extend, those aspects of Bandura's theory that seemed to be most relevant to the process of interest formation, career selection, and performance" (Lent et al., 2002. p. 258).

SCCT subscribes to Bandura's triadic reciprocal model of causality, which includes three components, including overt behavior, internal personal factors, and external environment (Bandura, 1997). All three interact and affect one another as casual influences bidirectionally. In line with this model, SCCT provides a comprehensive model for conceptualizing career development, primarily focused on the personal and cognitive variables of *self-efficacy*, *outcome expectations*, and *personal goals*, as well as how these three components interact with internal personal behaviors and external environmental influences (Lent et al., 1994).

More specifically, self-efficacy reflects people's specific beliefs of their ability or inability to complete a particular task or set of tasks (Bandura, 1977). Outcome expectations refer to the estimate of what will happen if certain behaviors are performed (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Personal goals are associated with eventual purposes beyond the activities

around people that they participate (Bandura, 1986). Bandura found that self-efficacy beliefs are more influential in determining one's behavior than outcome expectations (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, the interaction between self-efficacy and outcome expectations also influences interest development as individuals become interested in things requiring abilities that they believe they either have or can develop, which may produce desired outcomes.

These three components that SCCT highlights are essential factors in career performance, interests, and decision making (Lent et al., 1994). According to SCCT, after an individual examines interests, abilities, and values, career decisions can be made. Career decision self-efficacy is a construct that has been demonstrated to be a reliable predictor of individuals' beliefs in their ability to accomplish tasks typically associated with career decisions (Betz & Hackett, 2006).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a correlational design to measure the relationship between four predictor variables (hope, acculturation to American culture, acculturation to the home culture, and English language proficiency) and an outcome variable (career decision self-efficacy) among East Asian international students in the United States.

Participants

To that end, there were 167 East Asian international students ($n = 91$, 54.8% women; $n = 76$; 45.2% men) recruited from across the United States. Participants were originally from China ($n = 135$, 80.8%), South Korea ($n = 22$, 13.2%), and Japan ($n = 10$, 6.0%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 ($M = 28.5$, $SD = 7.1$). Academic level (currently pursuing) among participants was bachelor's ($n = 66$, 39.5%), master's ($n = 74$, 44.3%), and doctoral ($n = 27$, 16.2%).

Participants ranged in the length of residency in the United States from 0 to 132 months ($M = 29.4$, $SD = 27.0$).

The full survey, consisting of a total of 98 items, was estimated to take participants approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power (3.1) (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). A statistical power was anticipated to be at .80, with an effect size of .10 and an alpha level of .05. Result showed that a total sample of 159 participants was required to achieve a power of .80 for this study.

Instruments

A self-report survey was developed for this study. This survey consisted of a personal demographic questionnaire and three standardized measures: the Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), the Acculturation Index (Ward & Kennedy, 1994), and the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (Betz et al., 1996).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and hierarchical regression analysis to investigate the relationship between hope, acculturation to American culture, acculturation to the home culture, English language proficiency, and career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students studying in the United States.

Results

The results of the analysis of Hypothesis 1 supported the hypothesis that *greater levels of hope will be positively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students*. The results of the analysis of Hypothesis 2 supported the hypothesis that *greater levels of acculturation to American culture will be positively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students*. The results of the

analysis of Hypothesis 3 did not support the hypothesis that *greater levels of acculturation to the home culture will be negatively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students*. The results of the analysis of Hypothesis 4 supported the hypothesis that *greater levels of English language proficiency will be positively associated with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy among Asian international students*.

Conclusions

Hope

Hope was the strongest predictor of career decision self-efficacy in this study. After controlling for age, hope explained 31.9% of the variance, which represents a large effect size (Cohen, 1988), while age accounted for 4.6% of the variance, indicating a small effect. These findings suggest that East Asian international students with higher levels of hope are much more likely to feel confident in completing career decision-related tasks.

Acculturation to American Culture

Acculturation to American culture was positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy ($r = .23$, $p = .001$) as well as with other key variables, including hope ($r = .30$, $p < .01$) and English language proficiency ($r = .31$, $p < .01$). These findings are consistent with prior research showing that students who are more engaged with the host culture tend to experience fewer barriers and demonstrate greater confidence in career decision-making. In this study, acculturation to American culture explained 4.3% of the variance in career decision self-efficacy.

Acculturation to the Home Culture

Unlike previous findings (In, 2014), acculturation to the home culture did not significantly contribute to career decision self-efficacy in this study. This suggests that, for East Asian international students making career decisions within the U.S. context, connection to the

home culture may not play a significant role. Even though prior research found a small effect (2.6%), the current results indicate that its influence is minimal when other variables such as hope and acculturation to the U.S. are considered.

English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency uniquely explained 2.9% of the variance in career decision self-efficacy. Students reported higher confidence in reading ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.26$) compared to listening ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.31$), speaking ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.35$), and especially writing ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.37$), which was the most challenging area. These findings suggest that stronger English skills, particularly in speaking and writing, are associated with greater confidence in engaging in career-related activities such as networking, interviewing, and professional communication.

Table 1
Acculturation Strategies

		Identification with the original culture	
Identification with the host culture		High	Low
	High	Integration	Assimilation
	Low	Separation	Marginalization

Note: Berry, 1980

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Main Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Hope	167	23.99	3.47	16.00	31.00	-.01	-.26
Acculturation to the Home Culture	167	101.02	23.94	42.0	147.0	-.26	-.64

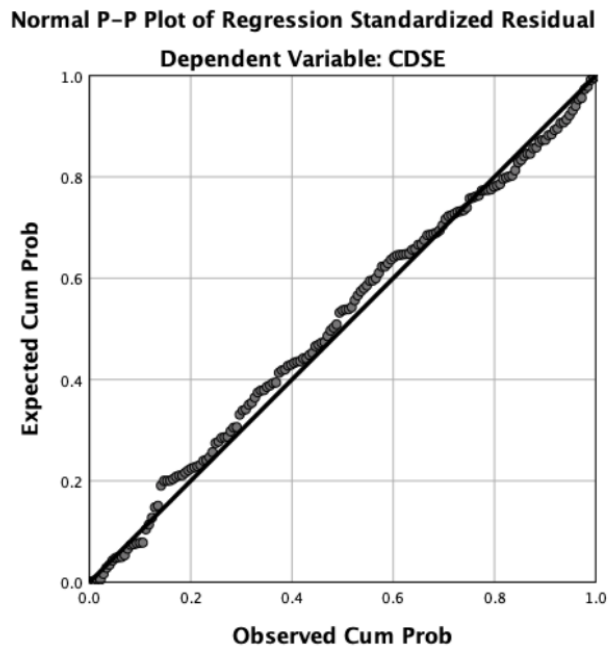
Acculturation to American Culture	167	86.79	20.75	33.00	145.00	.41	-.07
English Language Proficiency	167	21.40	4.75	7.00	28.00	-.53	-.28
Career Decision Self-Efficacy	167	89.42	16.28	50.00	125.00	-.12	-.29

Note: $N = 167$

Note^a: Standard error of skewness = .19

Note^b: Standard error of kurtosis = .33

Hierarchical Regression Analysis **Normal Probability Plots and Residual Scatter Plots**



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