THE ROLE OF CUE INTERCORRELATIONS IN THE JUDGEMENT OF STUDENT INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to broaden our understanding of how students combine and use information to make a judgement about a subject in which they may be interested. A review and assessment of previous studies is presented, including a discussion of Brunswik's single lens model. A simple idiographic analysis focusing on a person's behaviour across a large number of situations is presented. The emphasis is on the repeated sampling of a person across many situations. The situations in this study contain profiles or collections of information that involve educational descriptions. The profile is in the form of some ratings (or a set of cues) that describe a subject. The findings support earlier studies, which reported individual variation in perceptions of interest and differences in the ability to make accurate judgement of interest.

The purpose of this study was to (1) investigate how students use available information to make a judgement in a matter of educational interest; (2) how they perceive the world when it is organised in a particular way; and (3) how students construct their own reality and combine information to judge their own reality.

The research question was:

Does increasing the correlation between the items of information impact upon the nature of judgements made by people in terms of: (a) the correlation between each item of information and judgement or (b) the multiple correlation between all items and judgement?

In the past, interest was regarded as an undifferentiated motivational factor to learning and achievement, thus limiting the scope of the study of interest. This study, however, focuses on how students take into account the relationship between different factors when determining their level of interest in a subject they may be interested in studying. In this context, the ability of students to handle information effectively may positively affect the quality of their judgements in regard to their interest in the subject they are considering studying.

The research comprised four separate studies. Participants were university students from three different universities, the University of Technology Sydney, the University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife. Six different cues were used. Participants were given a booklet comprising 75 judgement profiles.

These profiles contained six different cues or informational details. Participants were asked, " How interested would you be in taking a subject that has been described in this way?"

Participants were also asked to study the cues in the profile and judge their own interest on a scale of 0 (no interest) to 9 (high interest) based on the information described in the profile. Profiles (N=15) were repeated to determine the reliability or consistency of judgement for each participant. Both multiple correlations and cue utilities based on Brunswik's single lens model were computed. In each study, the four most reliable students based on test-retest reliability, were chosen for further analysis. The cues varied in intercorrelation from 0.0, 0.2, 0.5 and 0.8.

Generally the results showed that participants were different in terms of their judgments and also varied in their perceptions of the situation. There was a plethora of idiosyncratic responses to the various profiles and cues. This individual variation was consistent even across the four content areas.

Overall, the results of the four studies were not substantially different from each other. It shows that policy capturing involves not only attaining some useful measure of cue importance through the procedure of multiple regression but also gaining some knowledge of how cue values are functionally related to judgements. The primary interest is on nonlinear relationships which are additive in nature and addressed the issue of the cue-judgement relationships.

The overall depiction showed that multiple correlation and multicollinearity varied from one case study to another. However, the overall results tended to confirm the importance of individual variation in perceptions relating to judgement of interest in a subject as earlier and widely reported in the interest literature. More importantly this study continues to highlight the large individual difference in human judgement and perception of the world in determining whether educational interest or some other factor that may influence the ways in which components of the educational world are intercorrelated.

These findings tended to support earlier reports that individuals differ in their ways of making a judgement (Parkin 1993, Armelius & Armelius 1976). Indeed, the result of the study confirmed previous reports on the significant differences that exist in individual perceptions of interest.

Taken together, the results of this study support the view that judgement analysis may function as a very important aid to individual student learning and performance on the judgment task. Significantly, the outcome of these four studies, show how students have combined and used information to make a judgement in a subject including how they have constructed their own world of reality.