Kuder® Career Planning System Usage: Students' Career Exploration & Academic Planning Behavior

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For many years now, reviews of empirical literature have shown that performance in school and transition into higher education are strongly associated with motivational factors such as career exploration and planning through the establishment of career goals and other similar constructs (Pantages & Creedon, 1978; and Summerskill, 1962). Through this study we sought to gain a greater understanding of the career exploration and academic planning behavior of students in 29 schools in the Midwest who were currently using the Kuder® Career Planning System (KCPS). The main goals were to establish and define some of the factors that lead students to engage in more career exploration and academic planning behavior. Moreover, we wanted to define what educational institutions can do to increase such behaviors through evaluating how they utilize the KCPS with their students.

The KCPS is one of many Computer Assisted Career Guidance Systems (CACGS) which can benefit students in their career exploration and academic planning. The value of using such systems, specifically the KCPS but also CACGS in general, was examined in this study, as well as the factors which allowed for more effective usage of the systems.

Study Hypotheses

Analyses of KCPS data and a brief survey of school personnel who are familiar with utilization of the KCPS for their individual institution were used for the purpose of this investigation. This study sought to explore two specific hypotheses:

1. Career assessments, active use of a computer assisted career guidance system (CACGS), and integration of a CACGS into a school environment is predictive of career exploration behavior among secondary school students.

2. Career assessments, active use of a computer assisted career guidance system (CACGS), and integration of a CACGS into a school environment is predictive of academic planning behavior among secondary school students.

Participants

The final sample of participants included anonymous student records from 5,884 users of the KCPS. Student utilization records were drawn from schools for which a community college system provides free access. The schools included high schools, junior high schools, alternative schools, and combined records for an entire school district.

- The total number of unique users at the schools ranged from 1 to 1,316 with a mean average of 684 students.
- Enrollment for the schools during the 2006-2007 school year ranged from 181 to 2,179 students, with an average enrollment of 889 students.
- Socioeconomic status of the participating schools was measured by the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch at each school. The schools in the sample had an average of 21.34% of students eligible for the latter.
- The sample included a nearly equivalent number of female (2,929, 49.8%) and male (2,955, 50.2%) students.
- Participants' racial/ethnic identities were as follows:
  - 5 (0.1%) Alaska Native.
  - 49 (0.8%) American Indian.
  - 95 (1.6%) Asian/Asian American.
  - 100 (1.7%) African-American.
  - 21 (0.4%) Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
  - 111 (1.9%) Hispanic.
  - 3,573 (60.7%) White.
  - 151 (2.6%) self-identified as "Other."
  - A total of 1,779 (30.2%) students indicated "N/A" in response to racial/ethnic background.

Findings

The first hypothesis was examined through a hierarchical statistical procedure in which career exploration behavior was the criterion variable. In the first step, school size, socioeconomic status of the school, and gender explained 10.9% of the variance in career exploration behavior. In the second step, completion of assessments in the KCPS explained an additional 5.1% of the variance, with completion of each assessment significantly predicting increased career exploration behavior. The third step included system utilization and integration variables which explained 4.3% of the variance. Taken together the predictor variables explained 20% of the variance of secondary school students' career exploration behavior.

The second hypothesis was examined through the same hierarchical statistical procedure but in this case academic planning behavior was the criterion variable. The same set of predictor variables were entered into this statistical analysis procedure. The first set of variables explained 29.8% of the variance in academic planning behavior. Completion of the three assessments explained an additional 7.3% of the variance in the second step. However, a different pattern emerged in this step with completion of the Kuder® Career Search with Person Match and Kuder® Skills Assessment significantly contributing to the prediction of academic planning behavior, while completion of Super's Work Values Inventory-revised was not predictive of academic planning. The third step accounted for an additional 16.3% of variance. All of the predictor variables in this analyses explained 53.2% of the variance in predicting students' academic planning behavior.

Summary

This study represents an important contribution to the vocational development literature as relatively little research has specifically examined the use of CACGS and actual career exploration or academic planning behavior. Research has clearly demonstrated that students benefit from the use of CACGS (Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998). These systems have been found to positively impact career decisionmaking self-efficacy, career commitment, career decidedness, and career maturity (Hughes & Karp, 2004).

The results of the study suggest:

1. Having students engage in the career assessment process is highly predictive of their engagement in both career exploration and career planning behavior.

2. Logging in to the system several times as opposed to creating minimal interaction also leads students to be more likely to engage in both of these behaviors.

The results of the study also suggest that school administrators and educators:

1. Require the use of the assessments and the creation of an academic plan, as it is crucial in students' engagement in both career exploration and academic planning behaviors.

2. Encourage wide usage of the system, which leads to increased career exploration and academic planning. In other words, schools that had a larger percentage of students using the system also had a higher likelihood of students engaging in these behaviors.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that features of the KCPS impact secondary school students' career exploration behavior and their engagement in the academic planning process.

References

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