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Article

The Predictors of Career Decision-Making Difficulties Among High School Students: Career Decision Self-Efficacy and Personal Traits - Turkey Case

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyse high-school students' career decision-making difficulties through self-efficacy and personal traits. In Turkey, high school is a critical period when students focus on career decision-making. Since career decision self-efficacy reflects one's belief in making the right career decision, and personal traits are useful to shape life-related subjects, it is essential to address those issues. It was quantitative research carried out with 418 high school students. The *Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire*, *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale*, and *Adjective Based Personality Test* were used for data collection. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to identify the relationship between variables, and multiple linear regression analysis to determine the predictive power for the dependent variable. The results showed that there was a low and medium-level relationship between career decision self-efficacy and personality traits, and these variables were predicted by certain sub-dimensions (neuroticism, agreeableness, accurate self-appraisal, goal selection). The findings were discussed considering the literature. Future studies might investigate the reasons for the negative predictive power of certain personality traits.

Keywords

Career decision-making difficulties • career decision-making self-efficacy • personality traits • high school students

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Career-related decisions are the most critical, challenging, and complicated decisions in an individual's life. They are characterized by selecting an occupation, education program, school, or workplace (Sampson et al., 1992). Career planning is a life-long process that starts in the early stages of life (Super, 1980), and the high school period is one of the critical times for a career decision. High school students experience difficulties when making career-related decisions due to many options (Bacanlı, 2012; Sampson et al., 2004). The conflicts about career decision-making are conceptualized as career decision-making difficulties in the career guidance field (Gati, Garty et al., 1996). Career decision-making difficulties include indecisiveness due to environmental or intrinsic factors (Gati, 1986) and distraction from an ideal career. It might lead to avoiding making a decision or a wrong career choice (Gati, Krausz et al., 1996).

Career decision-making difficulties have been assessed in three categories by Gati, Krausz et al. (1996): lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. Lack of readiness refers to low motivation and irrational belief in choosing a career. Lack of information is characterized by a lack of information about the self, the occupation, and the decision-making process. Inconsistent information reflects the internal and external conflicts and unreliable information about an occupation (Gati, Krausz et al., 1996).

In the literature, the perceived social support from family and teachers (Öztemel, 2013), irrational beliefs in career-decision making (Bacanlı, 2012), personality traits and self-assessment (Fabio et al., 2012), occupational maturity (Harman, 2017) were predictors of career decision-making difficulties. Bacanlı et al. (2013) found that career decision-making difficulties varied by grade level, gender, perceived academic success, and socioeconomic status, career decisiveness, trust in a career decision. However, in the study with Australian high-school students, Albion (2000) did not significantly differ in career decision-making by gender. Doğan and Bacanlı (2012) conducted an experimental study and found that a specific program for career decision-making difficulties decreased high-school students' career decision-making difficulties. Another study that analyzed the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and ego identity demonstrated a significant relationship between them (Gökçe & Traş, 2017). Duru (2019) claimed that career decision-making difficulty differed by school type and grade level, and there was a low-level negative relationship between occupational maturity and career decision-making difficulties. Additionally, family sense of belonging (Slaten & Baskin, 2013), personal and emotional traits (Saka et al., 2008), extroversion, honest or smart (Chen & Liew, 2015), and cultural differences (Mau, 2001) were associated with career decision-making difficulties.

Another variable of career decision-making difficulty was career decision self-efficacy expectation. It can be defined as the self-appraisal to complete career development tasks (Hackett & Betz, 1981). It was found that career decision self-efficacy expectations were significant and positive predictors of career decision-making difficulties among high-school students (Dursun & Kara, 2019), and as career decision self-efficacy increased, career decision-making difficulties decreased (Mutlu, 2011). Similarly, in their study with university students, Morgan and Ness (2003) found an opposite relationship between career decision-making difficulties and career decision self-efficacy. Another study suggested a negative relationship between expressed and measured career decision-making difficulties and career decision self-efficacy (Amir & Gati, 2006). Hence, a high career decision self-efficacy expectation refers to that person accurately assesses their talents, values, and interest sets achievable goals, and has high self-confidence to overcome the difficulties in achieving those goals (Işık, 2010).

Personality traits are among the variables related to career decision-making difficulties. In a study with high-school students, Şen (2017) found a positive relationship between career decision-making difficulties and A-type personality traits and a negative relationship with emotional intelligence. Burger

(2006) defined personality as consistent behavioral patterns and personality processes. The current study dealt with the Five-Factor Personality Model as the model presents various perspectives holistically, shows consistency and offers a comprehensive model for personality traits (Bacanlı et al., 2009; Koç, 2019; Smith & Canger, 2004).

The majority of the studies on career decision-making difficulties were carried out with high school and university students, and they considered several variables. However, there is not any study on the relationship between five-factor personality traits and students' career decision-making difficulties in Turkey. Thus, this research would contribute to the literature. The study aimed to analyze high school students' career decision-making difficulties by career decision self-efficacy expectations and personality traits. Since high school students' personality development might be an essential factor for career decisions, the study would enlighten and contribute to the process. It would also be instructive for future studies and help guidance counselors and interventions in identifying the personality traits and career decision-making self-efficacy expectation level will guide student-oriented services and interventions.

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research method and a correlation model to describe the relationship between adjective-based personality traits, career decision-making self-efficacy expectations, and career decision-making difficulties among teenagers. The correlation model showed the relationship between two or more variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016).

Participants

The group consisted of 482 students from seven high schools in Arnavutkoy, Istanbul. Among the participants, 282 were girls (67.5%) and 136 were boys (32.5%), ranging from 14 to 19 years old. Besides, 29.7% ($n = 124$) were 9th grade, 29.2% ($n = 122$) were 10th grade, 22.0% ($n = 92$) 11th grade, and 19.1% ($n = 80$) were 12th grade students. When the monthly income levels of the families were analyzed, it was found that 42.8% ($n = 179$) were between 1500-3000 TL, 28.9% ($n = 121$) between 3000-4500 TL, 16.3% ($n = 68$) 4500 TL or more, and 11.9% ($n = 50$) were 1500 TL or less.

Instruments

In this study, the *Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire* (CDMDQ), *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Expectations* (CDMSES) scale and *Adjective Based Personality Test* (ABPT) were used for data collection.

Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDMDQ). The scale was developed by Gati and Saka (2001) for adolescence and adapted to Turkish by Bacanlı (2008). Turkish adaptation was conducted on high school students. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale, including 34 items and three sub-dimensions: *Lack of information*, *Inconsistent information*, and *Lack of readiness*. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was .82 for the Turkish version. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for this study was .92. Similarly, it was .77 for the *Lack of readiness*, .89 for the *Inconsistent information*, and .71 for the *Lack of information*.

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Expectations Scale (CDMSES). This scale was developed by Betz et al. (1996) and adapted to Turkish by Işık (2010). The scale is a 5-point Likert scale including 25 items. High scores in the scale indicate increased career decision-making self-efficacy expectations. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency was .88 for the original version and .89 for the current study. It was measured .75 for *Accurate self-appraisal*, .76 for *Gathering occupational information*, .77 for *Goal*

selection, .75 for *Planning*, and .71 for *Problem-solving* sub-dimension. According to the confirmatory factor analysis, the fit indices showed compliance: GFI = .90, AGFI = .90, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .078.

Adjective Based Personality Test (ABPT) was developed by Bacanlı et al. (2009) to describe adolescent personality traits. The 7-point Likert scale is based on a five-factor personality theory and includes adjective pairs. The scale consists of 40 items and five sub-dimensions: *Extroversion*, *Agreeableness*, *Conscientiousness*, *Neuroticism*, and *Openness to experience*. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency was .88 for the total score, .85 for *Extroversion*, .79 for *Agreeableness*, .83 for *Conscientiousness*, .81 for *Neuroticism*, and .76 for *Openness to experience* sub-dimensions.

Procedure

The study used a multi-factor correlational design (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). Data were collected from seven schools with psychological counselors' support between January 15 and February 15 in 2020. Since the participants were under 18, they signed an informed consent form. The parents were also informed about the study and signed a parent consent form. School administrators' approval was also obtained, and the necessary permissions were taken from Arnavutkoy district's national education directorate.

Data Analysis

Before data analysis, missing data were identified and outlier values were found using the Mahalanobis distance method. Mahalanobis value shows the distance between an independent variable and other variables (Can, 2018). Following the elimination of irrelevant data, the analysis was completed by using 418 data units. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis values were checked. The results showed a normal distribution between +1 and -1 range (Barrett et al., 2012; Can, 2018). Independent *t*-test, one-way variance analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis were performed.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics about career decision-making difficulties, career decision-making self-efficacy expectations, and the participant teens' adjective-based personality traits.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics on variables*

<i>Variables</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Lack of readiness	33.56	5.54	-.32	.12
Lack of information	33.42	13.12	.28	-.80
Inconsistent information	23.87	9.10	.26	-.56
Accurate self-appraisal	18.44	3.82	-.41	.06
Gathering occupational information	17.62	3.56	-.28	-.05
Goal selection	18.17	3.87	-.35	-.13
Planning	17.84	3.94	-.44	.09
Problem-solving	17.19	3.86	-.34	-.09
Neuroticism	26.05	7.14	-.01	-.15
Extroversion	44.39	10.70	-.46	-.35
Openness to experience	41.38	8.20	-.61	.28
Agreeableness	46.61	9.54	-.64	.59
Conscientiousness	35.86	8.52	-.61	.08
CDMDQ total	90.87	23.74	.24	-.53
CDMSSES total	89.28	16.44	-.43	.25

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the scales' sub-dimensions, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *The relationship between career decision-making difficulties, career decision-making self-efficacy expectation and personality traits*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Lack of readiness	1												
2. Lack of information	.38**	1											
3. Inconsistent information	.33**	.79**	1										
4. Accurate self-appraisal	-.09	-.54**	-.46**	1									
5. Gathering occupational information	-.04	-.39**	-.32**	.65**	1								
6. Goal selection	-.14**	-.57**	-.51**	.77**	.66**	1							
7. Planning	-.12*	-.50**	-.41**	.75**	.73**	.73**	1						
8. Problem-solving	-.11*	-.33**	-.28**	.65**	.63**	.55**	.65**	1					
9. Neuroticism	.15*	.22**	.19**	-.23**	-.21**	-.22**	-.27**	-.17**	1				
10. Extraversion	-.09	-.21**	-.14**	.36**	.36**	.35**	.40**	.35**	-.07	1			
11. Openness to experience	-.05	-.19**	-.18**	.35**	.34**	.29**	.33**	.29**	-.01	.67	1		
12. Agreeableness	.02	-.02	-.09	.16**	.18**	.19**	.21**	.18**	-.10*	.46**	.55**	1	
13. Conscientiousness	-.08	-.23**	-.16**	.34**	.34**	.37**	.41**	.32**	-.17**	.55**	.53**	.60**	1

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As seen in Table 2, there was a positive relationship between *Lack of readiness*, *Lack of information* ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), *Inconsistent information* ($r = .33$, $p < .01$) and *Neuroticism* ($r = .15$, $p < .05$) sub-dimensions, and a negative relationship between *Goal selection* ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$), *Planning* ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$) and *Problem-solving* sub-dimensions ($r = -.11$, $p < .05$). There was no significant relationship between *Lack of readiness* and *Accurate self-appraisal* ($r = -.09$, $p > .05$), *Gathering occupational information* ($r = -.04$, $p > .05$), *Extraversion* ($r = -.09$, $p > .05$), *Openness to experience* ($r = -.05$, $p > .05$), *Agreeableness* ($r = .02$, $p > .05$) and *Conscientiousness* ($r = -.08$, $p > .05$). While, there was a significant positive relationship between career decision-making difficulties sub-dimensions *Lack of information* and *Inconsistent information* ($r = .79$, $p < .01$) and *Neuroticism* ($r = .22$, $p < .01$), a negative relationship was found between *Gathering occupational information* ($r = -.39$, $p < .01$), *Goal selection* ($r = -.57$, $p < .01$), *Planning* ($r = -.50$, $p < .01$), *Problem-solving* ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$), *Extraversion* ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$), *Openness to experience* ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$) and *Conscientiousness* ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$) sub-dimensions. Additionally, there was no significant correlation between *Lack of information* and *Agreeableness* ($r = -.09$, $p > .05$). Nevertheless, there was a positive relationship between *Inconsistent information* and *Neuroticism* sub-dimensions ($r = .19$, $p < .01$), and a negative relationship between *Accurate self-appraisal* ($r = -.46$, $p < .01$), collecting information about occupations ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$), *Goal selection* ($r = -.51$, $p < .01$), *Planning* ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$), *Problem-solving* ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$), *Extraversion* ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$), *Openness to experience* ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$) and *Conscientiousness* ($r = -.16$, $p < .01$) sub-dimensions. There was also no significant correlation between *Inconsistent information* and *Agreeableness* ($r = -.09$, $p > .05$).

Standard multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the career decision-making difficulty level, and the results are showed in Table 3. In Table 3, *Neuroticism*, *Agreeableness*, *Accurate self-appraisal*, and *Goal selection* explained 32% of the total variance for *Career decision-making difficulties* ($R = .58$, $R^2 = .32$, $F = 20.84$, $p < .01$). When standardized regression coefficients for career decision-making difficulties scores were analysed, it was found that one standard deviation increases in career decision-making difficulties score led to .16 decrease in *Accurate self-appraisal* ($\beta = -0.16$), 0.40 decrease in *Goal selection* ($\beta = -0.40$) sub-dimensions of CDMSES, and 0.10 increase in *Neuroticism* ($\beta = 0.10$) and 0.12 increase in *Agreeableness* ($\beta = 0.12$) sub-dimension of personality traits.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis on career decision-making self- efficacy and personality traits as predictors of career decision-making difficulties levels

	<i>Model</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE_B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>VIF</i>
CDMSES	Accurate self-appraisal	-1.02	0.46	-0.16	-2.21	.02	.29	3.38
	Gathering occupational information	0.80	0.42	0.12	1.88	.06	.39	2.53
	Goal selection	-2.45	0.42	-0.40	-5.76	.00	.33	2.97
	Planning	-0.72	0.45	-0.12	-1.59	.11	.28	3.48
	Problem-solving	0.21	0.35	0.03	0.61	.53	.48	2.07
Personality traits	Neuroticism	0.35	0.14	0.10	2.52	.01	.89	1.12
	Extraversion	0.08	0.12	0.03	0.63	.52	.47	2.08
	Openness to experience	-0.28	0.17	-0.09	-1.60	.10	.44	2.25
	Agreeableness	0.31	0.13	0.12	2.29	.02	.54	1.82
	Conscientiousness	-0.10	0.15	-0.03	-0.63	.52	.50	1.99

$R^2 = .33$, Adjusted $R^2 = .32$; $F = 20.84$

Note. Dependent variable = Career decision-making difficulties; CDMSES = career decision-making self-efficacy.

Discussion

The study results revealed a significant relationship between high school students' career decision-making difficulties, self-efficacy expectations, and personality traits. Students who could plan and set goals and had problem-solving skills rarely experienced a lack of readiness. Additionally, as they became neurotic, they experienced less readiness. Accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, planning, setting goals, and developing problem-solving skills decreased career indecisiveness. Positive personality traits (e.g., extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness) decreased career indecisiveness, but negative personality traits (e.g., neuroticism) triggered career indecisiveness. It can be inferred that as one's career decision self-efficacy expectations increase, career indecisiveness decreases. Besides, positive personality traits (e.g., extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness) decreased career indecisiveness, but negative personality traits (e.g., neuroticism) increased career indecisiveness. The multiple linear regression analysis results showed that career decision-making self-efficacy expectation, accurate self-appraisal, and goal selection sub-dimensions and extroversion and agreeableness personality traits explained career decision-making difficulties

It was concluded that career decision-making difficulties were closely related to career decision-making self-efficacy expectation. Some studies in the literature addressed those two variables together (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014; Coon, 2009; Creed et al., 2006; Dursun & Kara, 2019; Duru, 2019; Öztemel, 2012). In their studies, Dursun and Kara (2019) found that high-school students' career decision-making self-efficacy expectations negatively explained career decision-making difficulties. Similarly, Öztemel (2012) stressed that high-school students' career decision-making self-efficacy significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties. Duru (2019) also proved that high-school students' occupational decision-making self-efficacy had a low and medium-level relationship with career decision-making difficulties. Coon (2009) found that as career decision-making self-efficacy increased among university students, their career decision-making difficulties decreased. Career decision-making self-efficacy is characterized by self-faith in discovering and choosing one's right career (Bandura, 1977; Solberg et al., 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that individuals with high self-efficacy about career-oriented tasks can also make accurate self-appraisal, set career-related goals, and experience less career indecisiveness.

Another result indicated the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, agreeableness). Personalities are continuous, intrinsic, and relatively

permanent properties that differ across people, guide behaviors and can be developed in an interactive environment and under different conditions (Burger, 2006; Cüceloğlu, 1996; Eryılmaz & Ercan, 2011; McCrae & Costa, 1989; Pervin & John, 2013). Personality explains one's behaviors and affects career decision-making. Fabio and Palazzeschi (2009) indicated that extroversion was negatively correlated with career decision-making difficulties, positively related to neuroticism. Fabio and Saklofske (2014) emphasized that personality traits were related to career indecisiveness, and specific traits such as extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and neuroticism were essential to predict career decision-making difficulties. Different studies showed that individuals with extrovert, responsible, openness to experience, and balanced personality traits experienced less career decision-making difficulties (Kırdök & Korkmaz, 2018; Pečjak & Košir, 2007). Wang et al. (2006) found that career indecisiveness had a negative impact on career decision-making self-efficacy, extroversion traits decreased career indecisiveness, and neuroticism increased it. Since neurotic individuals are disposed to be anxious, aggressive, emotionally imbalanced, they might struggle with negative emotions and experience anxiety in career decision-making. It can be suggested that emotionally stable students might experience fewer problems to cope with career-related dilemmas.

Agreeableness is a personality trait mainly emphasized in interpersonal relationships. Oğuz-Duran and Kararımak (2007) stated that the agreeableness personality trait is characterized by compromises. Basım et al. (2009) described that agreeableness predicted conflict solution approaches. Since conflicts also bring positive outcomes (Chen, 2006; Kurtzberg & Mueller, 2005), less conflict and compromising behaviors can lead to insufficient expression of personal ideas and desires among aggregable individuals, resulting in them to experience decision-making problems.

One of the limitations was the lack of analysis by high school type, grade level, and gender. Future studies might investigate those variables. The study sample included only Turkish samples, so future studies can study career decision-making difficulties from different countries and make intercultural comparisons. It was concluded that career decision-making self-efficacy expectation negatively predicted career decision-making difficulties, and neuroticism and agreeableness personality traits positively predicted career decision-making difficulties. Therefore, future studies can conduct experimental studies that focus on career decision-making self-efficacy expectation to decrease career decision-making difficulties. Future researchers can also investigate the reasons for negative predictive roles of certain personality traits in career decision-making difficulties. Qualitative studies can be carried out to determine how individuals with certain personality traits cope with career decision-making difficulties.

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