# Voices of the Future: Turkish Undergraduate and Graduate Students' Career Perceptions, Challenges, and Career Counseling Expectations

*Geleceğin Sesleri: Türk Lisans ve Lisansüstü Öğrencilerinin Kariyer Algıları, Karşılaştıkları Güçlükler ve Kariyer Psikolojik Danışması Beklentileri*

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines university students' views on seeking career counseling help. In this study, the phenomenological research design was used, and the interview technique, one of the qualitative research techniques, was applied. The interviews were conducted with ten volunteer undergraduate and graduate students with maximum variation sampling. Content analysis was used for data analysis. The data analysis showed that a career is essential for university students, but they have difficulty focusing on their careers due to financial problems, and especially psychological violence. Among the coping methods used by university students, family-environment support emerged as the most critical factor. It was observed that they primarily defined career as job satisfaction, happiness, and materialism. When the support requests by university students were examined, it was found that they needed to improve themselves professionally and receive psychological support. They defined career counseling as guiding, developing, and performance enhancing. Finally, they expected career counselors to be realistic, knowledgeable, and transparent. The findings were discussed in the light of the literature, and suggestions were offered to researchers and practitioners.

**ÖZET**

Bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımı aramaya ilişkin görüşlerinin incelenmesidir. Bu çalışmada fenomenolojik araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır ve nitel araştırma tekniklerinden olan görüşme tekniği uygulanmıştır. Maksimum çeşitlilik örneklemesi ile gönüllü on Türk üniversite öğrencisiyle görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizinden yararlanılmıştır. Veri analizi sonucunda üniversite öğrencileri için kariyerin önemli bir yere sahip olduğu fakat yaşadıkları maddi zorluklar ve özellikle psikolojik şiddet sebebiyle kariyerlerine odaklanmakta güçlük yaşadıkları görülmüştür. Üniversite öğrencilerinin kullandıkları başa çıkma yöntemleri arasında aile-çevre desteği en önemli faktör olarak karşımıza çıkmıştır. Kariyer kavramını en çok meslek doyumu, mutluluk, maddiyat olarak tanımladıkları görülmüştür. Türk üniversite öğrencilerinin talep ettikleri destekler incelendiğinde mesleki yönden kendilerini geliştirmeye ve psikolojik destek almaya ihtiyaç duydukları bulunmuştur. Kariyer psikolojik danışmasını ise yol gösterici, geliştirici, performans arttırıcı olarak tanımlamışlardır. Son olarak kariyer psikolojik danışmanından gerçekçi, bilgili ve saydam olmalarını bekledikleri tespit edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular alanyazın ışığında tartışılmış, araştırmacılara ve uygulayıcılara öneriler sunulmuştur.

## INTRODUCTION

Career is a lifelong, dynamic process that includes progression, regression, and stability, especially in professional life, drawn for oneself in line with one's preferences, wishes, and goals (Herr vd., 2004; Holland, 1996; Parsons, 1909). An individual's progress in their career path brings with it many professional and social responsibilities (Bakioğlu and İnandı, 2001). The process may sometimes be interrupted by these responsibilities due to the decisions made because individuals may have difficulty coping with the challenges they encounter in their ways (Carnevale, 2001). When individuals realize they struggle to manage, they can contact a career counselor.

Career counseling aims to help clients plan their careers by considering cultural elements, gender, interpersonal relationships, etc. (Bacanlı, 2020; Doğan et al., 2016). İt is obtaining information on issues, such as individuals' work experiences, abilities, desires, etc., and intervening with career psychological approaches. Changes and innovations in society are effective in creating differences in career counseling. Parsons was the first to argue that personality traits and job adaptability are important in career counseling. Nowadays, it is seen that concepts such as professional development (updating and developing professional knowledge and skills) and professional maturation (being able to fulfill professional development tasks, being ready to cope) are becoming more prominent (McMahon, 2014; Yeşilyaprak, 2011; Yeşilyaprak, 2012). Career counseling is vital for university students adjusting to social changes in their career processes.

Career counseling has come to the present day in Türkiye in three stages. In the first stage, the initial stage, with the establishment of the Testing and Research Bureau under the roof of the Ministry of National Education in 1953 and the opening of the Guidance Center in 1954, studies were conducted to translate scales abroad to obtain information on students' interests, abilities, vocational suitability, etc. (Özgüven, 2005; Tan, 2000). The introduction of the Guidance and Psychological Counseling course into the undergraduate program at Ankara University, the graduate program at Hacettepe University, and all teacher training programs at Gazi University Faculty of Education was a pioneering step (Doğan, 2000; Pişkin, 2006; Tan, 2000; Yeşilyaprak, 2009). In the 1970s, training Guidance and Psychological Counseling (GPC) students at universities became one of the most important developments during the search period, the second stage of career counseling (Pişkin, 2006). During the development period, thesis studies and scale adaptations were carried out with university students in Vocational Guidance and Career Counseling (Yeşilyaprak, 2019). In the following years, the "Vocational Guidance and Counseling" course was included in the GPC undergraduate program, first theoretically and then practically (Owen, Korkut-Owen, and Kurter, 2011; Varçın, 2007). A systematic step was taken by establishing the Vocational Qualifications Authority in 2006 (Yeşilyaprak, 2019). As can be seen, career counseling has formed the basis of GPC from past to present and continues to maintain its essential place today (Yeşilyaprak, 2019).

A career counselor is a person with specialized training in career counseling (Litoiu & Oproiu, 2012). Career counselors support their clients with career problems regarding their professional preferences, renewal, or development of some characteristics that affect their professional lives. They also help clients prepare career plans that are suitable for them. However, the two primary purposes of career counselors are to help their clients with career choices and career adaptation (Ültanır, 2005). Career counselors work in career and psychological counseling centers to serve these purposes. Universities have career centers

from which university students (both undergraduate and graduate students) can benefit. In this context, the number of university career centers has increased from 53 in September 2018 to 191 today (Turkish Presidency Human Resources Office [TPHRO], 2020). Considering the figures given, the number of career centers is gradually increasing. It can be said that career centers within universities have become important. It can also be noted that it is essential to continue studies on this issue to help the functionality of university career centers.

In the study conducted by Zeren et al. (2017) with university students, job search strategies, resume preparation, interview strategies, career decision making, or changing are among the top four reasons for university students to apply to the career center, with a rate of 100%. Another study conducted with university students showed that 26.5% of university students were aware of career counseling services. The expectations of the university students who participated in the study included being informed about job opportunities, how to prepare for a job interview, and getting to know the department they chose in more detail. In this study, it was seen that factors change and affect the expectations of university students. Some aspects are low motivation, lack of information, suitability of their preferences, etc. (Işık, 2007). In another study examining the tendency to apply to career centers, it was observed that university students' indecisiveness about their future and lack of sufficient information affected their career processes (Kaval & Gökoğlan, 2020). Another study on career centers observed that the number of personnel working in career centers was low. The number of psychological counselors in eight university career centers constitutes 10% of the personnel (Özkanan et al., 2022). Another study conducted with career centers is related to career day activities. This study showed that career day activities were not completely practical in the career decisions university students would make for their future (Işık et al., 2022).

University students, including both undergraduate and graduate students tend to seek career counseling to help them cope with the difficulties they experience in their career development processes. Seeking career counseling help is the tendency of an individual to seek help due to the insufficiency of internal motivational resources and the need for external resources in the face of difficulties experienced in the career process (Çankaya & Duman, 2010; Gore et al., 2002). In the study conducted by Bakır et al. (2023) with Generation Z university students, it was observed that social support was among the perceived external resources and that there was a significant relationship between increasing social support and meeting their psychological needs. Other studies have also shown that family and friends are the most common sources of social support for university students (Coşkun, 2018; Odacı & Ülken, 2021).

Examining some studies on students in higher education seeking career counseling help, Köse et al. (2021) found that environmental stigma affected students' attitude towards seeking career counseling help, and that boys experienced fear of stigma more than girls. In the study conducted by Kutluca (2022), it was observed that university students had difficulties seeking career counseling help due to the inadequacy of people who support them and their characteristics (timid, lack of self-confidence).

Examining at the studies planned to be carried out on career in Türkiye today, it is seen that the 11th Development Plan, which is among the Sustainable Development goals of the Turkish Presidency, includes the statement "*A graduate tracking system will be established to follow the career processes of graduates and strengthen graduate-university cooperation*" (Turkish Presidency Strategy and Budget Directorate, 2019). Considering that career centers are essential, with the statements "*Career centers for qualified workforce will be increased and guidance*

*activities will be activated in these centers*", it can be said that they are intended to be more effective and to carry out functional studies for university students with technological developments. The 11th Development Plan states, "*Programs that will contribute to the personal and social development and career planning of young people will be implemented*". Here, it is thought that the study can clarify the desired issues to see what the target audience wants to develop and their career aspirations and decisions. This study aims to be a source of help for future studies (Turkish Presidency Strategy and Budget Directorate, 2019). In addition, a workshop on career centers organized by a university noted that career centers have physical space and personnel problems and that it is essential to work on cooperation between career centers (Bursa Technical University, 2023).

In the literature, there are studies on counseling, career counseling, and help-seeking career counseling. However, in these studies, the attitude of seeking career counseling help was addressed with variables such as self-stigma (Köse et al., 2021), self-efficacy (Keny & Cladious, 2020), self (Lau et al., 2020), perception and experience (Lara et al., 2011). In studies on career counseling, studies were conducted on career centres, whether individuals are aware of career centres, their expectations and attitudes (Işık, 2007; Işık et al., 2022; Kaval & Gökoğlan, 2020; Özkanan et al., 2022; Zeren et al., 2017). Therefore, no study directly addressing higher education students' views on career counseling help-seeking behavior was found in the literature.

This study examined Turkish university students, including both undergraduate and graduate students' level of knowledge about seeking career counseling help, their career planning and career decisions, their concerns about seeking career counseling help, their desires, needs, and expectations for career counseling. The problem statements of this study are as follows,

1. How do Turkish undergraduate and graduate students perceive the concept of career?
2. What kind of experiences do Turkish undergraduate and graduate students have throughout their career processes?
3. What are the difficulties experienced by Turkish undergraduate and graduate students during their career journey?
4. How do Turkish undergraduate and graduate students cope with the difficulties they encounter in their career processes?
5. What are Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' psychological and developmental needs in their career process?
6. How do Turkish undergraduate and graduate students perceive the process of career counseling?
7. What are Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' expectations regarding the personal characteristics and professional competencies of career counselors?

**METHOD**

This qualitative study examined career counseling in Türkiye and Turkish university students', including both undergraduate and graduate students, views on seeking career counseling help. One of the qualitative research methods used in the study was a phenomenological research design. The phenomenological research design focuses on the participants' perceptions and perspectives of the phenomenon under

investigation, how they make sense of the phenomenon, how they experience it, and how they describe these experiences. This phenomenon can be a concept, a thought, or an emotion (Tekindal & Arsu, 2020).

**Participants**

Ethics committee approval was obtained before starting the study (IRB: E-10042736-659-668985). Participants were reached through announcements made on university student forums and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram student groups. In addition, faculty advisors were informed about the study and asked to share the invitation with their students. Volunteer students who showed interest contacted the researchers via e-mail or direct message. After initial contact, the researchers provided detailed information about the study, and interview appointments were arranged accordingly. Participants were informed about the study, their inquiries were addressed, and their consent was obtained. In the phenomenological research design, the number of participants can vary between two and twenty-five, and the interviews should continue until data saturation is reached (Kıral, 2021). This study observed data saturation after interviews with ten Turkish undergraduate and graduate students. Therefore, the research group of the study consisted of ten volunteer students. The students interviewed were selected using the maximum variation sampling method. Maximum variation sampling is used to create a holistic understanding by looking at different aspects of the phenomenon to obtain different experiences in various contexts (Dökme & Yağar, 2018). Maximum variation sampling was used in this study to see many different perspectives with other groups and to see whether there are similar points in various situations. The characteristics that varied among participants were grade level, department and faculty, age, and gender. Demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Participants

| Participant | Age | Gender | Educational status | Faculty | Department | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | 21 | Female | Undergraduate | Faculty of Education | Guidance and Psychological Counseling (GPC) | 3 |
| P2 | 22 | Female | Undergraduate | Faculty of Architecture | Architecture | 4 |
| P3 | 20 | Female | Undergraduate | Faculty of Science and Letters | Psychology | 2 |
| P4 | 31 | Female | Graduate | Faculty of Education | Education Programs and Teaching | Graduate |
| P5 | 20 | Female | Undergraduate | Engineering faculty | Textile Engineering | 1 |
| P6 | 21 | Male | Undergraduate | Faculty of Communication | Journalism | 3 |
| P7 | 22 | Female | Undergraduate | Faculty of Science and Letters | Statistics | 4 |
| P8 | 22 | Male | Undergraduate | Faculty of Education | Special Education Teaching | 4 |
| P9 | 22 | Male | Undergraduate | Faculty of Law | Law | 3 |
| P10 | 26 | Male | Graduate | Faculty of Education | Preschool Education | Graduate |

**Ethical Disclosure**
**Ethics Committee Name:** Dokuz Eylül University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee
**Approval Date:** 21/07/2023
**Approval Document Number:** E-10042736-659-668985

## Data Collection Tools

The study used a semi-structured interview form consisting of six questions while conducting interviews with Turkish undergraduate and graduate students. During the preparation of the interview questions, a literature review was performed, and the interview questions were prepared after being reviewed by three assistant professors and three associate professors from the Guidance and Psychological Counseling department. The content validity rate and index were calculated as .83 with the Lawshe technique, which aligns with the experts' feedback. Sample questions are as follows: What does career mean to you? What are your career decisions, career challenges, and what are your coping methods?

## Data Collection Process

The interviewees were reached by taking into account that they were from different departments, contacting the universities' departments, and using social media tools. The interviews were conducted online or face-to-face per the participants' preferences. Six people were interviewed face-to-face, and four people were interviewed online. Before the interviews were conducted, Turkish undergraduate and graduate students were informed about the process by submitting an informed consent form, and their consent was obtained. In-depth interviews with students lasted 73 minutes on average. The interviews were recorded confidentially and were deleted after the transcripts were written and checked.

## Data Analysis

The data obtained from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method. This method involves identifying, classifying, and coding themes (Kıral, 2020). To ensure confidentiality, the participants were named P1, P2... To enhance credibility, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and direct quotations were frequently included in the findings to authentically reflect participants' experiences and perspectives. In addition, researcher triangulation was ensured by involving two independent coders, one being the project consultant and the other one of the researchers, who analyzed the interview transcripts separately After independent coding, joint sessions were held to compare and discuss codes and themes, minimizing subjective bias and increasing analytic depth. A systematic coding process was followed for dependability (consistency). A codebook was developed collaboratively and iteratively revised as new codes emerged. The stages of theme formation, initial coding, grouping similar codes, and structuring main and sub-themes were documented to ensure auditability. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) [(Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)) × 100], resulting in a consistency coefficient of .83, indicating a high level of agreement between two coders.

## FINDINGS

This section includes the participants' views regarding the questions asked by the purpose of the study and the findings obtained as a result of content analysis. As a result of the analysis, seven main themes and twenty-one sub-themes were found. In addition, when Turkish undergraduate and graduate students were

asked the question "Would you like to get help from a career counselor?", it was seen that 30% of the participants had no knowledge about career counseling and could answer the question after the participants were given sufficient information about career counseling. 40% of the participants had insufficient knowledge about career counseling and confused the concepts of psychological and career counselors. Only 30% of the participants had sufficient knowledge about career counselors. 90% (9) of the participants said they would like career counseling help. This situation shows that the concept of a career counselor is not sufficiently known, and there is a need for informative introductions about the competencies and mission of career counselors. In addition, since most Turkish university students want to receive counseling from a career counselor, it is seen that there is a need for career counselors in career processes.

**Main Theme 1: Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' perceptions of career**

The first main theme of the study was the participants' perceptions of careers. This theme reflects how students define and make sense of the concept of career based on their emotions, behaviors, and personal values. Three sub-themes were obtained under this theme: cognitive perception, emotional perception, and value perception. Information on the main theme of participants' perceptions of career is given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Participants' Perceptions of Career

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Participants' Perceptions of Career | Behavioral Perceptions |
| | Emotional Perceptions |
| | Value Perceptions |

The participants focused on their behaviors, emotions, and values while expressing what career means. According to participants' responses, behavioral perceptions can be expressed as perceptions that enable individuals to form their own behavioral patterns under life conditions. It was observed that the participants expressed their career as making effort, job satisfaction, and pursuing opportunities in the sub-theme of behavioral perceptions. These definitions show that participants view their careers as a process and that effort, satisfaction, and opportunities play essential roles in this process. Participants made the following statements in this context:

> *Even if you fall or get up, you must continue that path. That's what I believe. One day, many beautiful doors will open... I think effort is significant. No one should give up trying.* -(P2)

> *When I think of career, I think of job satisfaction... How satisfied I can be with what I have learned, how much I can apply it, or how much I can learn the things I am curious about at work are important.* -(P3)

> *Chasing opportunities, chasing job opportunities, or chasing to start a business, chasing to trade.* -(P8)

According to participants' responses, emotional perceptions include both positive and negative feelings associated with their career journeys. Emotions such as happiness, hope, failure, and courage emerged frequently, highlighting the psychological complexity of the career development process. For many students, a career is not only about achieving goals but also about managing internal emotional states and uncertainties. Some participants described a career as a source of happiness and personal satisfaction:

*A career is being happy by doing what you love. – (P10)*

Others emphasized the role of hope, even in moments of self-doubt or perceived inadequacy:

*I may not be perfect in my field, now or in the future. I may be very, very good, but the effort I make is noticed. That gives me hope; I believe there is still hope for me. – (P9)*

Yet, negative emotions like a sense of failure were also acknowledged:

*It includes failure. – (P7)*

Furthermore, some participants pointed to the emotional resilience required to pursue a meaningful career:

*We are constantly changing and evolving, so it seems strange that people view careers as something static. I think we simply lack the courage. So, a career is a matter of courage. – (P4)*

These insights suggest that for Turkish university students, career is not a fixed destination but a dynamic emotional process shaped by internal motivation, fears, aspirations, and the ability to cope with change.

According to the participants' responses, value perceptions involve the internalized beliefs about what is important, desirable, and meaningful in life, often shaped by cultural, social, and personal standards. Within this framework, students associated careers with core values such as financial security, social integration, prestige, self-development, and lifelong learning.

Participants frequently emphasized the role of money and happiness as intertwined outcomes of a successful career:

*"So, a career is divided into two: happiness and money. It is also possible to combine both at the same time." – (P7)*

Others highlighted the connection between career and social belonging or respect, indicating that one's profession plays a significant role in how they are perceived and accepted by society:

*"If you want to see yourself as a member of society, the first step starts with a career. You know, respect comes to the fore with your profession in society." – (P10)*

Moreover, students framed career as a pathway to personal success and growth, often referring to self-investment and intellectual development:

*"For me, a career means success, especially in business. The training I take to improve my career, the books I read to improve myself, self-improvement, and learning are all aspects of my career." – (P7)*

These responses suggest that Turkish university students perceive careers not only as a means of earning a livelihood but also as a central domain for achieving social recognition, identity formation, and personal fulfillment. In this context, careers become a value-laden journey shaped by both internal ambitions and external societal expectations.


**Main Theme 2: Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on their career experiences**

This theme reflects the emotional and physiological experiences of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students during their career journeys, revealing how they emotionally respond to challenges and how these

experiences manifest in their daily lives. Table 3 shows the sub-themes and frequency values of the second main theme, the participants' career experiences, and the sentences containing the participants' views are included.

**Table 3.** Participants' Career Experiences

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Participants' Career Experiences | Emotional experiences |
| | Physiological Experiences |

The participants reported a wide range of emotional experiences, including loss of motivation, diminished interest, happiness, disappointment, fear, anger, and hopelessness, all of which shaped their relationship with their career paths. Interest and passion emerged as key motivators. One participant explained:

> *"I am interested in law… I don't like it because it's the law; I love it because it's my interest. If I like something, even the most difficult task becomes easy. But if I have no interest, I simply cannot do it." – (P9)*

Others described demotivation and difficulty staying engaged:

> *"I sat at that desk again in the morning as I chose the Turkish-Maths field, but my motivation dropped incredibly. I don't want to study at all, but I have to, and it is very, very difficult." – (P3)*

Career experiences were also associated with happiness and creative expression, as another student shared:

> *"It is pure pleasure, entertainment, and happiness for me. Although I did not receive an education, I acted in theater." – (P8)*

Some participants linked their career journeys to disappointment and a loss of direction:

> *"When I started high school, the exams suddenly went badly. It was an incredible disappointment for me. After that, I lost interest in education." – (P6)*

Experiences of hopelessness and fear were also present:

> *"I wanted to quit, but what would happen to me then? I had to look for a profession again. It sounded scary. That's why I continued, but I felt very hopeless during that period." – (P2)*

In more intense emotional states, participants reported anger, especially when encountering repeated frustration:

> *"Generally, when my emotions reach a certain point, I get angry. When I experience that emotion again, it makes me even angrier." – (P5)*

In addition to emotional responses, participants described physiological reactions to career-related stress. These included somatic symptoms like shortness of breath, sweating, heart palpitations, and even blacking out:

> *"Sometimes I can't breathe, I have heart palpitations, I sweat, and sometimes I black out." – (P2)*

These findings indicate that for Turkish university students, career development is not solely a rational process but one marked by intense emotional and physical experiences that shape their career engagement and motivation.

**Main Theme 3: Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on the difficulties they experience in the career process**

This theme reflects the various challenges and obstacles Turkish undergraduate and graduate students encounter during their career development processes, including psychological, social, financial, and health-related difficulties. Table 4 shows the sub-themes and frequency values of the third main theme, the difficulties experienced by the participants in their career process. Sentences containing the participants' opinions are included.

**Table 4.** Difficulties Experienced by Participants

| Theme | Sub-themes |
| --- | --- |
| Difficulties Experienced by Participants | Psychological Violence |
| | Social Pressure |
| | Financial Difficulties |
| | Health problems |

Under the sub-theme of psychological violence, students described experiences of teacher mobbing, family discouragement, and peer bullying. One participant recounted the sense of injustice and humiliation experienced in academic settings:

> *"We can think of it as teacher mobbing… sometimes we are not given our rights in exams, and this can lead to a loss of motivation in me and a decline in my career." – (P7)*

Another student described emotional abuse from their immediate social environment:

> *"I was actually bullied by all my family, friends, and relatives. They said, 'You will not be able to do anything, don't even take the exam.'" – (P8)*

Social pressure, especially rooted in gender inequality and societal expectations, also emerged as a significant barrier. One participant shared how deeply ingrained gender-based discrimination shaped their self-worth and career outlook:

> *"Since primary school, I have experienced gender inequality. Even when I knew the answer, I didn't raise my hand. I grew up with the feeling that I can't succeed." – (P3)*

Financial difficulties were among the most frequently cited concerns, including economic hardship, housing problems, and access to basic resources. These challenges often caused students to feel like a burden and restricted their ability to plan their futures confidently:

> *"When I graduate, I no longer want to be a burden to my family… it becomes very difficult to obtain resources. Even buying books is expensive." – (K9)*

> *"I had a problem with accommodation. When I first went there, I was alone… in an unfamiliar city." – (P6)*

Finally, health problems, particularly physical ailments and surgery, interfered with academic performance and career progression. One student noted:

> *"I couldn't go to school a month before the exam due to my health problems. If I didn't have health problems, I could have scored higher." – (P6)*

Another reflected on the physical toll of keeping up:

*"Sometimes I had physical difficulties… I was having trouble keeping up with my body." – (P10)*

These findings indicate that career development for Turkish university students is shaped not only by educational and occupational factors but also by deeply rooted personal, social, and structural challenges that require comprehensive support systems.

**Main Theme 4: Coping methods of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students regarding the difficulties they experience in their career process**

This theme explores how Turkish undergraduate and graduate students manage the difficulties they face in their career paths by utilizing various coping strategies, such as emotional regulation, seeking social support, taking initiative, or engaging in avoidance behaviors, depending on the nature and intensity of the challenges. Table 5 shows the sub-themes and frequencies of the fourth main theme, the coping methods related to the difficulties experienced by the participants in their career process. Sentences containing the participants' views are included.

**Table 5.** Participants' Coping Methods

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Participants' Coping Methods | Cognitive Coping Methods |
| | Emotional Coping Methods |
| | Behavioral Coping Methods |
| | Relational-Social Coping Methods |
| | Spiritual/Motivational Coping Methods |

Cognitive coping focused on reframing negative thoughts and cultivating a resilient mindset. Students emphasized the importance of staying mentally strong and reinterpreting perceived failures as opportunities for growth. One participant refused to let a delay define her progress and instead reframed her situation positively:

*"I could have obsessed about it, I could have told myself I lost three years. But I always try to look at the positive side… Even if I start at 25, it is still very early for everything." – (P6)*

Another participant described gaining self-awareness through counseling, which enhanced her confidence and emotional intelligence:

*"You get to know yourself and become aware of your potential. This allows you to love and recognize yourself… and they complete each other after the sessions." – (P3)*

Emotional coping involved recognizing, expressing, and accepting emotions rather than suppressing them. Participants used emotional expression as a tool for stress relief and embraced acceptance when faced with unchangeable situations. One participant viewed crying as a direct response to stress, offering emotional relief:

*"We cope with this stress… sometimes by crying." – (P7)*

Another noted that verbal expression helped reduce emotional burden:

*"I talk about it, I share it... the more I talk, the more I feel relieved." – (P1)*

Acceptance emerged as a key emotional strategy for managing uncontrollable circumstances:

*"Acceptance is important… to look for other ways and do something with this acceptance." – (P2)*

*"Some things are out of my control… even if I go far, someone tells me to give up." – (P7)*

Behavioral coping reflected action-based strategies to regulate emotions and maintain control. Participants described taking initiative through physical effort, activity, or distraction. One student found motivation by looking up to self-made individuals:

*"There are many people who have succeeded from nothing… with the right moves." – (P9)*

Another described how physical exhaustion helped manage internal tension:

*"I cope with it… not with actions that tire my brain, but physical actions that tire my body, like cleaning." – (P7)*

Engagement in social and leisure activities also functioned as a behavioral outlet:

*"I cope by playing games and participating in the activities of the counseling community with my friends at work." – (P10)*

Social-relational coping was centered on receiving emotional and academic support from others. Teachers and peers played a significant role in helping students navigate difficult times and maintain psychological stability. One participant appreciated the individualized academic help received from faculty:

*"I started a few months late, but my professors told me the subjects I missed through private tutoring." – (P10)*

Another highlighted the moral and emotional backing provided by friends:

*"My circle of friends was generally more supportive because they helped me and supported me mentally." – (P5)*

Spiritual and motivational coping involved relying on inner strength, religious belief, or intrinsic motivation. This helped participants maintain hope and determination even in the face of uncertainty. One participant described an internal force of courage that kept her moving forward:

*"Until I came to university, I had courage and determination… I somehow believed that I could do it." – (P3)*

Another relied on prayer and faith during a crucial decision-making period:

*"Oh God, let me choose a good department… I was praying like this. I really didn't want to lose a year either." – (P2)*

**Main Theme 5: Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on their needs in the career process**

This theme refers to the specific types of support, guidance, and resources Turkish undergraduate and graduate students feel they need in order to make informed career decisions, navigate uncertainties, and progress effectively in their career paths. Table 6 shows the fifth main theme, the sub-themes, and the frequencies of the participants' needs in the career process, and the sentences containing the participants' views are included.

**Table 6.** Participants' Career-Related Needs

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Participants' Career-Related Needs | Psychological Needs |
| | Need for Learning and Personal Development |

Psychological needs centered on enhancing emotional well-being, boosting self-confidence, and feeling supported and connected. These needs were particularly prominent in contexts of academic performance,

self-expression, and navigating interpersonal challenges. The need for self-confidence and emotional regulation was emphasized by participants who struggled to express themselves in academic settings, even though they felt confident elsewhere:

*"I would like to get support for self-confidence in terms of career and especially to be able to explain myself… at school, in my presentations or in my expressions, and it pulls me down a lot… I am a person who gets teary-eyed quickly, especially when I get angry… So it would be good if I could get support on this issue." – (P2)*

Support and affirmation from others were seen as rare but invaluable resources that helped students stay motivated and resilient amid judgment or doubt:

*"You have someone who supports you… This is a very special thing in your career goals. It's really difficult to find such unconditional support… because people have prejudices… I attach great importance to receiving support." – (P3)*

A desire for belonging also emerged as a key psychological need, particularly for those who felt socially or institutionally disconnected:

*"I did not have any sense of belonging… I don't know if this feeling was only due to me, but I needed something like that." – (P4)*

Participants also expressed a strong desire for guidance in building discipline, professionalism, and effective learning habits. These needs were driven by their recognition of performance gaps, time mismanagement, and uncertainty around workplace norms. Difficulties with time management and self-discipline were common. Students noted inconsistent study habits, poor concentration, and a desire to establish healthier routines:

*"I want to attend these training sessions… But sometimes I spend too many long hours and long periods of time on something. Sometimes I don't study at all… I wish I could do it more regularly." – (P7)*

*"I waste a lot of time… I procrastinate, I'm not good at time management… I sit in the dorm without studying. I play with my phone, I do this and that…" – (P1)*

The need for professional competence and communication skills was highlighted by participants who sought to better understand workplace expectations, especially regarding behavior and self-presentation:

*"Even though I am not a professional, I would like to learn how to behave, how to talk… I think stance is very important… I would like to get support for that… to learn how to be professional." – (P2)*

**Main Theme 6: Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on career counseling**

This theme refers to Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations regarding career counseling services. It explores how they understand the role of career counseling, their levels of trust in these services, and the extent to which they consider such support beneficial in navigating their career paths. Table 7 shows the sub-themes and frequencies of the sixth main theme, the participants' perceptions of career counseling, and sentences containing the participants' views are included.

**Table 7.** Participants' Perceptions of Career Counseling

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Participants' Perceptions of Career Psychological Counseling | Personal Development and Emotional Support |
| | Social Relations and Support |
| | Career and Professional Development |

Many participants described career counseling as a deeply personal and restorative experience. It was seen as a source of clarity, confidence, emotional relief, and psychological healing, particularly in moments of indecision or anxiety. One student explained how the sessions helped relieve confusion and contributed to her emotional well-being:

> *"Receiving the counseling of a career planner made me feel very relaxed... I felt that my mind was very clear. I didn't know what to do before, but during and after the sessions… I was a little bit happier, a little bit closer to what I wanted to do, and more confident." – (P3)*

Another participant reflected on how timely and clear guidance during field selection would have helped her develop stronger motivation:

> *"If she/he had given me a satisfactory answer when I first went for the field selection, I would have gained real confidence… I would have been more determined and willing." – (P4)*

Career counseling was also described as providing a mental shift or perspective change, empowering individuals to make decisions more aligned with their values:

> *"She/He taught me different perspectives. I can say that I succeeded thanks to him/her. In other words, s/he showed me what I am mentally, or in terms of my mindset… Counseling is a good thing for people." – (P5)*

For some, the counselor's symbolic role as a guiding light was emphasized:

> *"A guide, a lighthouse, a lantern that illuminates your path. I can describe him/her like that." – (P9)*

Beyond emotional benefits, students perceived career counselors as helpful figures in navigating complex social dynamics, such as relationships with family and peers. The counselor's role was viewed as holistic, addressing not only professional concerns but also interpersonal tensions. One participant expressed this expanded perspective clearly:

> *"I think she/he can help you in your human relationships, whether it's with your family or your friends… she/he will support you in any way possible, morally and materially, no matter how big it is." – (P5)*

In addition to emotional and relational aspects, students also recognized counselors as instrumental in fostering career readiness, especially when dealing with setbacks or making strategic decisions. One participant described how counselors can support students not just emotionally but also practically, using psychological insight to reframe professional experiences:

> *"She/He can also help with the difficulties and problems experienced while climbing those career steps… and knows well how people react psychologically. So she/he can also support in that regard… by looking from the outside, s/he can explain it in a different way or make me realize it." – (P10)*

**Main Theme 7: Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on career counselors**

This theme refers to how Turkish undergraduate and graduate students perceive career counselors, their roles, qualifications, communication styles, and the kind of support they are expected to provide. It reflects students' expectations of counselors not only as career experts but also as emotional guides, mentors, and accessible role models who can understand their struggles and empower their decisions. The sub-themes and frequencies of the seventh main theme, the participants' expectations regarding the career counselor, are shown in Table 8, and sentences containing the participants' views are included.

**Table 8.** Participants' Expectations of Career Counselors

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| Participants' expectations of career psychological counselors | Personal Expectations |
| | Professional Knowledge and Skills Expectations |

Participants described a strong desire for career counselors to be motivating, sincere, empathetic, realistic, and human-oriented in their approach. Rather than formulaic advice, students valued counselors who could adapt their communication and guidance to individual emotional needs and personal struggles. Some participants emphasized a balance between emotional encouragement and realism. For instance:

> *"She/he can be both optimistic and very realistic. She/he needs to be optimistic when I am very depressed… but also realistic in most cases. That also motivates me." – (P4)*

The importance of sincerity and a non-clinical demeanor was underlined by others, who found "over-professionalism" off-putting:

> *"She/he should be like himself. I don't like this professionalism thing. I am a person who believes in sincerity." – (P8)*

> *"She/he should be straightforward with me… should clearly tell me what I do well and where I'm wrong… and support me sincerely." – (P10)*

Students also valued interactive reflection, hoping counselors would not only guide, but also help them self-question and grow:

> *"She/he should ask questions that will make me question and improve myself." – (P7)*

Finally, the need for individualized and constructive advice was a repeated theme:

> *"I would ask for advice that is a bit more human-specific… something really supportive." – (P3)*

> *"I wish she/he had an approach where s/he shows me the mistakes I made, their consequences, and the benefits I would have had otherwise." – (P6)*

In addition to emotional and interpersonal traits, participants highlighted the importance of career counselors' competence, expertise, and practical experience. Many preferred to receive support from counselors who had demonstrable success in their field and could offer strategic insight grounded in experience. One participant emphasized this need for mentorship from experienced professionals:

> *"I want to get one-on-one coaching from people who are successful in these matters… I want to get support in this way as they are people who have proven themselves." – (P6)*

Others expected professional tools and structured guidance, such as techniques drawn from counseling psychology:

> *"Maybe I can overcome it with the professional support of professional people… like the speeches and therapies. I would like to get support for that." – (P2)*

While a few participants were flexible about whether the counselor had deep field-specific knowledge, they still saw value in their insights:

> *"Even if he/she doesn't have mastery, but just knowledge of my field… I think it will benefit me when I evaluate his/her contribution." – (P9)*

Lastly, participants agreed that expertise matters more than simply going through the motions of counseling:

> *"If you work with a counselor who can guide you well, who has knowledge and expertise in the subjects you want to progress, of course, you will achieve very good results… I believe you should only get it from competent people." – (P10)*

## DISCUSSION

In this study, what career means to Turkish undergraduate and graduate students, their experiences, difficulties, coping methods, needs, and their views on career counselors and career counseling were examined. Seven main themes and twenty-one sub-themes were obtained in the study. The first finding of the study is on the knowledge levels of university students about career counseling. When Turkish university students were asked, "Would you like to get help from a career counselor?", it was observed that 30% of the participants were able to answer the question after it was explained who the career counselor was and what he/she did. It was found that 40% of them did not know exactly who a career counselor was, his/her duties, and they confused the concepts of psychological counselor and career counselor. It was observed that 30% of the participants knew who a career counselor was and his/her duties., To the best of our knowledge, there is no information in the literature regarding this finding, but while the number of career centers in Türkiye was 53 in 2018, it has reached 191 today (Turkish Presidency Human Resources Office [TPHRO], 2020). In 2023, the number of career centers reached 205 (CBKİO, 2023). The increase in the number of career centers over time may have resulted in the inability of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students to fully get used to this changing situation, their insufficient knowledge of who the career psychological counselor is, and the low number of applications to career centers (Fouad et al., 2006). It may also indicate that career centers are in the process of development. In Işık's (2007) study about career centers, it was observed that 26.5% of university students had information about career counseling services. In addition, a study conducted on the websites of universities shows that 53 out of 165 universities have a link to a career center (Keskin et al., 2022). This finding supports the lack of information and lack of knowledge about career centers.

The second finding of the study is related to undergraduate and graduate students' views on the concept of career. When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students were examined, it was seen that they expressed their behavioral perceptions of the concept of career as effort, road, ladder, job satisfaction, and pursuing opportunities. In a study conducted by Kozak and Dalkıranoğlu (2013) with graduate students, it was concluded that it is important to pursue opportunities in order to develop and progress. In support of this study, in a study conducted by Rasshid and Othman (2020) on Generation Z, it was stated that this generation prefers opportunities for their career development. In another study, it was stated that Generation Z is career-oriented and that they go to university to find a job (Selingo, 2021). In the study conducted by Çetin et al. (2015) with pre-service teachers, it was observed that the participants explained the concept of career mostly with the metaphor of a ladder. In a study conducted by Aras et al. (2016) with university students, it was found that Turkish students used the metaphor "road" for the concept of career. As a result, while Turkish university students expressed careers with metaphors such as ladder, effort, and road, they may have thought that a career is a long journey and that it can be achieved by making effort, and that there are steps and obstacles on this road.

When the emotional perceptions of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students regarding their views on career were examined, feelings of happiness, failure, courage, and hope came to the fore. In the study conducted by Aras et al. (2016) with university students, the participants discussed the concept of career as happiness with the metaphor "rose", which supports this finding of our study. Turkish university students may have expressed success in their career journey with the feeling of happiness, and may have associated it with the feeling of courage because the career journey involves some risks. In addition, the career process is dynamic, and there are failures in this dynamism. Being able to continue with hope after failures is important for the continuity of the career process. Therefore, Turkish university students may have drawn attention to the feelings of hope and failure. These interpretations are also supported by research indicating that emotional regulation, particularly managing failure and maintaining hope, plays a crucial role in sustaining career-related motivation and resilience during uncertain or prolonged job search processes (Heslin et al., 2020).

When the value perceptions of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students regarding their views on career were examined, it was concluded that materialism (money), social integration, prestige, success, and learning values were important. In a study conducted by Kozak and Dalkıranoğlu (2013) with graduate students, it was concluded that factors such as prestige, salary, and competence are important for graduate students. The fact that graduates and university students who embark on an independent life attach importance to similar values may be due to the need to be respected in career life, to gain a place in society, and to do their profession well. In addition, when looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, having a place in society and doing a profession well may correspond to the need to belong, and the value of money may correspond to the need for security to sustain life. This is also supported by person-centered research showing that students' career goals are shaped not only by interests but also by intrinsic values such as achievement, learning, and contribution to society (Rodrigues et al., 2020). In addition, prestige and respect may correspond to Maslow's need to be respected. The need to learn and achievement may stem from the need to know and understand, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In the study conducted by Korkut and Keskin (2016) with university students, it was concluded that success is important for university students. This finding supports the findings of our study. When perceptions about the concept of career are examined in general, it can be said that the concept of career has an important place in the lives of Turkish university students. It has many meanings, such as prestige, money, happiness, and effort. This shows the subjectivity and versatility of the career concept.

The third finding of the study is related to Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on career experiences. When the views of the students were analyzed, it was seen that they expressed their emotional career experiences as motivation, interest, and passion. In Güldü and Kart's (2017) study on career obstacles, it was observed that when the interest level of individuals is low, it can be an obstacle to their career, and interest is an important factor for career. In addition, similar results were found in Bacanlı and Sarsıkoğlu's (2019) study with university students. In addition to these studies, in a study conducted on the career experiences of undergraduate students, one of the students stated that he was oriented towards what he was interested in in his career and that it was much better to study at university while doing what he was interested in (McAlexander, 2021). Turkish university students may have chosen the profession they are curious about and interested in, and may have spent enough effort to achieve this. In addition, it was observed that Turkish university students explained their emotional career experiences by including

emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, and hopelessness. Fear of failure was also mentioned in studies in the literature (Demirkaya & Sağdıç, 2019). It can be said that Turkish university students have a fear of not being able to achieve their goals in their career processes, feel sad and despair when they cannot achieve them, and feel happy when they achieve them. In addition, Turkish university students may have experienced unexpected situations in their career processes, and as a result, they may have experienced a sense of fear. When the views of Turkish university students on physiological career experiences were examined, it was observed that they experienced symptoms such as shortness of breath, sweating, and a desire to sleep. In a study conducted in the literature, it was mentioned that they experienced stress symptoms such as anger, sweaty palms, shortness of breath, and desire to sleep (Üzüm et al., 2018). Turkish undergraduate and graduate students may have experienced physiological symptoms such as shortness of breath during an important exam, presentation, or interview in their career processes.

The fourth finding of the study is related to the views of undergraduate and graduate students about the difficulties they experience in their career processes. When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students were examined, they stated the difficulties they faced in the field of psychological violence as teacher mobbing, family pressure, environmental pressure, and peer bullying. In a study conducted by Bilgiç et al. (2019) with university students, it was found that students felt that they were not cared for enough by academics and that they had problems with the attitudes of academics. In a study conducted with university students, the attitudes of academics were among the problem areas experienced by university students. These attitudes were listed as the disproportionate difficulties of the exams, not providing sufficient support, and not providing support for the needs (Kutluca, 2022). In this study, a few participants stated that they were humiliated by academics and that academics discriminated between students. Considering these findings, it can be said that the attitudes of academics towards students are important for Turkish university students and affect their career process. Another theme emphasized by Turkish university students is peer bullying. When university students from different cultures come together, they may experience cultural conflict and may not be able to adapt to cultural differences (Güvenç, 1994). Therefore, peer bullying may have occurred as a result of disruptions in social interaction. Regarding family pressure, a participant stated that his family kept saying, "You can't succeed because you do not study, and your brother will succeed because he studies, but you do what you want," and that he did what he wanted, and it was a very difficult process. Based on these statements, the lack of support from the family and the oppressive approach of family members were effective in the family's involvement in the difficulties experienced by Turkish undergraduate and graduate students in their career processes.

When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students on the social pressure sub-theme of the difficulties they experienced were examined, they stated the difficulties they experienced as gender inequality, social perception, and acceptance. Many studies in the literature have concluded that gender inequality is one of the important obstacles in the career process (Bacanlı & Sarsıkoğlu, 2019; Can & Solmaz, 2021; Kart & Güldü, 2017; Kozak & Dalkıranoğlu, 2013; Kutluca, 2022; Özbağış, 2023). Gender inequality may affect the professions that individuals choose in the career process, and there may be individuals who have to narrow down their professions due to the stereotypes in society (Gottfredson, 2005). In career processes, there may have been glass ceiling syndrome, which includes the prejudices of male managers that women cannot do a job as well as a man (Korkmaz, 2016). In addition, the fact that

women's roles in social life (housework, children, etc.) are imposed by society are slightly more than men's roles may cause them not to be preferred in business life.

When Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views regarding financial difficulties were examined, they stated these difficulties as economic inadequacy, housing problems, and transportation problems. Many studies in the literature have emphasized that financial issues are among the career obstacles (Kart & Güldü, 2017; Kutluca, 2022). Turkish u undergraduate and graduate students may have made their career choices by considering the financial opportunities of professions as important in order to improve their quality of life.

When the views of Turkish university students regarding their health problems were examined, it was seen that they have undergone surgery, experienced physical difficulties, and had some health problems. In a study conducted in the literature, it was seen that the health problems of university students are important, and mental health is at the forefront. In addition, it was found that mental health can affect the physical health of Turkish university students (Bilgiç et al., 2019). Regarding this finding, one participant stated, "*If I am not doing well mentally, it does not matter if my career is good*".

The fifth finding of the study is related to the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students on the methods of coping with the difficulties they experience in their career processes. When the views of the students were examined, they stated cognitive coping methods as positive self-talk and awareness. In a study conducted on academic resilience in the literature, it was seen that inner talk has an important place among positive coping methods (Sever, 2022). Positive inner talk increases the belief that the person can do it, and this may bring success. In a study conducted by Tunç et al. (2020) with university students, it was pointed out that the awareness of university students is essential in the psychological counseling process. In mindfulness-based therapies, one of the contemporary therapies, being aware, is seen as vital for one's life. Therefore, it may have been important for Turkish undergraduate and graduate students to first become aware of the situation in order to cope with the difficulties.

When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students on behavioral coping methods were examined, they stated that these methods as making an effort, being active, and engaging in physical activities. Studies in the literature have shown that making an effort is important (Adıgüzel, 2009; Gümüştekin & Gültekin, 2015). In their study on a career theory, Atlı and Canbolat (2023) concluded that university students have been making efforts for a long time in their careers in line with their goals. Making an effort may have shown a relaxing effect by doing your best. Turkish university students may have used being active and engaging in physical activities as a coping method in terms of distraction and directing attention to another subject. They may have even made efforts by increasing their professional competencies in order to reach the right career path for them in their professional lives (Bandura, 1989). In support of this, a participant said, "You need to keep going, I think doors will open, so I think effort is very important, I don't think anyone should stop trying."

When exploring how Turkish undergraduate and graduate students cope emotionally, participants described strategies such as crying, sharing their feelings, and coming to terms with difficult situations. Turkish university students may have coped by experiencing emotional discharge and expressing their emotions. Turkish university students' emotional discharge may have relieved them. This finding is

consistent with Nikolaev et al. (2023), who emphasized that emotion-focused coping strategies such as acceptance and emotional discharge play a mediating role in promoting psychological adaptation and well-being in the face of challenges. Supporting this, one participant stated that *expressing her emotions was comforting and healing for her.* Another participant stated that *when he felt that he could not cope, he coped by accepting the situation and looking for different solutions.* Based on these statements, it is important for Turkish undergraduate and graduate students to accept the situation and express themselves in order to ensure the continuity of their careers.

Turkish undergraduate and graduate students described social-relational coping strategies primarily in terms of the emotional and instrumental support they received from their families, teachers, and peers. In Coşkun's (2018) study with university students, the most common coping resources were support from friends and family. One participant stated, "Family and environment are very valuable; they affect me both in good and bad ways." Based on this statement, the social support received by Turkish undergraduate and graduate students may have had an important effect on them not to feel lonely in their career processes and to make efforts again when they experienced failure. In addition, these social supports may have had an accelerating effect in helping them achieve their goals more easily.

In the context of spiritual and motivational coping, Turkish undergraduate and graduate students highlighted the importance of internal strength through self-efficacy and trust in a higher spiritual force. In a study conducted by Dönmezoğulları (2020) with university students, it was seen that self-efficacy had a significant effect on career decision making. Self-efficacy or belief in a divine power may provide continuity in the career process. Supporting this, a participant in this study said, "I believed that I could do it...I was self-focused." Another participant said, "God, please make me enroll in a department where I can say 'I am glad' even if I don't know." Based on this sentence, in a collectivist society like Türkiye with a high level of spirituality, belief in divine power can be seen as an important resource for individuals to cope with the difficulties they face. Especially, the socio-cultural structure in Türkiye leads religious beliefs and spirituality to play an important role in daily life and individual decision-making processes.

The sixth finding of the study is related to the needs of undergraduate and graduate students in their career processes. When the views of the students were examined, it was seen that their psychological needs came to the fore and they emphasized the need for psychological support, the need to belong, self-confidence, and emotional control. In Kutluca's (2022) study with university students, lack of self-confidence and lack of supportive people were among the career challenges. One participant said, "*I want to control my emotions, I want to do my job professionally,*" regarding emotional control. Based on these statements, Turkish undergraduate and graduate students may have wanted to control their emotions in order to do their profession well. The need to belong may be due to the fact that they want to gain a place in their profession.

When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students regarding their learning and personal development needs were examined, they stated these needs as professionalism, competence, time management, and self-discipline. When the studies conducted in the literature were examined, similar results were reached in terms of competence and professionalism. In a study conducted by Owen (2018) with university students, it was observed that university students need internship experience. In a study conducted by Kutluca (2022) with university students, it was concluded that university students need a better education. In a study conducted by Amabeoa (2020) with female university students, it was

concluded that time management and self-discipline play an important role in fulfilling their tasks. Turkish undergraduate and graduate students may need to improve themselves and may want to ensure this order through time management. In the personal development process of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students, self-discipline plays a critical role in achieving success and learning goals. During this period, students are confronted with levels of freedom and responsibility that they have not encountered before. This new independence requires them to develop skills in managing their own time, study habits, and social interactions. Self-discipline is central to this process as it helps students achieve their academic, social, and personal goals. In addition, Turkish university students' need for self-discipline in their personal development processes forms the basis for their success in their future careers and personal lives. Individuals with self-discipline can be more resilient in the face of challenges and obstacles (Tınat & Polatcı, 2021) and can show the necessary effort to achieve their goals.

The seventh finding of the study is related to Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' views on career counseling. When the views of Turkish university students on the sub-theme of personal development and emotional support were examined, they expressed career counseling as a healing, comforting, guiding, and regulating process. It is a process in which the psychological counselor aims to raise awareness about the needs of the client. The psychological counselor plays a supportive and helpful role in the face of the difficulties experienced by the client during the process. In a study by Kaya et al. (2021), they emphasized the importance of a supportive attitude in the counseling process in order to increase the psychological well-being of individuals. Turkish university students may have taken these into consideration and stated that the process was good for them and relaxing. They may have thought that the process was beneficial in terms of organizing their career lives as it progressed in line with the wishes of Turkish university students. In addition, psychological counseling is a healing process and involves self-disclosure. In most of the interviews, university students stated that it was good for them to express themselves and to be understood. Psychological counseling is a therapeutic process in which clients engage with a mental health professional who understands them and accepts them unconditionally. Therefore, good communication with the career counselor may have contributed to Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' perception of career counseling as comforting and healing.

When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students on career counseling under the sub-theme of "social relationships and support" were examined, it was seen that they perceive career counseling as a socially supportive process. In a study conducted by Ouyang et al. (2021) on female adolescents, a significant difference was observed between students who received social support and those who did not, and it was concluded that social support reduces the stress of female adolescents. Abay and Abay Çelik (2023) concluded that social support resources are healing in times of disaster. In a study conducted by McAlexander (2021) with university students, it was concluded that family plays an important role in the social support sources of university students. University students tend to benefit from the power of social support in coping with the uncertainty and stress they face while exploring their career paths. While thinking about their career choices and struggling with the difficulties they face in this field, students can strengthen their social support systems under the guidance of psychological counselors by considering this process as a platform of solidarity and understanding.

When the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students on career counseling under the sub-theme of "career and professional development" were examined, it was seen that they perceive the career counselor as someone who supports their professional knowledge and skills. In a study conducted by Özer (2020), as psychological effects increase, individuals prefer to receive psychological counseling from more specialized people. One participant stated, *"Of course, if you work with a consultant who has knowledge and expertise in the subjects you want to advance, you will achieve very good results."* Based on this sentence, it is important for the career process of the client that the career counselor provides information for the needs of the client, completes the missing information, or corrects the incorrect information. It is also an indication that the career counseling process has an informative aspect.

The eighth finding of the study is related to the views of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students on career counselors. When the participants' thoughts on the sub-theme of "personal expectations" were examined, they stated that they wanted the career counselor to give advice and to be optimistic, hones,t and transparent. In addition, they used the lantern metaphor for the career counselor as a guiding person. To the best of our knowledge, there is no study in the literature regarding this finding. Turkish university students may have thought that the career counselor illuminates the path they take in their career processes, so they may have expressed him/her with the lantern metaphor and described him/her as a guide. Cochran et al. (2012) concluded in a study on the characteristics of effective psychological counselors that openness and honesty are important, and this finding supports our study. In their study with psychological counselor candidates, Owen and Dost (2020) found that being helpful and wanting to be helpful were among the characteristics of psychological counselors, and this finding supports our study. In addition, 60% of the participants directly or indirectly stated that they asked for advice from the career counselor. Turkish students do not know much about the healthy process; they think career counseling is a guiding process, but this is not true. The fact that 60% of the participants asked for advice from a career counselor shows that students also need suggestions when making career decisions. However, career counseling is defined as a client-centered process that aims to help individuals make their own decisions freely. Counselors generally offer resources to help clients gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and awareness to make their own decisions, avoiding direct advice or guidance. Thus, it is important to consider that students may have different expectations and needs from the career counseling process and that some students may benefit from a more directive approach. Due to their uncertainty and anxiety about career decisions, students may seek more precise and guiding answers. In this context, counselors may need to consider how they can respond sensitively and supportively to such requests of students while allowing them to make their own choices. In addition, Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' tendency to seek advice from career counselors can be associated with culturally determined respect for authority and the need for social support, and in this context, it is important for counselors to understand these cultural expectations of Turkish undergraduate and graduate students and guide them.

When the participants' views on the sub-theme of "professional knowledge and skill expectations" were examined, they stated that they wanted the career counselor to be experienced, successful, and to have sufficient professional knowledge and good professional skills. In their study on the characteristics of effective psychological counselors, Lee et al. (2016) concluded that professionalism is important, and this finding supports our study. In a study conducted by Kline and Pope (1999) on the personality characteristics of psychological counselors, they concluded that competency is one of the characteristics

of psychological counselors, and this finding supports our study. Knowledge and skills are among the competencies that psychological counselors must have (Sue et al., 1992). A study concluded that professional skills are important for effective counseling (Yılmaz et al., 2022). Therefore, students' expectations from career counselors emphasize the importance of constantly developing and updating the professional competencies of counselors, thus pointing to the importance of a professional development process that will enable counselors to provide more effective and comprehensive support to students.

The last finding of the study is related to Turkish undergraduate and graduate students' desire to receive career counseling support. When the views of students were examined, 9 out of 10 participants (90%) stated that they would like to receive career counseling support. In a study supporting this finding, it was concluded that university students' attitudes towards receiving psychological counseling help were positive (Lakkis et al., 2023). The participants may have thought that they could meet their spiritual/motivational and social support needs with a career counselor who accepts them unconditionally. In addition, almost all of the participants (8) stated that they needed career counseling help, indicating that career counselors have an important role in career processes. Therefore, this finding shows that students have a great need for career counseling support due to the difficulties they experience.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the findings obtained from the research, it is seen that Turkish undergraduate and graduate students have emotional and physiological experiences, and these experiences play an important role in the career process. In addition to their experiences in their career process, they face many difficulties (psychological violence, social pressure, financial problems, and health problems). In order to cope with these difficulties, it was observed that they used skills such as cognitive skills, emotional skills, and spiritual skills. It is seen that students' career needs include psychological, personal, and learning needs, and they perceive a career counselor as a source of social-psychological support. In addition, they expect career counselors to have good professional knowledge/skills.

## LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is that the gender distribution is not balanced. This issue may be taken into consideration in future studies. Another limitation of this study is the relatively small and context-specific sample. The research was conducted with only ten Turkish undergraduate and graduate students using a maximum variation sampling method. While this approach aimed to capture a range of perspectives, the limited number of participants restricts the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the data were collected through self-reported, in-depth interviews, which may be influenced by participants' comfort level, memory limitations, or social desirability bias. Since the topic of career-related stress and help-seeking may be considered sensitive or personal by some participants, certain experiences might have been underreported or selectively shared.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is one of the recommendations that informative activities can be conducted for undergraduate and graduate students about what a career counselor is and what his/her duties are (conferences, seminars, workshops, etc., can be organized). Undergraduate and graduate students can be encouraged to meet with career counselors at their university, and if there are not enough career counselors, necessary studies can

be carried out to increase their number. Career counselors of each faculty can intervene after determining the needs of their students, and this can be an important step in meeting the needs of university students. The number of career centers and their staff can be increased. Career centers can increase the number of studies they carry out. Their services and activities can be disseminated to university students via social media platforms. Undergraduate and graduate students can be given opportunities such as career fairs, employer meetings, and internship opportunities so that they can decide how to continue their careers. One of the findings of this study is the psychological violence that students frequently encounter in their career processes. A structured system may be established within faculties to facilitate undergraduate and graduate students in expressing the difficulties they face, such as instructor mobbing, family pressure, and peer bullying. As part of this system, an anonymous opinion and suggestion box can be implemented to encourage open and safe communication. In addition, views of university students can be obtained through anonymous student evaluation forms. Another finding of this study is the pressures experienced by students during their career processes. In this regard, studies can be carried out to strengthen the psychological resilience of university students, and awareness-raising studies can be included in these studies. In cases where the number of career counselors at university career centers is insufficient, support mechanisms can be developed for students who are compelled to seek private career counseling but face financial hardship. Additionally, financial assistance such as covering the costs of training programs, educational materials, and relevant books can be provided to aid students in their career development. Seminars and informative activities can be carried out at regular intervals to update the knowledge of career counselors working at universities. Lastly, undergraduate and graduate students with different profiles and studying in different faculties throughout Türkiye can be reached, and the number of participants can be increased. Thus, researchers can reach better findings.

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## Genişletilmiş Özet

**Giriş**: Kariyer, ömür boyu süren, kişinin tercihleri, istekleri ve hedefleri doğrultusunda kendisine çizdiği dinamik bir süreçtir (Bursalı ve Kök, 2018). Bireyin çizdiği kariyer yolunda ilerlemesi mesleki ve sosyal birçok sorumluluğu beraberinde getirmektedir (Bakioğlu ve İnandı, 2001). Bu sorumluluklar ile birlikte süreç, alınan kararlar bakımından bazen sekteye uğrayabilir. Çünkü bireyler karşılarına çıkan zorluklarla kendi yöntemleriyle başa çıkmakta güçlük yaşayabilirler (Carnevale, 2001). Bireyler başa çıkmakta zorluk yaşadıklarının farkına vardıklarında ise kariyer psikolojik danışmanı ile iletişime geçebilmektedirler.

Kariyer psikolojik danışması kültürel ögeleri, cinsiyeti, kişilerarası ilişkileri vb. faktörleri göz önünde bulundurarak danışanlarının kendi kariyer planlamalarını yapmalarına yardımcı olmayı hedeflemektedir (Doğan vd., 2016). Kariyer psikolojik danışması, bireylerin iş deneyimleri; yetenekleri, istekleri vb. konularda bilgi elde edilerek kariyer psikolojik danışma yaklaşımlarıyla müdahale etme sürecidir. Kariyer psikolojik danışmasındaki farklılıkların oluşmasında toplumdaki değişimler ve yenilikler etkili olmuştur. Kariyer psikolojik danışmasında ilk olarak Parsons kişilik özellikleri ve iş uyumunun önemli olduğunu savunmuştur. Günümüzde ise mesleki gelişme (mesleki bilgi ve becerilerinin güncellenmesi ve gelişmesi) ve mesleki olgunlaşma (meslek gelişim görevlerini yerine getirebilme, baş etmeye hazır olabilme) gibi kavramların daha fazla ön plana çıktığı görülmektedir (McMahon, 2014; Yeşilyaprak, 2011; Yeşilyaprak,

2012). Kariyer süreçlerindeki toplumsal değişimlere adapte olmaya çalışan üniversite öğrencileri için kariyer psikolojik danışması önemli bir yer tutmaktadır.

Kariyer psikolojik danışmanı, kariyer psikolojik danışmanlığı hakkında uzman bir eğitime sahip kişidir (Litoiu ve Oproiu, 2012). Kariyer psikolojik danışmanları kariyerleri ile ilgili sorunlar yaşayan danışanlarının mesleki tercihlerine, meslek yaşamlarını etkileyen bazı özelliklerinin yenilenmesine veya gelişmesine destek olur. Ayrıca danışanının kendisine uygun bir kariyer planı hazırlamasına yardımcı olur. Bunula birlikte kariyer psikolojik danışmanının iki temel amacı, danışanlarına mesleki tercihler ve mesleki uyum konularında yardım etmesidir

Lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencileri de dahil olmak üzere tüm üniversite öğrencileri kariyer süreçlerinde yaşadıkları zorluklarla başa çıkabilmek için kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı aramaya yönelmektedir. Kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı arama, bireyin kariyer sürecinde yaşadığı güçlükler karşısında içsel motivasyon kaynaklarının yetersizliği ile birlikte dışsal kaynaklara ihtiyaç duyması ve yardım aramaya yönelmesidir (Çankaya ve Duman, 2010; Gore, Leuwerke ve Krumboltz, 2002). Bakır vd. (2023)'nin Z kuşağı üniversite öğrencileri ile yaptıkları çalışmada algılanan dışsal kaynaklar içerisinde sosyal desteğin yer aldığı ve sosyal desteğin artması ile psikolojik ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu görülmüştür. Yapılan diğer çalışmalarda da üniversite öğrencilerinin sosyal destek kaynakları arasında en çok aile ve arkadaş çevrelerinin yer aldığını göstermiştir (Coşkun, 2018; Odacı ve Ülken, 2021).

Öğrencilerinin kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı arama ile ilgili yapılan bazı çalışmalara bakıldığında, Köse vd.nin (2021) üniversite öğrencilerini çevresel damgalamanın kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımı arama tutumunu etkilediğini ve erkeklerin kızlara göre damgalanma korkusunu daha çok yaşadıkları görülmüştür. Kutluca'nın (2022) yaptığı çalışmada üniversite öğrencilerini destekleyen kişilerin yetersizliği ve kişisel özellikleri (çekingen, özgüven yetersizliği) sebebiyle kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı arama sürecinde zorlandıkları görülmüştür.

Alanyazında kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı arama ve kariyer danışmanlığına ilişkin çalışmaların olduğu görülmektedir. Fakat bu çalışmalarda kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı arama tutumu ile ilgili kendini damgalama (Köse vd., 2021), öz yeterlik (Keny ve Cladious, 2020), benlik (Lau vd., 2020), algı ve deneyim (Lara vd., 2011) gibi değişkenlerle ele alındığı görülmüştür. Kariyer danışmanlığı ile ilgili çalışmalarda ise; kariyer merkezleri, kariyer merkezlerinden haberdar olup olmadıkları, beklentileri ve tutumlarına ilişkin çalışmalar yürütülmüştür (Işık, 2007; Işık vd., 2022; Kaval ve Gökoğlan, 2020; Özkanan vd., 2022; Zeren vd., 2017). Dolayısıyla lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerinin kariyer psikolojik danışma yardımı arama davranışlarına yönelik görüşlerini doğrudan ele alan bir çalışmaya rastlanmamıştır.

Bu çalışmada ise Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerinin kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımı arama ile ilgili bilgi düzeyleri, kariyer planlamalarının ve kariyer kararlarının neler olduğu, kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımı aramaya ilişkin kaygıları, kariyer psikolojik danışması için istekleri, ihtiyaçları ve beklentilerinin neler olduğu incelenmiştir.

**Yöntem**: Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de kariyer danışmanlığının; Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerinin kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımı aramaya ilişkin görüşlerini incelemek amacıyla gerçekleştirilen nitel bir çalışmadır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden olan fenomenolojik araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada on Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencisi ile yapılan görüşmeler sonrasında veri doygunluğuna

ulaşıldığı görülmüştür. Dolayısıyla çalışmanın araştırma grubu gönüllü olan on Türk üniversite öğrencisinden oluşmuştur. Görüşme yapılan Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencileri maksimum çeşitlilik örneklemi yöntemi kullanılarak seçilmiştir. Derinlemesine görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir.

**Bulgular**: Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerine "kariyer psikolojik danışmanından yardım almak ister misiniz?" sorusu yöneltildiğinde; katılımcıların %30'una kariyer psikolojik danışmanının kim olduğu, neler yaptığı açıklandıktan sonra soruya yanıt verebildikleri görülmüştür. %40'ının ise kariyer psikolojik danışmanının kim olduğunu, görevlerini tam olarak bilmedikleri ve psikolojik danışman ile kariyer psikolojik danışman kavramlarını karıştırdıkları görülmüştür. Katılımcıların %30'unun ise kariyer psikolojik danışmanının kim olduğunu, görevlerini bildiği görülmüştür. Araştırmanın ikinci bulgusu üniversite öğrencilerinin kariyer kavramına ilişkin görüşleri ile ilgilidir. Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerinin görüşleri incelendiğinde, kariyer kavramına ilişkin davranışsal algılarını; çaba, yol, merdiven, meslek doyumu ve fırsatları kovalamak olarak ifade ettikleri görülmüştür. Bir başka bulguda üniversite öğrencilerinin kariyer süreçlerinde yaşadıkları zorluklara ilişkin görüşleri ile ilgilidir. Türk lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerinin görüşleri incelendiğinde psikolojik şiddet alanında karşılaştıkları zorlukları; öğretmen mobbingi, aile baskısı, çevre baskısı, akran zorbalığı olarak belirttikleri tespit edilmiştir. Başa çıkma yöntemlerinde ise bilişsel, duygusal, sosyal-ilişkisel ve manevi- motivasyonel olarak başa çıktıkları görülmüştür.

**Tartışma ve Sonuç**: Sonuç olarak lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencileri için kariyer psikolojik danışmasının önemli bir yer tuttuğu görülmüştür. Kariyer süreçlerinde yaşadıkları bazı zorluklar olduğu (manevi, psikolojik şiddet vb.) görülmüş ve kariyer psikolojik danışmasına ihtiyaç duyulduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışmaya katılan öğrencilerin (10 katılımcı) 9'u (%90) kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımı almak istediklerini belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcılar manevi/motivasyonel, sosyal desteğe olan ihtiyaçlarını kendisini koşulsuz kabul eden bir kariyer psikolojik danışmanı ile bu ihtiyaçlarını giderebileceklerini düşünmüş olabilirler. Ayrıca katılımcıların neredeyse tamamı (8'i) kariyer psikolojik danışması yardımına ihtiyacı olduğunu söyleyerek kariyer psikolojik danışmanının kariyer süreçlerinde önemli bir role sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Dolayısıyla bu bulgu lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerinin yaşadıkları zorluklar nedeniyle kariyer psikolojik danışması desteğine büyük bir ihtiyaç duyduklarını göstermektedir.

**Sınırlılıklar ve Öneriler:** Bu çalışmanın sınırlılıklarından biri cinsiyet dağılımının dengeli olmayışıdır. Sonraki çalışmalarda bu konuya dikkat edilebilir. Lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencileri için kariyer psikolojik danışmanının kim olduğu, görevlerinin neler olduğu konusunda bilgilendirme çalışmaları yapılabilir (konferans, seminer, çalıştay, atölyeler vb. verilebilir). Bu çalışmanın bulgularından biri öğrencilerin kariyer süreçlerinde sıklıkla karşılaştıkları psikolojik şiddettir. Öğrencilerin yaşadıkları bu zorlukları (öğretmen mobbingi, aile baskısı, akran zorbalığı) ifade etmelerini kolaylaştıracak bir sistem kurulabilir, fakültelerde görüş ve öneri kutusu oluşturulabilir. Buna ek olarak isimsiz öğrenci değerlendirme formları ile öğrencilerin görüşleri alınabilir.

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## Yazar Katkıları / Authors contributions

Melek Erol: Kavramsallaştırma, Metodoloji, Biçimsel analiz ve araştırma, Yazım- orijinal taslak hazırlama.
Sebahat Sevgi Uygur: Denetleme, Gözden Geçirme ve Düzenleme.
Melek Erol: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis and investigation, Writing – original draft.
Sebahat Sevgi Uygur: Supervision, Writing – review and editing.

## Çıkar Çatışması / Conflict of Interest

Yazarlar tarafından çıkar çatışmasının olmadığı rapor edilmiştir.
No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Not / Note

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## Etik Bildirim / Ethical statement

Bu araştırma Helsinki Bildirgesi doğrultusunda yürütülmüştür. Bu kapsamda çalışma, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Etik Kurulu tarafından incelenmiş ve onaylanmıştır. Ayrıca çalışmada kullanılan veri toplama araçları yalnızca gönüllü katılımcılara uygulanmıştır. Tüm katılımcılardan aydınlatılmış onam alınmıştır. Katılımcılar, veri toplama sürecinin herhangi bir aşamasında çalışmadan istedikleri zaman çekilebilecekleri konusunda bilgilendirilmiştir.

This research was completed in line with the Helsinki Declaration. In line with this, the study was investigated and permitted by Dokuz Eylül University Scientific Research and Ethical Review Board. Additionally, data tools in the study were only distributed to volunteer participants. All participants provided informed consent. Additionally, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time during data collection.

**Etik Kurul Adı / *Name of the Ethics Committee***: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimler Etik Kurulu **/** Dokuz Eylül University Scientific Research and Ethical Review Board.

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