

## Research Reports

# Measuring Difficulties in Choosing an Upper Secondary School: Validating of the Parental Expectations, Confusion, Anxiety and Suitability Scale (PeCAS Scale)

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## Abstract

This study was aimed to develop a new questionnaire, on school choice difficulties, with a limited number of items and scales to make it suitable both for pre-screening on large numbers of students and studies which use batteries of many tests. The PeCAS Scale assesses four dimensions, Parental expectations, Confusion, Anxiety, and Suitability, which could be considered the most essential according to previous literature. In total, 1495 students participated in the study. Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis supported a four-dimensional factor structure. Reliability and concurrent validity, concerning the process of choosing a school and a scale on career exploration, were also adequate.

*Keywords:* educational guidance, difficulties in career choices, career exploration, parental expectations, secondary school students

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1 The choice of an upper secondary school is a difficult one, and all students are not mature enough or do  
2 not have access to adequate support to take on such a task (Howard & Walsh, 2010). In Italy, this choice is  
3 more challenging because it has to be made when they are 13-14 years old and students have to choose  
4 between a wide range of schools (6 lyceums, with general topics and a focus on one of them like sciences,  
5 arts or languages; 11 technical institutes, very focused on technical topics like economics, tourism or informat-  
6 ics; 6 professional institutes and 21 professional qualifications, very focused on specific operative jobs like  
7 mechanic, cook or hairdresser). Unfortunately, both schools and families tend to invest limited resources in  
8 these kinds of activities: Sometimes they underestimate the importance and impact of this choice, with negative  
9 consequences such as school failure or strong dissatisfaction and poor performance of the students. On the  
10 one hand, it can be useful to enable targeted counselling aimed both at students, to help them to understand  
11 their psychological characteristics better and to collect information about educational prospects, and to their  
12 teachers and parents, so that they can support them (Boerchi, D'Urso, & Pace, 2019). On the other hand, not  
13 all students need to be supported and, to optimise the use of limited resources, it could be useful to identify  
14 those with greater difficulties to intervene in a targeted and prompt manner.

15 The Anglo-Saxon language differentiates between "indecision", indicating an early and normal stage of any  
16 decision-making process and therefore a common experience in the life of every individual in relation to career  
17 choices (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007), and "indecisiveness", which "refers to  
18 a chronic inability to make decisions in different contexts and situations" (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz,  
19 & Gati, 2013, p. 43). In this second case, it is essential to understand how specific personality characteristics  
20 can affect the process of choice, making it difficult. Literature, for example, showed that negative relationships  
21 exist with extroversion and emotional intelligence and positive relationships exist with introversion (Di Fabio &  
22 Palazzeschi, 2009; Di Fabio et al., 2013). But even if the problem cannot be traced back to a personal and  
23 structural limit on decision making, you can still identify a condition of difficulty related to personal or contingent  
24 factors that make career choices more difficult. According to Gati and Levin (2014), there are many factors  
25 that, combined, make a career choice more complex and difficult: the number of alternatives to choose from is  
26 becoming wider and wider; more and more factors should be taken into account (e.g. the employment context,  
27 length of training, choosing to use specific skills such as one's numeric aptitude); there is always greater  
28 uncertainty about both themselves and the world of work; most career decisions require more compromises  
29 than in the past; customers tend to limit their choices because of social barriers, both real and imaginary; finally,  
30 customers are increasingly aware of the importance of their decision and they worry about making the "wrong"  
31 choice. It is therefore important to understand if a lack of decision is due to an early stage of decision making,  
32 otherwise called "developmental indecision" (Guay, Ratelle, Senécal, Larose, & Deschênes, 2006; Osipow,  
33 1999; Tinsley, 1992;), or whether it is a structural element of the personality of the individual (Saka & Gati,  
34 2007; Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008). Another possibility could be that it is just becoming a critical issue because of  
35 specific difficulties that need to be identified and thus addressed (Osipow, 1999).

36 The international literature provides us with different questionnaires, the purpose of which are to investigate  
37 what kind of difficulties you are encountering in the process of choosing a training course or a job. Con-  
38 cerning indecisiveness, the most suitable questionnaire is the Emotional and Personality- Related Career  
39 Decision-Making Difficulties (EPCD; Saka & Gati, 2007; Saka et al., 2008; 53 items). It explores 11 personality  
40 traits that may cause chronic career indecision like: pessimistic views (about the process, about the world  
41 of work, about one's control); anxiety (about the process, about uncertainty, about the choice, about the  
42 outcomes); self-concept and identity (general anxiety, self-esteem, uncrystallized identity, conflictual attachment  
43 and separation). The authors found few gender differences and with small effect size: just for the scale of  
44 anxiety about the process (Cohen's  $d = 0.17$ ), where females had greater difficulties, and for the scales of  
45 pessimistic view about the process ( $d = 0.29$ ), where males had greater difficulties (Saka et al., 2008).

46 Concerning indecision, Kelly and Lee (2002) argue that it is possible to identify three approaches, represented  
47 by the same number of questionnaires. The first approach is represented by the Career Decision Scale (CDS;  
48 Osipow, 1987), developed from the clinical experience of the author and his colleagues, which is particularly ef-  
49 fective in identifying changes related to targeted interventions. The main limitation of this tool is the uncertainty  
50 concerning its dimensionality. According to the author, it consists of a scale on certainty, including two items,  
51 and of a scale on indecision, comprising of a 16 items scale. But, concerning the scale on indecision, Laplante,  
52 Coallier, Sabourin, and Martin (1994) and Martin, Sabourin, Laplante, and Coallier (1991) argued that it is one-  
53 dimensional considering just 6 items; Kelly and Lee (2002) proposed a three-dimensional model comprising  
54 of 11 items (identity diffusion, positive choice conflict, tentative decision); Schulenberg, Shimizu, Vondracek,  
55 and Hostetler (1988) and Shimizu, Vondracek, Schulenberg, and Hostetler (1988) identified four factors which  
56 include 16 items (negative confusion, positive confusion, desire for support, internal/external barriers). CDS

57 was adapted into an Italian context (Nota, Ferrari, Solberg, & Soresi, 2007) on high school students, but its  
58 structure was not understandable on this occasion. Authors, as a first step, found a four-factor structure, two  
59 of them analogous to those proposed by Osipow (1987) and, in the end, they decided to average the 16 items  
60 as a global index of career indecision: The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .81, and no differences were found  
61 between males and females in University-Preparation School. The second approach is represented by the  
62 Career Factors Inventory (CFI; Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill, & Boggs, 1990) composed of 21 items and based  
63 on the idea that there are two broad categories of problems related to decision making: Lack of information  
64 and emotional impediments to the completion of the decision-making process. Exploratory and confirmatory  
65 factor analyses confirmed a stable structure of four factors: The need for career information; the need for  
66 self-knowledge; anxiety related to a career choice; general indecision (structural). The only significant gender  
67 difference was on the Generalized Indecisiveness Scale,  $t(313) = 2.75, p < .01$ , with women describing them-  
68 selves as more indecisive. CFI was adapted into an Italian context (Lo Presti, Pace, Lo Cascio, & Capuano,  
69 2017) and tested on students attending high school and university: The Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged  
70 from .87 to .64. The third approach is represented by the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire  
71 (CDDQ; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996) a 44 item questionnaire developed to test a theoretical taxonomy on  
72 the difficulties in career decision-making consisting of 3 categories and 10 subcategories: Lack of readiness  
73 (lack of motivation, general indecisiveness, and dysfunctional beliefs); lack of information (about the career  
74 decision-making process itself, the self, occupations or majors, and ways of obtaining additional information  
75 and help) and inconsistent information (unreliable information, internal conflicts, external conflicts). The authors  
76 reported Cronbach alpha coefficients for Israeli and American samples ranging from .63 to .95. Despite the  
77 wider range of difficulties considered, this questionnaire is limited to cognitive aspects, completely omitting the  
78 role of anxiety, as well as no-optimal levels of internal consistency in some scales. CDDQ was also adapted  
79 into an Italian context (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2013) and tested on high school and university students: The  
80 Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged from .87 to .70 and results were similar for women and men.

81 None of the questionnaires considers the role of parents in choosing a school. According to the social cognitive  
82 career theory of Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994), parents represent one of the most important Contextual  
83 Influences Proximal to Choice Behavior. On the one hand, they can provide support; on the other hand, their  
84 expectations can influence the choice negatively (Boerchi & Tagliabue, 2018). Schmitt-Wilson (2013) found that  
85 “perceiving parental expectations, along with the control variable of gender, significantly explained educational  
86 expectations” of the students (p. 234). Shen, Liao, Abraham, and Weng (2014) found, on a sample of Asian  
87 Americans, that living up to parental expectations influences self-efficacy directly in stereotypical occupations,  
88 interests in stereotypical occupations and outcome expectation in stereotypical occupation, and it mediates  
89 between these and parental pressure. The limit of these and similar studies is that parental expectations are  
90 limited to the intended educational level of child (Andres et al., 2007) or academic achievements (Wang &  
91 Heppner, 2002), not to the parental expectations of choosing a specific school, which can be in contrast with  
92 child desires producing difficulties in the choice making.

## 93 The Present Study

94 Some of the questionnaires on difficulties in choosing a school described here feature many items and factors,  
95 others have some psychometric limits, and all of them were developed on samples of high school or university  
96 students. For an operational use directly managed by teachers and for studies based on the use of a battery of  
97 questionnaires, a new scale would be useful featuring by: the representativeness of the most common psycho-

98 logical dimensions highlighted in the previous literature; a small number of items and factors; valid to be used  
99 with students from 13 years and older; simple to administer and interpret for teachers and non-psychologist  
100 counsellors.

101 The aim of this study, then, was to draft and seek evidence of the reliability and structural validity of a new  
102 questionnaire about school choice difficulties by:

- 103 1. Drafting the questionnaire structure starting from the previous literature;
- 104 2. Testing the latent factor structure through both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis;
- 105 3. Providing evidence regarding the internal consistency of all the subscales through Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ;
- 106 4. Providing evidence regarding the concurrent validity of the subscales by testing the hypothesis of positive  
107 relation with a scale on an exploration of vocational issues;
- 108 5. Providing evidence regarding the concurrent validity of the subscales by testing the hypothesis of positive  
109 relation with the number of options the students are considering.

110

## Method

### 111 Participants

112 The research involved 36 middle schools, composed of one to five groups of students. Schools were in a  
113 specific region in the north of Italy with middle and small cities, characterised by having a very wide, but not  
114 complete, range of upper secondary schools and some problems of transportation which partially reduce stu-  
115 dents' choice. In total, 1495 students, attending the last year, answered the questionnaire. They corresponded  
116 to near the whole population of the region: Just a few of them didn't participate at the study or because not  
117 present at school, or because of the presence of severe physic or cognitive disabilities. 50.6% were male, and  
118 49.4% were females. Participants' mean age was 12.93 ( $SD = 0.624$ ), ranging from 11 to 15 (73% were 13  
119 years old).

### 120 Procedure

121 The administration took place in November, two months after the beginning of the school and three months  
122 before the deadline of the enrolment to the upper school. Because of the aim to provide teachers with an  
123 instrument they can use directly, they were asked to administer the paper-pencil version of the questionnaire to  
124 their students in the classroom. Previously, teachers were provided with clear instructions on how to administer  
125 the questionnaire and how to manage students' possible questions avoiding steering their opinions. The  
126 administration was made exclusively after parents' authorisation and only after clarifying that no one student  
127 should feel obligated to participate.

### 128 Measures

#### 129 PeCAS Scale

130 The conception of the questionnaire was to draft a scale characterised by simplicity and inspired to the previous  
131 literature. Therefore, to design it, four psychologist experts in vocational guidance were involved in the study.

132 They were asked to analyze separately the explanations of each scale of the three questionnaires previously  
 133 described, CDS (Osipow, 1987); CFI (Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill, & Boggs, 1990); CDDQ (Gati, Krausz, &  
 134 Osipow, 1996), and to group the scales for the similarity of the psychological variable assessed without any  
 135 limitation about the number of clusters. Later, they met and agreed on the presence of two main clusters  
 136 (information and indecisiveness) and two independent scales related to anxiety and barriers (Table 1).

137 Table 1

138 *Analytic Classification of Psychological Dimensions Assessed in the Literature*

Area	Career Decision Scale <sup>a</sup>	Career Factors Inventory	Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire
Information	Desire for support	Need for career information; Need for self-knowledge	Lack of information; Inconsistent information
Indecisiveness	Negative confusion; Positive confusion	General indecision (structural)	Lack of readiness
Anxiety	-----	Anxiety related to career choice	-----
Barriers	Internal/external barriers	-----	-----

139 <sup>a</sup>For the Career Decision Scale, the model of Shimizu, Vondracek, Schulenberg, and Hostetler (1988) was used.

140 This taxonomy was the base to develop the new questionnaire, which was drafted to be simple and represen-  
 141 tative of the four areas of difficulty a student can encounter, but not necessarily exhaustive about all the  
 142 criticalities connected to school choice. It was composed of the following four subscales:

143 **Pe – Parental expectations** — Starting from all the barriers a student can encounter, it was decided to  
 144 concentrate on just one of them that particularly affect the students' choices. Sometimes students feel parents  
 145 attempt to control too much of their actions and choices about their school. If this happens, they tend to be  
 146 more confused and passive in the process of career preparation (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). The first scale aims  
 147 to assess if the student feels free or under pressure to respect parents' expectations.

148 **C – Confusion** — This scale aims to assess the level of the indecisiveness of the student asking if he/she  
 149 doesn't feel able to choose because of the wide range of opportunity he/she likes.

150 **A – Anxiety** — This scale aims to assess the level of anxiety the student is feeling because of choice itself or  
 151 the risk of making a mistake.

152 **S – Suitability** — This is the most complex scale of the questionnaire. It refers to the process of identifying  
 153 the school, which better fits students' expectations and abilities. It assesses the feeling of being able to gather  
 154 information about the self, about the schools and to understand which one can be more suitable to his/her  
 155 features.

156 Each subscale was composed of four items which were drafted selecting and adapting those more congruent  
 157 with the scales' content of the instruments previously described. Students is requested to indicate how much  
 158 they agreed with each of them using a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all*; 2 = *Slightly*; 3 = *Moderately*; 4 =  
 159 *Very*; 5 = *Completely*).

## 160 Exploration of Vocational Issue Scale

161 It is plausible that those students who experience more difficulty in making a school choice will devote more  
 162 time and energy in searching for information. A positive relation between exploration behaviours and the  
 163 difficulties assessed by PeCAS can be considered a confirmation of its validity. It was decided to validate, in  
 164 Italian, the Exploration of Vocational Issue Scale of Kracke (1997). It is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 6  
 165 items. In the original study (236 teenagers, mean age of 15.2 years and  $SD = .65$ ), it showed a Cronbach's  $\alpha$   
 166 index of .70. First, all the items were translated and checked with the method of back-translation. Then, some  
 167 items were partially modified to fit the specific choice of this sample of students better: for instance, "I talk to as  
 168 many people as possible about occupations I am interested in" was modified into "I talk to as many people as  
 169 possible about school courses I am interested in" (see Table 3). To simplify the task of the compilers, it was the  
 170 same five-point Likert scale of PeCAS was used, instead of the four-point scale of the original version.

## 171 The Situation of the Choice

172 Another index that is supposed to be related to the difficulties in choosing a school is the situation of the  
 173 students about choice. Those who have already chosen shouldn't feel in difficulty, while those who are still  
 174 considering a wide range of opportunity is more likely are confused about the choice. Thus, a positive relation  
 175 between the number of courses the student is considering, and the difficulties assessed by PeCAS is expected,  
 176 and it can be considered a confirmation of the validity of the questionnaire. The situation of the choice was  
 177 investigated by a single question, and students distributed quite homogeneously between the four alternatives:  
 178 1) "I have already decided which course to enroll" ( $n = 340, 22.7\%$ ); 2) "I am considering two alternatives" ( $n$   
 179  $= 429, 28.7\%$ ); 3) "I am considering three alternatives" ( $n = 383, 25.6\%$ ); 4) "I am considering four or more  
 180 alternatives" ( $n = 343, 22.9\%$ ).

## 181 Results

182 Table 2 lists the PeCAS' items and their psychometric characteristics: all of them showed to possess a clear  
 183 normal distribution.

184 Table 2

185 *PeCAS Items and Their Psychometric Characteristics*

Code	No.	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Pe_1	1	I would choose a course that my parents agree with.	2.60	1.04	0.32	-0.31
Pe_2	5	I think that parents are the most suitable people to say if a course is appropriate or not for their children.	2.72	1.05	0.24	-0.44
Pe_3	9	I would choose a course that does not disappoint my parents' expectations.	2.53	1.00	0.30	-0.29
Pe_4	13	My parents' opinion is important to me about the courses that I am considering.	2.87	1.00	0.17	-0.27
C_1	2	Right now, I consider interest in the same manner of many courses.	2.64	1.06	0.31	-0.52
C_2	6	Since I have many interests, I find it hard to choose a course that I like more than all the others.	2.60	1.15	0.36	-0.68
C_3	10	I find many courses interesting that I can choose between.	2.99	1.00	0.03	-0.40

Code	No.	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
C_4	14	Although I know that finally I will have to choose just one, right now there are many courses that attract me.	2.72	1.18	0.31	-0.75
A_1	3	I don't feel calm when I think of the choice of studies I shall make.	2.67	1.16	0.30	-0.72
A_2	7	The idea that I could make the wrong choice of my studies gives me a little bit of anxiety.	3.09	1.21	-0.04	-0.90
A_3	11	I am concerned about the idea that soon I will have to choose which course to do next year.	2.71	1.16	0.26	-0.74
A_4	15	I am nervous when I look for information on courses that I could attend next year.	2.24	1.01	0.69	0.10
S_1	4	I do not know to gather reliable information on the courses I could attend next year.	2.45	1.00	0.46	-0.23
S_2	8	I do not know what are the aptitudes that are needed to face the courses I am considering.	2.88	1.00	0.07	-0.42
S_3	12	I do not know how to assess the reliability of the information provided to me about the different courses.	2.23	0.83	0.47	0.19
S_4	16	I can't understand in which courses I could be more successful.	2.83	1.01	0.13	-0.42

186 Also, all the items of the Italian validation of the Exploration of Vocational Issue Scale of Kracke (1997)  
 187 adapted to school choices were normally distributed (Table 3). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed  
 188 the one-dimensionality of the scale,  $\chi^2 = 48.610$  (9),  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .054, CI [.040, .070]; CFI = .971, and  
 189 Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .72.

190 Table 3

191 *School Version of the Exploration of Vocational Issue Scale's Items and Their Psychometric Characteristics*

No.	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	I talk to as many people as possible about school courses I am interested in	3.04	1.01	0.06	-0.41
2	I try to find out which subjects mostly interest me	3.92	0.86	-0.51	0.05
3	I try to get information about school courses I am interested in, in many possible ways (e.g., reading, talking, internships)	3.50	1.07	-0.31	-0.54
4	I try to find out which school courses best fit my strengths and weaknesses	3.63	0.94	-0.34	-0.21
5	When I seek information about a school course, I also try to find out about its negative aspects	3.23	1.03	-0.09	-0.53
6	I consider various school courses and try to get extensive information about all alternatives	3.29	1.02	-0.10	-0.49

## 192 Construct Validity

193 To verify the structure of the questionnaire, the sample was randomly divided into two subsamples to test both  
 194 the exploratory factorial analysis (EFA; with SPSS [Vesrion 25]) and the CFA (with AMOS [Version 25]) with the  
 195 maximum likelihood method for both. The two subsamples did not differ significantly both for items' psychomet-  
 196 rics and gender distribution. EFA was conducted on a sample of 748 students, and the number of factors to be  
 197 extracted was defined comparing eigenvalue  $> 1$  and scree plot criteria. Four factors were considered the best

198 solution because eigenvalue of the 4th factor was lower but very near to 1 (.931), and screen plot suggested  
199 this solution. Factor loadings are reported in Table 4.

200 Table 4

201 *EFA Factor Loadings*

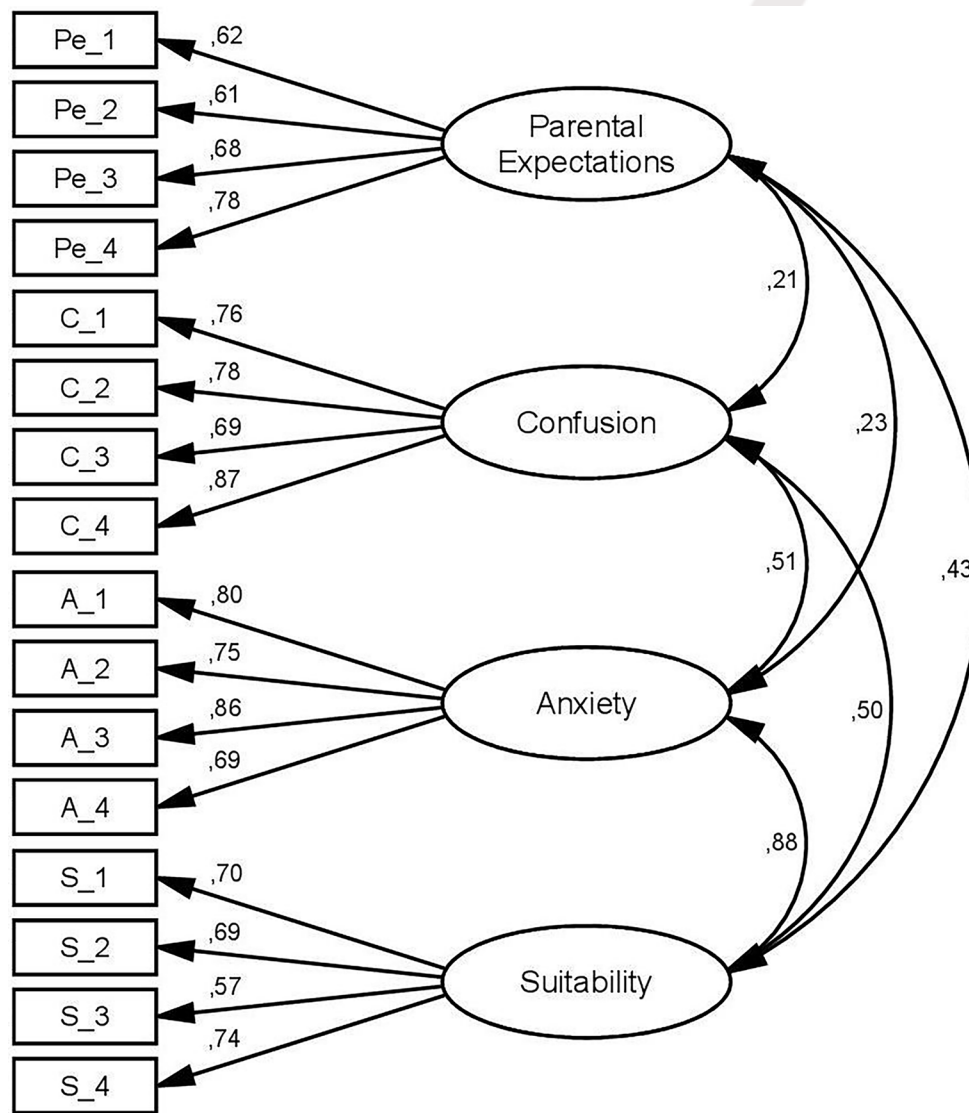
Item	1	2	3	4
A_3	<b>.862</b>	-.005	.031	-.030
A_1	<b>.798</b>	.013	.015	-.075
A_2	<b>.657</b>	.026	.034	.128
A_4	<b>.560</b>	.019	.061	.120
Pe_4	-.041	<b>.847</b>	.062	-.033
Pe_1	-.004	<b>.685</b>	-.044	-.033
Pe_2	.002	<b>.641</b>	-.041	.014
Pe_3	.068	<b>.515</b>	.048	.080
C_4	.006	-.042	<b>.852</b>	.067
C_3	-.100	.058	<b>.785</b>	-.036
C_1	.099	.030	<b>.714</b>	-.032
C_2	.110	-.080	<b>.691</b>	.052
S_2	-.033	-.023	-.027	<b>.806</b>
S_4	-.043	.098	.088	<b>.729</b>
S_3	.143	-.014	.038	<b>.364</b>
S_1	.221	.051	-.036	<b>.254</b>

202 *Note.* In bold are values bigger than .25.

203 The four factors explained 52.22% of the variance, with Factors 1 to 4 accounting, respectively, for 29.73%,  
204 11.06%, 7.67%, and 3.21% of the variance. All factors included the same items of the original model with  
205 loadings greater than .50, except two items of the scale suitability.

206 CFA was conducted on a sample of 747 students, testing a model consisting of 4 latent variables which  
207 affected four items each, and the correlations between the variables. Fit indexes confirmed the goodness of  
208 the model,  $\chi^2 = 326,787$  (98),  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .056 CI [.049, .063]; CFI = .956). Factors loadings were  
209 comprised between .57 and .86, and correlations between the factors were all positive and significant with  $p$   
210  $< .001$  (see Figure 1 for details).





211

212 *Figure 1. Structural Model of the PeCAS.*213 **Reliability**

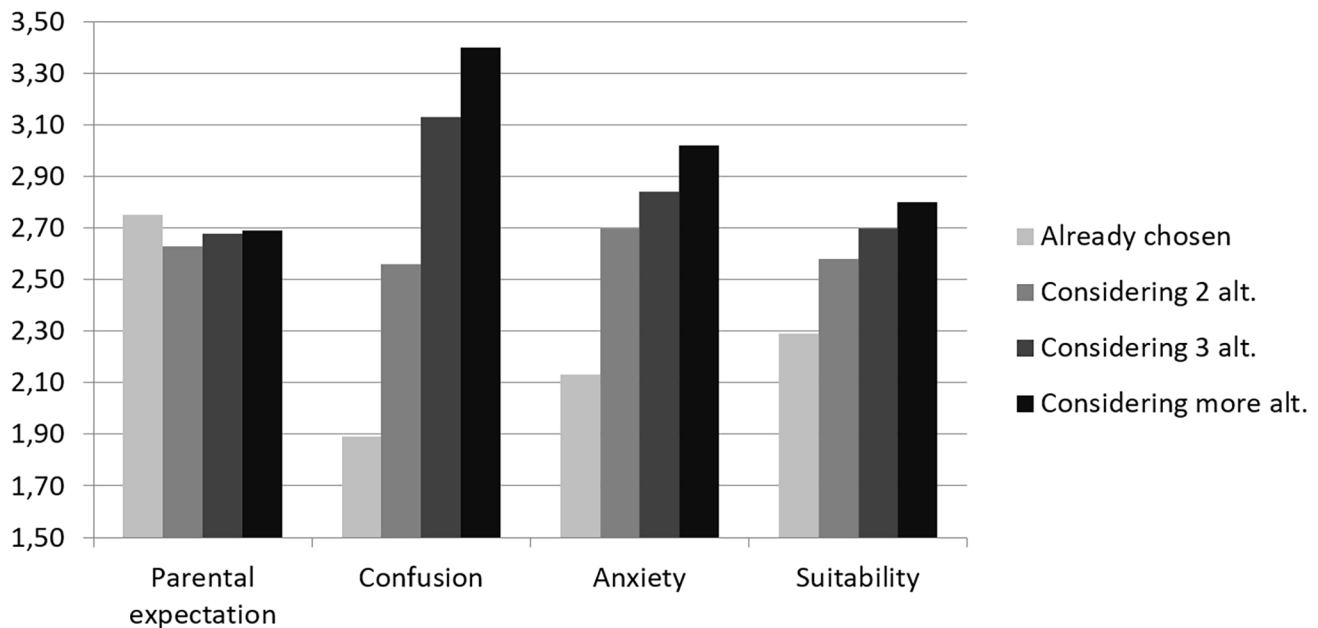
214 Internal consistency was estimated with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  on the whole sample and all indexes were good: parental  
 215 expectations = .77; confusion = .86; anxiety = .85; suitability = .73.

216 **Concurrent Validity**

217 All the scales of PeCAS correlated positively with career exploration, mostly confusion ( $r = .215, p < .001$ )  
 218 followed by parental expectations ( $r = .151, p < .001$ ), anxiety ( $r = .135, p < .001$ ) and suitability ( $r = .105, p$   
 219  $< .001$ ).

220 Students grouped according to the situation of the choice differed also in their perception of school choice  
 221 difficulty. Just for parental expectations, ANOVA statistics were not significant,  $F(3) = 1.572; p = .194$ . At the

222 opposite, confusion was the variable which differed more between the four groups,  $F(3) = 291.261$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  
 223 followed by anxiety,  $F(3) = 64.218$ ,  $p < .001$ , and suitability,  $F(3) = 34.606$ ,  $p < .001$  (Figure 2).



224  
 225 Figure 2. Mean PeCAS scales depending on the situation of the choice.

226 Gender differences were all significant, with women with greater scores in all the four scales, but they were  
 227 very small in effect size, ranging from  $d = 0.11$  for confusion to  $d = 0.33$  for anxiety, as it was for the first study  
 228 of Saka et al. (2008).

## 229 Discussion

230 The objective of this study was to test the psychometric properties of PeCAS scale, a psychological question-  
 231 naire drawn to identify the perception of difficulties related to the choice of upper secondary school for students  
 232 of the third year of middle school, and it demonstrated to possess very good psychometric features both for  
 233 reliability and validity.

234 Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the validity of the theorised structure, consisting of 4 scales, in part  
 235 related to each other, and each one composed of 4 items. Also, reliability was good for all scales.

236 To test concurrent validity, the Exploration of Vocational Issue Scale (Kracke, 1997) was translated and valida-  
 237 ted in Italian, adapting it to school choices and for a very young target. This study confirmed the mono-factorial  
 238 structure and showed internal consistency in line with the original research. The presence of significant corre-  
 239 lations between each scale of PeCAS and the Exploration of Vocational Issue Scales proved a relationship  
 240 between variables. Their modest intensity, on the other hand, showed that the five scales do not overlap and  
 241 that, therefore, it is suggested to use both to understand the condition of students better.

## 242 Limitations and Future Research Directions

243 The main limit of this study lies in the fact that the process of choosing can evolve differently for students and,  
244 consequently, their perception of difficulty. Subsequent studies should assess the progress of the perception  
245 of difficulty by making more administrations in the period from the beginning of the school's activities of the  
246 last year at the time of formalisation of choice. If on the one hand one of the strengths is its simplicity, on the  
247 other hand, it is not wide enough to examine, in-depth, the specific difficulties a student can encounter. So,  
248 the use of a supplementary questionnaire, like the CDDQ (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996) is recommended to  
249 understand in more detail the reasons for which a specific student feels difficulty and to be able to proceed with  
250 a personalised counselling intervention more focused on his/her needs.

251 Even if the structure of the scale and the drafting of the items were inspired to several international question-  
252 naires tested on different samples, this study was led only in one country, and students from just one type of  
253 school participated. Future studies should test its validity also on students involved in choosing different types  
254 of schools and college courses in different countries.

255 Future studies could also verify if parental career support (Boerchi & Tagliabue, 2018) and peer support  
256 (Muscarà et al., 2018) can play a role in school choice considering the mediation role of parental expectation.  
257 Moreover, other researchers could further indeep if career decision difficulties are associated with personality  
258 traits (Martincin & Stead, 2015) and emotional intelligence (Di Fabio et al., 2013).

## 259 Implications for Career Counseling Practice

260 The simplicity of the instrument, both for compiling and interpreting the results, allows teachers, career counsel-  
261 lors, and school psychologists to use it directly to identify students who are experiencing more difficulties in  
262 choosing the upper secondary school or the university. This scale may also help them to implement pre-screen-  
263 ing on a large number of students to plan guidance projects and to assess the effectiveness of school guidance  
264 support.

265 Moreover, it can be very useful for researchers because the limited number of items that compose the question-  
266 naire make it suitable to be inserted in questionnaires composed of a large number of scales, reducing the risk  
267 of overwhelming respondents and, as a consequence, the risk of reducing the reliability of the data.

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