

Occupational Preferences among Students in India and Malaysia: A Cross-Cultural Study

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ABSTRACT This study attempts to find out the preferences of occupational choice among the boys and girls in India and Malaysia. The questionnaire used for the study was California Occupational Inventory, which was modified to suit the Indian and the Malaysian context. The sample consisted of 80 boys and 80 girls drawn from English medium schools in India. Similar samples were drawn from 63 boys and 57 girls from English medium schools in Malaysia. The data was analyzed using 't' test to compare the differences in the occupational choices among the boys and girls. It was found that significant differences existed in the preferences among the Indian students on eight of the fourteen occupational choices classified. Similar differences were also seen in five factors among the Malaysian students. The results showed that boys in India had greater preferences for science skilled and linguistic skilled occupations compared to boys in Malaysia who showed greater preference in technical and business profession. On the other hand girls in India showed a greater preference for business profession and business skilled compared to girls in Malaysia who showed greater preferences in science and aesthetic profession. This study also found that cultural differences might influence boys and girls occupational aspirations.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in our society has resulted in creation of various new jobs in the market. Sometimes it is very difficult for career counselors, schools, higher institutions or even parents to advice and counsel children to various fields that suits their abilities and interests. The lack of adequate information and limited research on occupational choices among students in developing countries had also contributed to the difficulties in determining the schools and other higher learning institutions to plan.

There has been considerable interest in recent years in developing and testing models of occupational preference. An interest has evolved in developing models that can provide a better understanding of the process that affect differ-

ences in occupational preferences for males and females (Wheeler, 1983). Occupational choice has been studied looking at sex differences and the influences of various variables that contribute to such differences have been explored. According to Reeb (1979), jobs can be adequately represented by interpretable cognitive maps, which are approximately the same for both sexes. He went on to study occupational perception from a cognitive-perceptual consensus of more general application than from purely an affective dimension. He found that there is a close resemblance of the perceptual structures of boys and girls. However, according to him, under multidimensional preference mapping, prestige was not found to be an overall dimension for girls. He said that interpretable cognitive maps, which are approximately the same for both sexes, could adequately represent job perceptions.

Hackett and Betz (1981) emphasised on a self-efficiency approach to understanding sex differences in occupational preferences. Personal expectations of self-efficacy in relationship to performance requirements in an occupational area are a major determinant of interest in entering into an occupation. Self-efficacy perceptions could be acting as artificial barriers to entry in relatively high status, high paying jobs due to socialization experiences and modeling behavior that results in females underestimating their own capacities to perform in such occupations. In a study it was found that high school pupils, of both sexes ranked the prestige of various occupations in the same way, but boys tended to choose the occupations or school subjects with the highest prestige, while females tended to avoid them (Barnett, 1975).

A study by Hammond & Dingley (1989) among 589 grammar school girls and 437 grammar school boys found that career choices generally followed traditional pattern for each sex where girls favorite occupation was teaching and for the boys was engineering. The sex stereotype of an occu-

pation interacts with the sex of the subjects and affects a host of dependent variables including choice and interest in an occupation (Heilman, 1979). In a study it was found that males and females perceive a similar hierarchy of sex-relatedness of tasks and occupations. Sex relatedness was defined as either association or expected performance on tasks or presented as 'desirability for' or 'qualification for' an occupation (Chewing & Walker, 1980). Panck *et al.* (1977) investigated the sex stereotyping of various occupations and found that certain occupations are considered 'male', 'female' or 'neutral' occupations. Osipow (1976) quotes studies which show that sex stereotyping occupations starts at an early age of 7 years and influences occupational choice and career development. However, it was found that sex-role orientation was unrelated to occupational choice (Kanter and Ellerbusch, 1980).

Hackett and Betz (1981) found that men perceived themselves to be equally capable to pursue both traditional male or female careers. In contrast, it was found that women's efficacy expectations were strong for those occupations traditionally held by women but weak for the traditionally male vocations.

In another study, it was found that boys have greater choice in selecting a career compared to girls, even though girls do have greater aspiration but are restricted by choices which are traditional in nature (Hoult and Smith, 1978). Bloch (1980) found that some interests showed the traditional trend with girls scoring higher in aesthetics, humanities, literature, outdoor, people and secretarial and boys scoring higher in business, military, politics, physical sciences and sports.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether there is a significant difference in occupational choices among students in India and Malaysia, and how these findings are different compared to those studies conducted in the Western countries.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample consisted of 80 boys and 80 girls drawn from English medium schools in Madras, India. Similar samples were drawn from 63 boys and 57 girls from English medium schools in Malaysia. Their age ranging from 14-16 years.

Tools Used

The tool used for this study was a modified version of the California Occupational Inventory to suit the Indian and the Malaysian context. This questionnaire contains 168 items measuring a four point Likert scale. It finds out preferences for fourteen occupational choices like science professional and skilled, business professional and skilled, technical professional and skilled, linguistic professional and skilled, aesthetic professional and skilled, service professional and skilled, outdoor and clerical. It has been widely used (Kamalanabhan *et al.*, 1996) in the Indian context and the instrument was found to be reliable. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was found to be 0.71 in the Indian context and 0.85 in the Malaysian context. The t-test was used to find out the differences in occupational choice between the boys and girls in both countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the results of the t-test to compare the strength of occupational choices of boys and girls in India. From the table, it can be seen that there were significant differences with regard to eight of the fourteen occupational preferences. Preferences for the occupations classified as science skilled, outdoor, business professional and skilled, linguistic professional, aesthetic skilled, service professional and skilled, show significant differences. The differences are found to be significant at 0.01 level.

Observing more closely, boys have a higher mean than girls indicating greater strength of preference for the science skilled occupations involving scientific research and extensive study. This finding is in line with that of Tyer (1979) who found careers involving mathematics, chemistry, and physics being primarily chosen by men. The linguistic professional occupations involve teaching, writing, editing, law etc. It can be seen that boys have a greater preference for these occupations as against the findings of Bloch (1980) who writes of the traditional trend with girls showing more literary interests than boys.

The girls have a greater preference for outdoor, business professional and skilled, aesthetic skilled, service professional and service skilled occupations. It is interesting to note the trend of breaking over sex stereotyping of occupations as found earlier by Tyer (1979). He had observed that business administration was a male-domi-

Table 1: Occupational Preferences among Boys and Girls in India

Occupational Preference	Boys (N=80) Mean	S. D	Girls (N=80) Mean	S.D	df	t-Value
Aesthetic Professional	16.75	8.57	17.43	7.76	158	0.528
Aesthetic Skilled	13.30	7.58	17.94	7.60	158	3.879**
Business Professional	15.83	6.84	23.30	7.41	158	7.091**
Business Skilled	15.97	8.66	24.04	8.72	158	5.892**
Clerical	16.26	7.66	13.99	8.12	158	1.825
Linguistic Professional	15.95	7.88	12.26	7.95	158	2.958**
Linguistic Skilled	21.84	7.95	21.36	8.98	158	0.359
Outdoor	12.76	7.53	19.05	8.14	158	5.090**
Science Professional	17.36	9.91	17.11	11.44	158	0.153
Science Skilled	26.50	7.19	18.21	9.48	158	6.252**
Service Professional	16.18	7.58	24.56	9.18	158	6.316**
Service Skilled	12.31	7.40	16.88	8.08	158	3.742**
Technical Professional	13.40	8.20	15.81	8.20	158	1.865
Technical Skilled	18.45	7.57	16.36	7.55	158	1.754

** Significant at 0.01 level

nated profession. The trend found in this study could be explained by the findings of Wheeler (1983) who stated that there is increasing stress in achieving more equal proportions of females in traditionally male dominated occupations.

Outdoor occupations, involve agriculture, forestry and mining related activities and service professional and skilled occupations involve catering in a direct manner to the needs, desires and welfare of people. These are preferred more by girls. This confirms an earlier finding by Kamalanabhan *et al.* (1996). This study also confirms Bloch's (1980) findings, which shows that girls showed more interest in aesthetic professions.

Table 2 shows the occupational preferences among boys and girls in Malaysia. It can be seen that there were significant differences with re-

gard to five of the fourteen occupational preferences. Preferences for the occupations classified as aesthetic professional and skilled, business skilled, and technical professional and skilled, show significant differences. The differences are found to be significant at 0.01 level.

Contrary to the findings in India, boys in Malaysia indicate higher preference for technical professional and skilled, and business skilled. The study also found that girls showed higher preference on traditional female occupations such as service profession and skilled, outdoor, and aesthetic profession and skilled. This finding is in accordance to the study by Bonett (1994) who noted that regardless of marital status, women had lower self-efficacy expectations compared to men on the traditionally male-dominated occupations.

Similarly boys placed greater preference

Table 2: Occupational Preferences among Boys and Girls in Malaysia

Occupational Preference	Boys (N=63) Mean	S. D.	Girls (N=57) Mean	S.D	df	t-Value
Aesthetic Professional	17.78	7.55	20.68	6.06	118	2.311**
Aesthetic Skilled	15.13	5.95	20.00	6.68	118	4.226**
Business Professional	20.56	8.21	19.61	9.11	118	.596
Business Skilled	17.51	5.00	14.54	5.10	118	3.213**
Clerical	17.30	7.49	16.54	6.78	118	.579
Linguistic Professional	13.48	8.21	12.93	6.37	118	.145
Linguistic Skilled	13.56	6.40	12.12	4.56	118	1.399
Outdoor	13.71	6.50	15.61	5.36	118	1.736
Science Professional	20.76	8.19	22.81	7.03	118	1.459
Science Skilled	17.22	6.83	17.11	8.05	118	.086
Service Professional	17.63	8.03	19.05	7.54	118	.994
Service Skilled	13.48	6.77	14.18	4.94	118	.641
Technical Professional	26.89	6.38	24.25	6.30	118	2.279**
Technical Skilled	18.19	7.28	15.05	6.12	118	2.541**

** Significant at 0.01 level

mostly on male dominated occupations such as technical profession and skilled, business profession and skilled and science skilled (Tyer, 1979; Kamalanabhan *et al.*, 1998). This finding was in line with a study done by Furlong *et al.* (1996) where they found that men preferred to choose high-paying jobs such as professionals and managers. This study also found that in certain female dominated occupation such as clerical, linguistic professional and skilled, boys were found to have greater preference. The explanation for this is suggested by Hackett and Betz (1981) where they found that men perceived themselves to be equally capable to pursue either traditional male or female occupations.

Table 3 shows the result of t-test to compare the occupational choices of boys in India and Malaysia. There were significant differences with regard to six of the fourteen occupational choices. Preferences for the occupations classified as science professional and skilled, technical professional, business professional and skilled, and linguistic skilled, show significant differences. Boys in India showed greater preferences for science skilled and linguistic skilled. Malaysian boys placed higher preference for science professional, technical professional, and business professional and skilled. The occupational preferences may be different from one country to another due to differences in the stages of economic development (Gilo, 1998). The demand for certain skills are due to economic growth and industrialization, which could influence the promotion of certain professions such as engineers, technicians, computer and information technology experts as to fulfil the country's requirement. Certainly students will be

influenced to pursue their careers in these areas which in turn will guarantee them a job and better salary.

Table 4 shows the occupational preferences among girls in India and Malaysia. There were significant differences with regard to eleven of the fourteen occupational choices. Preferences for the occupations classified as science professional, technical professional and skilled, outdoor, business skilled, clerical, linguistic skilled, aesthetic professional and skilled, and service professional and skilled, show significant difference. Observing more closely, girls in India place greater preference for technical skilled, outdoor, business skilled, linguistic skilled, and service professional and skilled. Girls in Malaysia indicating greater preference for the science professional, technical professional, clerical, and aesthetic professional and skilled. A cross-cultural study shows that occupational preferences may associated with the socio-economic development and also the political structure of a country (Rai, 1999). The increased participation of women in the political positions has lead to higher opportunities for them to involve in various economic activities, thus contributing to women's career growth.

The occupational preferences among boys and girls in India and Malaysia show that cultural differences may play an important role in determining the occupational choice among boys and girls. Social background, employment opportunities, and the aspirations of the individual vary significantly from one place to the other. Studies show that occupational aspiration among males and females are influenced by family's social class and the place where they live (Furlong

Table 3: Occupational Preferences among Boys in India and Malaysia

Occupational Preference	Mean (N=80) India	S. D.	Mean (N=61) Malaysia	S.D	df	t-Value
Aesthetic Professional	16.75	8.57	17.78	7.55	141	0.517
Aesthetic Skilled	13.30	7.58	15.13	5.95	141	0.662
Business Professional	15.83	6.84	20.56	8.21	141	5.055**
Business Skilled	15.97	8.66	17.51	5.00	141	3.380**
Clerical	16.26	7.66	17.30	7.49	141	0.423
Linguistic Professional	15.95	7.88	13.48	8.21	141	1.850
Linguistic Skilled	21.84	7.95	13.56	6.40	141	6.732**
Outdoor	12.76	7.53	13.71	6.50	141	0.926
Science Professional	17.36	9.91	20.76	8.19	141	4.571**
Science Skilled	26.50	7.19	17.22	6.83	141	4.453**
Service Professional	16.18	7.58	17.63	8.03	141	0.573
Service Skilled	12.31	7.40	13.48	6.77	141	0.174
Technical Professional	13.40	8.20	26.89	6.38	141	4.660**
Technical Skilled	18.45	7.57	18.19	7.28	141	0.154

** Significant at 0.01 level

Table 4: Occupational Preferences among Girls in India and Malaysia

Occupational Preference	Mean (N=80) India	S. D.	Mean (N=57) Malaysia	S.D	df	t-Value
Aesthetic Professional	17.43	7.76	20.68	6.06	135	2.325**
Aesthetic Skilled	17.94	7.60	20.00	6.68	135	2.015**
Business Professional	23.30	7.41	19.61	9.11	135	1.990
Business Skilled	24.04	8.72	14.54	5.10	135	4.771**
Clerical	13.99	8.12	16.54	6.78	135	2.421**
Linguistic Professional	12.26	7.95	12.93	6.37	135	0.917
Linguistic Skilled	21.36	8.98	12.12	4.56	135	5.602**
Outdoor	19.05	8.14	15.61	5.36	135	5.160**
Science Professional	17.11	11.44	22.81	7.03	135	6.012**
Science Skilled	18.21	9.48	17.11	8.05	135	0.133
Service Professional	24.56	9.18	19.05	7.54	135	6.319**
Service Skilled	16.88	8.08	14.18	4.94	135	2.756**
Technical Professional	15.81	8.20	24.25	6.30	135	7.201**
Technical Skilled	16.36	7.55	15.05	6.12	135	2.030**

** Significant at 0.01 level

et al., 1996; Savage & Warde, 1993; Timms, 1978). This is true where norms and cultures, which are transmitted in their living place, are likely to have a significant effect on the development of occupational aspirations and expectations (Furlong *et al.*, 1996).

In India, occupations for which no sex differences were significant are the science profession, technical profession and skilled, clerical, linguistic skilled and aesthetic profession occupations. In the Malaysian context occupation like business professional, clerical, linguistic professional and skilled, outdoor, science professional and skilled, and service professional and skilled were found to be not significant among boys and girls. It can be observed that this study confirms as well as contradicts many earlier studies with regard to sex differences in occupational preferences. Certain occupational preferences show no sex differences. Various research findings do not confirm to the traditional sex stereotyping assumption explaining occupational preferences. These observations help us to infer that sex as a variable and other synonymous variables like sex typing, sex-role, and sex-orientation are not the only important variables that explain differences in occupational preferences. For both sexes, specially the girls self-efficacy perceptions (Betz and Hackett, 1981) with regard to occupations seems to be in a process of transition and change with the experience of changing cultural influence in society. It is possible that with the changing trend, the expectancy model (Brief *et al.*, 1979) that stresses on individual differences in terms of the importance given to obtaining different possible outcomes found in occupations, such as achievement opportunities,

chance to benefit from others, social relations, pay, security and supervisory relations, might be able to explain occupational preferences together with self-efficacy perception model (Wheeler, 1983).

In conclusion, there were significant differences with regard to six of the fourteen occupational choices between boys in India and Malaysia. Preferences for the occupations classified as science professional and skilled, technical professional, business professional and skilled, and linguistic skilled, show significant differences. Boys in India showed greater preferences for science skilled and linguistic skilled. Malaysian boys placed higher preference for science professional, technical professional, and business professional and skilled. Girls in India place greater preference for technical skilled, outdoor, business skilled, linguistic skilled, and service professional and skilled compared to girls in Malaysia indicating greater preference for the science professional, technical professional, clerical, and aesthetic professional and skilled. From the many research findings that confirm, it can be inferred that sex as a variable may not be the most important factor explaining differences in occupational preferences. Furthermore, this study also found that cultural differences might influence boys and girls occupational aspirations. Different stages of economic development and socio-political involvement of women in a particular country may also be significant factors contributing to occupational preferences. Thus, findings in the developed countries maybe different when compared to developing countries. It is suggested that future researchers need to study in a comprehensive framework the effects

of culture on occupational preferences as it will benefit many including the counselors, school and higher educational institutions, and the government agencies.

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