

Rural Korean Students' Level of Interest and Intentions to Pursue Careers in Agriculture

Levon T. Esters
Iowa State University

Neil Knobloch
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Similar to the United States, agriculture has contributed enormously to South Korea's economy (Na & Jyhung, 2001). Unfortunately, much like a majority of the American population, South Koreans also have negative perceptions of agriculture. For example, South Koreans' perception of agriculture is relatively negative because of low farmer income, the hard labor associated with farming, and the busy lifestyle of farmers (Na & Jyhung). These attitudes are very similar to those cited in the literature by American students who have negative images of agriculture because they perceive agriculture as being labor intensive, consisting of low salaries, and poor working conditions (Dobbins, King, Fravel, Keels, & Covington, 1999). In addition to Koreans' negative perceptions of agriculture, South Korea has also experienced a number of difficulties in trying to infuse agricultural literacy programs into their public school systems. Clearly, negative perceptions of the agricultural industry combined with low levels of agricultural literacy can have significant implications for Korean students' level of interest and intentions to pursue careers in agriculture.

The theoretical framework for this study was Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Social Cognitive Career Theory is a fairly recent approach aimed at explaining the process through which (a) academic and career interest develop, (b) educational and career choice are made, and (c) academic and career success is obtained. Social Cognitive Career Theory is anchored in Albert Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory and focuses on three cognitive-person variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals play key roles operating in concert with a variety of additional person, contextual, and learning variables (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, ability, support, external barriers) to help shape peoples' career trajectories (Lent, Brown, Schmidt, Brenner, Lyons, & Treistman, 2003).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of social cognitive career theory in the prediction of vocational interest and intentions to pursue careers in agriculture of Korean high school students. Participants for this study were rural Korean students enrolled in an agricultural magnet vocational school ($n = 383$). The instrument used to collect data for the study consisted of the Agriscience Education Self-Efficacy Scale (AGESES; Esters & Luster, 2004) which was translated and adapted for use with Korean high school students. The instrument is comprised of four sections measuring variables of the SCCT framework: (1) agriculture self-efficacy, (2) agriculture outcome expectations, (3) agriculture choice intentions, and (4) agriculture interests. Internal consistency reliabilities for this study were .94, .93, .95, and .92 respectively for each of

the four sections. Two hierarchical regression models were run to investigate the contributions of the social cognitive variables in the prediction of interest and intentions to pursue careers in agriculture after controlling for selected demographic characteristics.

Findings

For the first hierarchical model predicting interest in agriculture, the predictors of gender, age, and grade were not significant ($p = .362$). Self-efficacy explained 28% ($p < .001$) of the variance followed by outcome expectations which explained an additional 13% ($p < .001$) of the variance. The entire model of predicting interests in agriculture was significant ($p < .001$) and explained 41% of the variance. For the second hierarchical model predicting career intentions, the predictors of gender, age, and grade significantly explained 4% ($p = .002$) of the variance; gender was the only significant variable in this block. Self-efficacy explained an additional 23% ($p < .001$) of the variance followed by outcome expectations which explained an additional 22% ($p < .001$), and interests which explained an additional 7% of the variance ($p < .001$). The entire model of predicting career intentions in agriculture was significant ($p < .001$) and explained 56% of the variance.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study provide support for the Lent et al. (1994) SCCT model with a sample of rural Korean high school students. Consistent with theory, self-efficacy and outcome expectations were strong predictors of interest and intentions to pursue careers in agriculture. More importantly, results from this study also provide support for the social cognitive career model in the domain of agriculture. This finding is important because less is known about the support for SCCT in subject areas other than math and science (Fouad, Smith, & Zao, 2002). Results on the importance of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in the development of interests and career intentions in agriculture could also lead to the development of interventions for Korean students. For example interventions could be developed focusing on helping Korean students increase their self-efficacy in the expectation that doing so will lead to greater interest in agriculture, which in turn will lead to choosing a career in agriculture.

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