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The Relationship between Career Stress and Academic Motivation of Vocational Higher Education Students

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ABSTRACT

University students are exposed to different stressors such as an uncertain future and the difficulties of integrating into the system. The pressure to find a job represents a large part of the career stress of university students. Academic motivation is expressed as students' desire in the academic field and their tendency to take action. After graduation, university students make great efforts to get a job according to their graduation area. A college student worries about landing a job immediately after graduation. This research aims to examine the relationships between career stress and academic motivation based on the views of associate degree students. The data of the research was collected from students in eight vocational schools of a university located in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey in the 2020-2021 academic year. With the analysis of the collected data based on the students' opinions, it was found out that the academic motivation of university students was low, and their intrinsic and external motivations were at an average level. In addition, associate degree students had below-average career stress. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that the sub-dimensions of career stress, such as pressure to find a job, and external conflict dimensions were significant predictors of all three dimensions of academic motivation. Moreover, personal factors and other organizational variables that may have a mediating effect on the relationship between career stress and academic motivation, can be examined more holistically in the future, using more advanced statistics.

Keywords: Career stress, academic motivation, associate degree students

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Introduction

Universities, which are seen as the religion, language, and culture centers of the region where they were founded, have become institutions that train professional staff according to the needs and demands of the society. While raising the human profile related to society needs, it is expected from them to give high quality education to students and to produce qualified graduates who serve societies and their own needs, goals, and expectations. At the same time, if the expectations of the students are met, it is predicted that the level of satisfaction received from the university will increase (Şahin, Zoraloğlu, & Fırat, 2011).

University students have to make conscious decisions about their future to prepare themselves for working life. Universities are places for students to choose a profession and to prepare for a career. The choice of the profession should not be left to chance. Although Turkey has experienced a rapid expansion in higher education, the university entrance examination is still very competitive. For this reason, it can be said that many Turkish students choose a profession and a university not according to their abilities and wishes but according to the scores they have received. As a result of this situation, individuals can work in jobs; they are unsatisfied with, after graduation. In addition, students make great efforts to increase their employability to find a job after graduating from a university. Employment pressure is seen as the college student's first source of pressure (Zhao, Yan, & Xiaoyang, 2018). This affects their motivation levels during their university years and may cause them to be indifferent to the courses given during their university education. Işık (2010) states that the essential career-related problems of university students in Turkey are that they do not feel themselves sufficient in making decisions, are not sufficiently aware of their self-esteem, and have not a good perception of the suitability of the goals they set for themselves. According to Gizir (2005), the situations, which senior university students experience the most anxiety, are determined as not being able to find a job with sufficient financial income, not being able to find an appointment for the profession, lack of formation, not knowing what to do in the first semester after graduation. In this case, it is thought that university students who experience career stress may not have the enthusiasm to be successful academically. Therefore, it is believed that it is crucial to determine the academic motivation of associate degree students who experience career stress.

Theoretical Framework

University students graduate with the professional qualifications they have acquired through their education throughout their university life. After this graduation, they are concerned about whether they will be placed in a job related to their education (Zhao, Yan, & Xiaoyang, 2018). Therefore, both intrinsic and external sources of motivation are essential factors for successful graduation at every stage of students' education (Ng & Ng, 2015). It is thought that a student, who has to cope with career stress, is engaged in academic activities, and his academic motivation level is low. This study tried to identify the influence of career stress on academic motivation.

Academic Motivation

Motivation is a concept related to energy, direction, perseverance, and co-finality in all aspects of action and purpose. Academic motivation is defined as students' willingness to participate in the educational field and their tendency to take action (Direktör & Nuri, 2017), and students' willingness to achieve specific academic goals (Wilkesmann, Fischer, & Virgilito, 2012). It has been determined that students with high academic motivation have more positive

attitudes towards school and lower anxiety levels (Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose & Senécal, 2007).

The concept of motivation has been examined in three dimensions; intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is handled as individuals' natural satisfaction from their actions rather than external impulses, pressures, and rewards. It has been observed that individuals with intrinsic motivation have more permanent learning and higher creative characteristics than individuals with extrinsic motivation (White, 1959). Lack of motivation results from not valuing an activity, not feeling enough to do it, or not believing it will produce the desired result. In other words, it can be explained as the low intention to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is related to factors external to the individual. It is possible to say that students are extrinsically motivated when they are motivated by external support such as rewards and praises rather than the intrinsic satisfaction of learning (Ng & Ng, 2015). While the intrinsically motivated individual does a job for his natural bounties, the extrinsically motivated individual is willing to stay in a job because he or she seeks approval from authority figures. According to Demirci, Engin, Bakay, & Yakut (2013), the factors that cause stress in students affect the learning success of students negatively. This may be due to the lower university entrance scores of the associate degree students. Students who enter university with low scores may have more difficulties in lectures (Batıgün & Kayış, 2014).

Career Stress

One of the critical aims of universities is to train the qualified human resources needed by the society (Demircioğlu, 2007; Güçlü & Karadağ, 2011), so organizations need to be recruited with sufficient training, knowledge, skills, and equipment for organizational affairs (Özdemir, 2014). However, students have some concerns about their future and career after graduating with specific competencies. A university student worries about landing a job immediately after graduation (Zhao, Yan, & Xiaoyang, 2018). Having a job does not entirely remove students' future anxieties or career stress. Factors such as individuals' post-graduation job opportunities, socio-economic development opportunities, career advancement, and family expectations create career stress on students (Üzüm, Uçkun, & Uçkun, 2018).

The accumulation of feelings and thoughts obtained by the individual can vary according to his family's socio-economic characteristics and abilities. According to these variations, career expectations of them may also change (Tunç & Uygur, 2001). Looking at the steps in career processes, one of the critical stressful periods is the years covering university education periods (Özden & Berk, 2017). Students are exposed to different stressors such as an uncertain future and the difficulties of integration into the system (Redhwan, Sami, Karim, Chan, & Zaleha, 2009). Stress is undoubtedly a part of students' lives and can affect coping with college life demands. Their daily responsibilities involve numerous challenges that cause stress. In career management, individuals, who cannot make their plans for the future carefully and who do not reach their expectations, are likely to feel intensely hopeless and live with stress (Turpcu & Akyurt, 2018). Especially post-university life planning, which is the last period of planning and implementation, can create stress in determining the careers of individuals. At the end of school life, students' starting work or unemployment, career choice, social expectations, fear of having inadequate living standards can cause stress on university students (Cakmak & Hevedanlı, 2005). In addition to that, in the study conducted by Üzüm, Uçkun, and Uçkun (2018), it is seen that there is a relationship between gender and career stress. The study shows that women perceived uncertainty in their careers at a higher level than men. Furthermore, there are many factors

related to career stress and career stress may affect other situations in the individual's life. It is thought that academic motivation and academic success are among the factors that can be affected by it.

Lin and Huang (2014) focused on university students' stress in their studies. Employment stress, one of the dimensions of this study, represents a large part of the career stress of university students. Therefore, career stress as a factor affecting academic motivation increases the importance of the current study. In this context, the aim of the study is to examine the relationship between career stress and the academic motivation of university students. As a result of a study conducted by Durna (2006), a significant difference was determined in stress levels between undergraduate students and associate degree students in vocational high schools. Students studying in a four-year faculty are exposed to the lower stress rate than two year vocational school students. Having less education can cause them to experience career stress. From this point of view, this study focused on the relationship between career stress and academic motivation of associate degree students.

This research aims to examine the relationships between career stress and academic motivation based on the views of vocational higher education students (ISCED5). In this direction, answers to the following questions were sought in the study.

1. What is the career stress of vocational higher education students?
2. What is the academic motivation of vocational higher education students?
3. Is there a relationship between career stress and academic motivation of vocational higher education students?
4. To what extent do vocational higher education students' career stresses and academic motivations explain the variability?

Method

This research, which focuses on the relationship between career stress and academic motivation of vocational higher education students, was designed in the relational model. The data collected in the research were analyzed and interpreted with quantitative techniques.

Population and Sample

The research population consists of 3508 vocational higher education students in eight vocational schools of a university located in the Central Anatolia region in the spring term of the 2020-2021 academic year. Five hundred ninety-eight vocational higher education students (ISCED5) from eight vocational schools of this university participated in the research in spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. Of the participants, 486 (81.3%) were female, and 112 (19.7%) were male. Furthermore, 393 (65.7%) of the participants are in their first year, and 205 (34.3%) are in their second year.

Data Collection Tool

Career Stress Inventory and Academic Motivation Scale (CSIAMS) were used to collect data in this study. Career Stress Inventory: The Career Stress Inventory scale adapted to Turkish by Özden and Sertel-Berk (2017) was used to determine the career stress levels of university students. The scale has a 3-factored structure called "Career Ambiguity and Lack of Information," "External Conflict," and "Job Pressure". Also, the researchers tested the reliability and the validity of the scale. Cronbach alpha coefficient for internal consistency was .94 with

item-total correlations ranging between .44 - .80 whereas the test-retest reliability coefficient was .81 for the Turkish version of the CSIAMS. Factor analyses showed that the items of the CSIAMS loaded on three factors called "Career Ambiguity and Lack of Information," "External Conflict," and "Job Pressure," which explained 64.7% of the total variance.

Academic Motivation Scale: The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) adapted into Turkish by Karagüven-Ünal (2012) was used to determine the academic motivation levels of university students. The scale was used in the study with three factors, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation. According to goodness of fit values obtained as a result of CFA [$\chi^2 = 1017.74$; $\chi^2 / Sd = 3.094$; NFI=.091; CFI=0.94; AGFI=.081; RMSEA= 0.73] and .87 Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the scale used in the study was accepted as a valid and reliable tool. (Kline, 2005). The reliability and the validity of the scale were tested by the researcher.

Procedure

In the research, the scales were sent online to the students of eight vocational high schools of a university in the Central Anatolia region in the spring term of the 2020-2021 academic year. Due to the distance education process, it was required to collect the data online. Vocational higher education students participated in the research voluntarily. Completion of the scales took approximately 10 minutes for each participant on average. In this context, the scales were sent to the student e-mail addresses of 3508 vocational higher education students. 598 of them returned and were used by the data analysis. The analysis was carried out with statistical analysis programs. Before the analysis, it was evaluated whether there were extreme values and missing data in the data set. As a result of the examinations, it was seen that there were no extreme or missing data.

Data Analyses

This research was conducted with associate degree students at Yozgat Bozok University in the 2020-2021 academic year. Personal information forms, AMS and CSIAMS, were used within the scope of the research. Demographic information is included in the personal information form. Before the analysis phase, missing data was checked, and extreme values were determined. Mahalanobis distances were calculated and compared with the critical chi-square value. A value of $p < .001$ was taken as the outlier acceptance criterion. Analyses were carried out on 598 scales determined to be suitable for analysis. It was observed that the kurtosis coefficient values of the dimensions of both scales were between -0.14 and 0.41 and the skewness coefficient values were between -0.21 and 1.10. The kurtosis and skewness coefficient values are between plus/minus 1.5 and are interpreted as a normal distribution of the data set (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). According to these results, it is assumed that the data set has a normal distribution. The difference in variances between the groups was examined with the Levene test, and it was found that the variances were homogeneous ($p > .05$). Therefore, it has been examined whether there is a multi-connection problem. This study determined that the career stresses and academic motivation VIF value and tolerance values were in the acceptance range, and the correlation coefficients between the variables were below .80 and did not show a multicollinearity problem.

In the analysis phase, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean, and standard deviation scores were used to determine associate degree students' career stress and academic motivation levels. The relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study was tested with Pearson correlation, and the effect was tested with regression

analysis. Pearson correlation analysis to determine the relationship between career stress and academic motivation of associate degree students; Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictor status of career stress on academic motivation. LISREL and SPSS programs were used in the analysis of the data. The findings were evaluated at the 95% confidence interval at the 5% significance level.

Results

This study focuses on the relationship between career stress and academic motivation, how the participant views the two variables, and whether there is a statistically significant relationship between career stress and academic motivation sub-dimensions was analyzed based on descriptive statistics. The results are in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the sub-dimensions of career stress and academic motivation scales

Variables	Mean	Sd.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intrinsic motivation	3.40	.72	1					
2. Extrinsic motivation	3.64	.63	.69*	1				
3. Lack of motivation	1.90	.95	-.40*	-.43*	1			
4. Job Pressure	2.30	.76	-.43*	-.41*	.46*	1		
5. External Conflict	2.61	.81	-.46*	-.44*	.48*	.70*	1	
6. Career Uncertainty and Lack of Knowledge	2.59	.72	-.41*	-.39*	.51*	.73*	.76*	1

* $p < .01$

As can be seen from Table 1, the academic motivation scale averages of vocational higher education students are 1.90 in lack of motivation, 3.40 in intrinsic motivation, and 3.64 in extrinsic motivation. Therefore, according to these results, it can be said that their amotivation is low, and their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are at an average level.

Again, as shown in Table 1, career stress mean scores of vocational higher education students range between 2.30 and 2.61. According to these results, vocational higher education students have career stress below the average.

According to the results, the participants of job pressure ($r = -.43$; $p < .01$); external conflict ($r = -.46$; $p < .01$); and career uncertainty ($r = -.41$; $p < .01$); There is a moderate, significant and negative relationship between their opinions about their intrinsic motivation. However, there is the moderate, significant and negative relationship among pressure of the participants to find a job ($r = -.41$; $p < .01$); external conflict ($r = -.44$; $p < .01$); and the career uncertainty ($r = -.39$; $p < .01$). In addition, there is a moderate, significant and positive relationship among the pressure of the participants to find a job ($r = .46$; $p < .01$); external conflict ($r = .48$; $p < .01$); and career uncertainty ($r = .51$; $p < .01$).

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine how much of the variability in the three sub-dimensions of AMO was explained in each sub-dimension of the SSS. The results are in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of multiple regression analysis for research variables

Independent variable (Career Stress)	Dependent variable (Academic Motivation)	R	R ²	F	p	β	T	p	
Job Pressure	Intrinsic motivation	.49	.24	67.9	.000*	-.33	-3.13	.002*	
External Conflict							-5.15	.000*	
Career Uncertainty and Lack of Knowledge							-.07	-.99	.319
Job Pressure	Extrinsic motivation	.46	.21	54.8	.000*	-.29	-3.08	.002*	
External Conflict							-4.66	.000*	
Career Uncertainty and Lack of Knowledge							-.06	-0.93	.351
Job Pressure	Lack of motivation	.54	.29	82.5	.000*	.10	2.37	.018*	
External Conflict							.20	3.14	.002*
Career Uncertainty and Lack of Knowledge							.15	4.88	.000*

* $p < .05$

As can be seen from Table 2, the pressure to find a job and external conflict dimensions of the Career Stress Scale are significant predictors of the "intrinsic motivation" sub-dimension of the Academic Motivation Scale and explain 24% of the variability in the "intrinsic motivation" ($F=67.9$; $p<.01$). However, career uncertainty and lack of knowledge are not significant predictors of intrinsic motivation. Job pressure and external conflict dimensions of the Career Stress Scale were significant predictors of the "extrinsic motivation" sub-dimension of the Academic Motivation Scale PMS, explaining 21% of the variability in "extrinsic motivation" ($F=54.8$; $p<.01$). However, career uncertainty and lack of knowledge are not significant predictors of intrinsic motivation. Job pressure, external conflict and career uncertainty, and lack of knowledge dimensions of the Career Stress Scale are significant predictors of the "lack of motivation" sub-dimension of the Academic Motivation Scale, explaining 29% of the variability in lack of motivation. ($F=82.5$; $p<.01$).

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

In this study, the relationship between career stresses and academic motivation was examined based on the opinions of 598 vocational higher education students. In the research, an answer was sought as to how the career stress of vocational higher education students was. As a result of the analysis, it was observed that the average score of career stress of vocational higher education students was at a moderate level. This finding is consistent with similar studies. For example, in the study of Bozdam and Taşkın (2011), in which the professional anxiety levels of teacher candidates were examined, it was found that the professional anxiety was at a moderate level. In the studies conducted by Yasar and Turgut (2020) and Yemenici, Bozkurt, and Özkara (2020) on university students, the researchers found out that the career stress of the students was not high. In the study of Gümrükçü, Bilgici, and Deniz (2016) on teacher candidates, it was determined that professional anxiety was at a moderate level.

The research also sought an answer to how the academic motivation of vocational higher education students was. As a result of the analysis, it was observed that the average score of the academic motivation of the vocational higher education students was at a moderate level. On the other hand, in the studies by Eryılmaz (2010), Gömleksiz, and Serhatlıoğlu (2014), the academic motivation levels of teacher candidates are high. The medium level of academic motivation of vocational higher education students may be caused of having anxiety about finding a job after graduation. The opportunity of career centers established at universities for students and their referral to professional organizations may enable students to experience less career stress. In universities, it can be arranged to create the content of an elective course called "career planning" in the curricula, and the university students who want to get help with their career development can choose this course and get professional help in their career planning processes.

The study also questioned whether there was a relationship between career stress and academic motivation. Pearson correlation coefficient were analyzed within the scope of sub-dimensions of two variables. It was determined that the pressure to find a job, external conflict and career uncertainty, and lack of knowledge in the career stress scale were negatively, moderately, and significantly related to the academic motivation scale's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation dimensions. It has been determined that the student's intrinsic motivation is low when they have a conflict between the family's wishes and their wishes due to external conflict. This shows that students, who experience high external conflict, may be less willing to engage in an activity for the pleasure they experience in new learning. Moreover, this finding suggests that students with low intrinsic motivation have low levels of inner strength required to successfully cope with individual and environmental difficulties encountered in their future decisions. It can be said that students with a high level of external conflict also have high motivation levels. It is possible to say that students, who have conflicts between their family's wishes and their wishes, experience an uncertainty about university education and have confusion about why they come to the university. Intrinsic motivation levels and external conflict levels of students, with high career uncertainty and lack of knowledge, were determined as low. It was determined that when career uncertainty and lack of knowledge are high, the level of amotivation of students also increases. By establishing cooperation with career centers, directing students to professional organizations may enable them to experience less career stress and thus they reach motivation levels that will enable them to be academically successful.

Finally, it was also questioned whether the sub-dimensions of career stress affect the academic motivation. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that the sub-dimensions of career stress, pressure to find a job, and external conflict dimensions were significant predictors of all three dimensions of academic motivation. However, the career uncertainty dimension was determined as a significant predictor of amotivation dimension only. Findings show that job pressure and external conflict dimensions influence the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In other words, pressure to find a job and external conflict can be interpreted as a variable that plays a role in vocational higher education students' intrinsic and external motivations. Many reasons, such as the inadequacy of the quality and quantity of the instructors of Vocational Schools, the inadequacy of the number of laboratories and workshops to be held and the lack of equipment, the lack of employment opportunities after graduation, can cause students to experience career stress and decrease their academic motivation. Further research is needed to be done on each of these causes, which have the potential to create stress for students. Researchers can suggest that the application-oriented research should be carried out to raise the

academic profile of vocational school students and to graduate more qualified personnel to the job market.

In this study, the relationship between career stress and academic motivation was examined based on the views of vocational higher students. The findings reveal that the participants' career stress and academic motivation are moderate.

This research was conducted on a relatively small study group. Therefore, this research can be repeated on larger samples in the future. In addition to that, personal factors and other organizational variables that may have a mediating effect on the relationship between career stress and academic motivation can be examined more holistically using more advanced statistics. Also, qualitative studies can deepen the information about the relationship patterns between research variables. In this context, focus group studies can be carried out with vocational higher education students.

Based on the results of this research, practical suggestions can be made. Several practical trainings can be given for individuals to deal with the stress. Psychological counseling should also be included in the health services offered by universities for students. Thus, students become conscious of the sources of their stress. Lastly, the academic advisors of vocational higher education students can develop the students' professional competencies with the knowledge and the experience during their education at the university.

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