

A Qualitative Study on Middle School Students' Views on Career

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ABSTRACT

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In this study, it is aimed to examine the opinions of secondary school students about their career. In this context, the students' concerns and fears about their future career, what they do to get to know the professions, their thoughts on the importance of having a profession, and their views on what factors they pay attention to when choosing a profession are taken. The study was carried out by making use of the phenomenology pattern which is one of the qualitative research methods. The study group for the research consisted of 18 students studying the 7th and 8th grades in a secondary school in the province of Batman in the 2022-2023 academic year. An appropriate sampling method was used to determine the study group consisting of 10 (55.6%) girls and 8 (44.4%) boys. In order to collect data from the participants, a semi-structured form consisting of four open-ended questions was prepared. Data obtained from secondary school students were evaluated using content analysis. As a result of the study, it has been seen that secondary school students have more fear and anxiety about their future careers, their higher education exams and higher institutions. It has been determined that students try to obtain information by discussing directly with a person in order to get to know the professions. It was determined that the students explained their thoughts about the importance of having a profession mostly due to economic reasons. Another result of the study was that secondary school students paid attention to their interests, personality traits and abilities while choosing a profession.

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INTRODUCTION

People make many decisions about their lives every day. Among these decisions, there are also career-related decisions (Gati & Asher, 2001). Career; it is a process that covers the whole life of the individual, emerges as a result of the interaction of the individual's life roles, and emerges as a result of the movements of the roles, especially in business and professional life, in a certain development process (Herr et al., 2004). In this process, there is also the choice of profession. Profession is the whole of knowledge and skills that people do to earn a living, the rules are determined by society and gained as a result of a certain education (Yanikkerem et al., 2004). Choosing a profession is one of the most important issues that should be emphasized in the process of planning a person's life career. The choice of profession directly affects a person's life. Therefore, it is extremely complex and difficult to make such an important decision (Öztemel, 2012).

It is necessary for the individual to know himself correctly at the stage of choosing a profession and to be able to determine his or her wishes in this direction in order to make healthy decisions. The person who has unclear and very comprehensive choices at the beginning, can come to the point where he can make the right choices as a result of making more logical and sturdy evaluations as he gets to know himself and the environment in accordance with the characteristics of the developmental period (Kars, 2012). Choosing the right profession depending on one's own will, ability and interest ensures a productive, successful and happy life. On the contrary, the result of wrong career choices made regardless of his own will, ability and interest; it causes them to be inefficient, unsuccessful and unhappy (Yanikkerem et al., 2004).

Since the choices people make during their career development process are one of the most decisive decisions in their lives, they are very effective in shaping people's lives (Ulaş, 2016). Career development can be considered as a vital process in terms of making career decisions and creating career systems, in which people generally try to reveal their interests, abilities and values along with the life tasks they undertake (Özyürek, 2016). People go through some career development periods in the time period until they die, and they try to do their own career development tasks in these periods (Bacanlı, 2008). In this direction, Super (1980) considered career development as five different periods. The growth period between these periods includes individuals between the ages of 4-14 (Hartung, 2013). It is seen that this time period includes secondary school students. In this respect, especially the secondary school years; for the individual, the information and interest in the professions increase and the decisions made become clear are important years (Deniz, 2001). Köse and Yaygın (2015) stated that students who have completed their education at primary and secondary education levels in our country are at the first stage of choosing a profession, which is one of the vital decisions. Because students in this period make choices in order to get to know themselves, to realize their interests and talents, and as a result, to continue in higher education institutions. From this point of view, it can be said that middle school students should know themselves in this period and as a result, make decisions about their vital careers.

Career decision is a person's orientation towards the education program, field of study and career choice that he or she considers appropriate among his professional options (Doğan & Bacanlı, 2012). This decision; in addition to psychological factors for instance the needs, individual characteristics, interests, values and abilities of individuals, environmental factors such as environmental conditions, family situation and job opportunities affect them (Çınar, 2011). It can be stated that the period when people come to a decision about their career before starting the profession is very important (Gökdeniz, 2017). Based on all these, it is seen that the secondary school period is an important period for the careers of individuals. It is thought that this study will contribute to a clearer understanding of the career planning process of secondary

school students. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine secondary school students' views on their careers. In this direction, answers to the following questions will be sought.

1. What are your concerns and fears about your future career?
2. What do you do to get to know the professions, from whom and what do you benefit?
3. What do you think about the importance of having a profession?
4. What do you pay attention to when choosing a profession?

METHOD

In this section; information about the model of the research, the study group, the data collection tool used and how the collected data were analyzed were given.

Research Model

In the study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of secondary school students about their careers. In this direction, qualitative research method was used in the research. Qualitative research; it can be defined as research in which a qualitative process is followed in order to reveal the perceptions of events and individuals in a holistic and realistic way in the natural environment, in which qualitative data collection methods such as document, observation and interview analysis are used (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Participants

The participants of the study; consisted of 18 students attending the 7th and 8th grades in a secondary school affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the 2022-2023 academic year in the province of Batman. Of these students, 10 are girls and 8 are boys. The participants of this study were determined by a convenient sampling method. An appropriate sampling method is the selection of the participants of the study from units that can be easily accessed and applied as a result of the limitations caused by reasons such as money, time and labor force (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). In this study; in the determination of the study group, a convenient sampling method was preferred because the researchers were close to the students and were easily accessible.

Measure

First of all, the literature related to the research topic was reviewed. Then, a semi-structured interview form was prepared on the subject. After preparing the form, the researcher took the opinion of an expert in the field and gave the form its final shape. The questions asked in the prepared form are given below.

1. What are your concerns and fears about your future career?
2. What do you do to get to know the professions, from whom and what do you benefit?
3. What do you think about the importance of having a profession?
4. What do you pay attention to when choosing a profession?

Data Analysis

In this study, content analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained as a result of the interviews with the participants. The main purpose of this method is to access concepts and relationships that can explain the data collected from the participants. In the content analysis method, the process starts with the coding of the data and the creation of the themes. It proceeds in the form of defining and interpreting the findings as a result of the arrangement of the codes and themes created (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Interview technique was used to collect data with students attending the 7th and 8th grades of secondary school. In the analysis of the interviews, groupings were made according to the similarity of the expressions. A code was given to the participants (1K, 2K, 3E...) in order to provide an explanation in the research. In these codes, in order to distinguish between male and female students, coding was done by giving the letter (K) to female students and (E) to male students. The data obtained from the participants of the study were digitized and expressed as frequency and percentage. Similar expressions of the participants were grouped and themes suitable for these groups were formed.

FINDINGS

“What are your concerns and fears about your future career?” The findings regarding the answers given to the question are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Findings on Students' Worries and Fears Regarding Their Future Career

Theme	Code	Participants	f	%	%
Related to Upper Education Institutions Exams	Failure in the High School Entrance Examination	4E, 5K, 9K, 10K, 11E, 14K, 15E, 16K, 18K	9	1.62	2.7
	Not being able to win the university / not getting the desired department	2K, 6K, 13E, 14K, 16K, 17K	6	1.08	
Related to High School	Failing in high school	1K,2K,5K, 9K, 11E, 13E	6	1.08	2.52
	Not getting into the high school she wanted	2K, 4E, 5K, 6K, 11E, 12E, 14K, 16K	8	1.44	
Related to Profession	Inability to have a profession	1K, 2K	2	0.36	1.44
	Inability to do the profession	2K,3E, 9K, 12E, 16K, 17K	6	1.08	
About work	Inability to find a job	3E, 6K, 11E	3	0.54	0.54
Total		18	18	100	100

Table 1 shows the findings about the students' concerns and fears about their future career. When Table 1 is examined; 9 (1.62%) students stated that they had anxiety and fear about failing the High School Entrance Examination and 6 (1.08%) students not being able to get into the university / not studying the department they wanted. 6 (1.08%) students stated that they had anxiety and fear about not being successful in high school and 8 (1.44%) students about not being able to get into the high school they wanted. 2 (0.36%) students stated that they might not have a profession and 6 (1.08%) students stated that they had anxiety and fear of not being able to do the job. 3 (0.54%) students stated that they were worried and afraid of not being able to find a job. Based on these findings, it was determined that 15 (2.7%) students were concerned about exams, 14 (2.52%) students were related to high school, 8 students (1.44%) were related to profession, and 3 (0.54%) students were worried and afraid of not being able to find a job. In this direction, it can be said that secondary school students experience

more anxiety and fear about their future career and exams and high school. Below are the answers given by some students.

“I have to work to go to the high school I want. How will I get through high school if I don't work? When I take LGS([Liselere Geçiş Sınavı]High School Entrance Exam in Türkiye), I have fears about if I get a question about which I didn't study, if I can't do it, if I can't get the score I want.”(4E)

“I am afraid of not being able to go to the high school I want. Not being able to achieve the success I want in high school scares me.”(5K)

“I want to be a doctor, but what if I don't?” (K2)

“There are too many educated unemployed in the country. It feels so scary to be like them.” (6K)

"I want to become a teacher. I'm also afraid that I can't be a teacher. For example, sometimes I am afraid that I will get angry when children do not understand what I am talking about.” (9F)

“I am a little afraid of exams. I'm afraid of LGS. Some say LGS are getting harder and harder. Even if we try, it won't happen anyway. I have already started working. It's like when I take the exam, I won't get in qualified high school.” (14K)

“What do you do to get to know the professions? Who and what do you benefit from? The findings regarding the answers given to the question are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Findings Related to What Students Do to Recognize Professions and From Whom They Benefit

Theme	Code	Participants	f	%	%
Getting help directly from a person	A professional	1K, 2K, 3E, 4E, 7E, 9K, 10K	7	1.26	4.5
	Family members	4E, 5K,8E, 10K, 11E, 13E, 14K, 15E, 16K, 17K	10	1.8	
	Teachers	2K, 3E, 5K, 8E, 9K, 11E	6	1.08	
Doing research	Internet	1K, 2K, 4E, 5K, 6K, 8E, 10K, 11E, 12E, 14K, 16K,17K, 18K	13	2.34	3.06
	Book	3E, 6K,7E, 13E	4	0.72	
Learning by watching	Television/Series	2K, 4E, 5K, 12E, 13E, 17K	6	1.08	1.08
Total		18	18	100	100

In Table 2, there are findings about what students do to get to know the professions and from whom and what they benefit from. When Table 2 is examined; 7 (1.26%) students stated that they got information about professions by talking directly with a professional, 10 (1.8%) students with their family members and 6 (1.08%) students with their teachers. 13 (2.34%) students stated that they tried to obtain information about professions by using the internet and 4 (0.72%) students using books. 6 (1.08%) students stated that they are trying to get to know the professions by watching television/series. Based on these findings, in order to get to know the professions, students; He stated that he received direct help from a person (4.5%), did research (3.06%) and watched television/series (1.08%). In this direction, it can be said that secondary school students prefer the way of obtaining information by interviewing directly with a person in order to get to know the professions. Below are the answers given by some students.

"My uncle. He's also a soldier. I also want to be a soldier. He comes to us, for example, he tells me that being a soldier is excellent." (15E)

"I want to be a doctor. I remember my kindergarten teacher told me." (5F)

"I read the book written by a psychologist and I watch videos on the profession of psychology on YouTube." (6K)

"Internet. For example, I looked at what people in this profession are doing on the internet. I looked into cooking. I'm watching MasterChef and Yemekteyiz (TV show from Türkiye). I get information from there." (17K)

"What do you think about the importance of having a profession?" The findings regarding the answers given to the question are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Findings Regarding the Importance of Having a Profession

Theme	Code	Participants	f	%	%
Economic	Earning money	1K, 2K, 3E, 4E, 5E, 6K, 7E, 8E, 9K, 10K, 14K, 15E, 17K, 18K	14	2.52	3.6
	Future security for female students	2K, 5K, 9K, 10K, 14K, 17K	6	1.08	
Individual needs	Prestige	6K, 11E, 12E, 13E, 16K	5	0.9	1.98
	Entertainment	4E, 9K, 10K, 14K, 17K, 18K	6	1.08	
Contribution to society	Benefiting society	2K, 6K, 7E, 8E, 9K, 10K, 11E, 13E, 15E, 16K, 17K	11	1.98	1.98
Total		18	18	100	100

Table 3 shows the findings about the students' thoughts about the importance of having a profession. When Table 3 is examined; 14 (2.52%) students stated that it is important to have

a profession for economic reasons (3.6%) in order to earn money and 6 (1.08%) students to feel economically secure in the future. 5 (0.9%) students stated that it is important to have a profession in order to be respected and 6 (1.08%) students with their individual needs (1.98%). 11 (1.98%) students stated that it is important to have a profession in order to contribute the society. Based on these findings, it can be said that students explain the importance of having a profession mostly for economic reasons. Below are the answers given by some students.

“It makes an economic contribution to our future.” (1K)

“Everyone will get married one day. Do not depend on your husband's money. You can't be unemployed. I contribute both society and myself. I both heal people and earn money.” (2K)

“Having a profession is important for us to make a living.” (3E)

"Important. It's more important for girls. Because then they can choose their future for themselves.” (5K)

“If you have a job, people respect you. Otherwise, you're just an ordinary person.” (6K)

“I want to make money on my own. I don't want to live off someone. I want to make my dreams come true. I love teaching, it gives me pleasure, I am happy.”(9F)

“What do you pay attention to when choosing a profession?” The findings regarding the answers given to the question are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Findings Regarding Things Considered While Choosing a Profession

Theme	Code	Participants	f	%	%
Personal characteristics	Interest	1K, 2K, 4E, 5K, 6K, 9K, 10K, 11E, 15E, 17K, 18K	11	1.98	4.86
	Personality characteristics	1K, 2K, 3E, 5K, 6K, 7E, 8E, 10K, 16K, 17K	10	1.8	
	Talent	2K, 3E, 5K, 8E, 9K, 11E	6	1.08	
Features of the profession	Features of the profession	2K, 6K, 7E, 9K, 10K, 12E, 15E, 16K, 17K	9	1.62	2.7
	Money earned/Salary	2K, 3E, 6K, 9K, 12E, 18K	6	1.08	
Total		18	18	100	100

Table 4 shows the findings that students pay attention to when choosing a profession. When Table 4 is examined; 11 (1.98%) students stated that they paid attention to their personal characteristics (4.86%) while choosing a profession, including interest, 10 (1.8%) student personality traits, and 6 (1.08%) students' talent. 9 (1.62%) students stated that they paid attention to the characteristics of the profession (2.7%) when choosing a profession, including the characteristics of the profession and 6 (1.08%) students earned money/salary. Based on

these findings, it can be said that students pay more attention to their personal characteristics when choosing a profession. Below are the answers given by some students.

I would like to choose a profession that suits me. It will also make me happy. For example, I don't want to be a teacher because I get very angry.” According to my success, for example, if my Turkish, history and geography are at good level, I cannot choose a profession related to mathematics” (1K)

“I watched a movie. I wanted to be a prosecutor. In the project assignment in the English class, our teacher said to do whatever you want to be. I also made a prosecutor's outfit. I became interested in him, I started to like him.” (4E)

“First of all, I look at my abilities, what I like to do, and the courses I've been successful in. I think that whatever job I do, I will be happy.” (5K)

“Whether the profession appeals to me or not is important. How long will I do this job? What kind of problems will I encounter in this profession in the future? Doctors, for example, are killed.” (6K)

“I have wanted to be a doctor since the second grade. I'm helping my uncle with his business. Everyone knows me as helpful. I am a helpful person, and doctors help people.” (7E)

“I have an interest in being a doctor, I could also be a science teacher. I also love science. I would like to work on the fields I love. For example, I love fine arts class, but I don't have the skills. I have a talent for science. I choose the courses and the profession in which I am skilled.” (10K)

“I want to be a winch operator. There are lots of days off and it is comfortable, but other professions have few days off.” (15E)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considering the primary education period in terms of developmental periods, it is a critical period in which people receive compulsory basic education, acquire knowledge and skills related to daily life, and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for secondary education. Therefore, the second stage of primary education is called the period of variability, transition and research (Drummond & Ryan, 1994). In addition, this period is a period in which students acquire career decision-related behaviors and attitudes and their career decision-making competency beliefs develop (Bozgeyikli et al., 2009). Because of these, it is thought that the secondary school period has a critical importance for the careers of individuals. In this direction, it is aimed to examine the opinions of secondary school students about their career in this study.

When the fears and concerns of secondary school students about their future career were examined within the scope of the study, it was concluded that students were more worried and afraid of failing in the transition to higher education exams (such as the High School Entrance Exam). In addition, it has been determined that students have concerns and fears about failing and not being able to find a job when they attend high school. When we look at the education policy of our country, central exams are held so that students can move to a higher education institution at the end of their eight-year education life. Since 2018, the High School Entrance Examination (LGS) has started to be applied to 8th grade students attending secondary school (Ministry of National Education [MEB]). Students are faced with a new exam that they have

not taken before. This new exam is one that will lead to many changes in students' lives. Therefore, students' anxiety increases (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). High school is the building block where students start to build their careers, which includes the preparation process for university, which is a higher education institution, and which forms the basis of their life (Bilir, 2019). Therefore, it can be said that the fear and anxiety of failing in the transition exams to higher education and when they continue to high school are normal. Considering the fear of students not being able to find a job, one of the biggest problems in Türkiye and the world is unemployment (Surat & Ceran, 2020). Unemployment drags the individual to feelings such as hopelessness and helplessness. Having a job; meeting moral and material demands in return for work is among the basic needs of individuals. Frustration, conflict and anxiety will arise when basic needs are not met, blocked or delayed (Aytaç & Keser, 2002). It can be said that the students who observe individuals experiencing this situation have the fear and anxiety of not being able to find a job as a result of thinking that they are likely to experience the same situation.

Considering the students' views on what they do to get to know the professions, what and from whom they benefit, in order to get to know the professions; it was determined that he mostly got help directly from a person, did research on the internet and books, and watched television/series. In this respect, it can be said that students prefer to get information about professions directly from a family member, teacher or someone who practices their profession in their immediate surroundings. The reasons why students prefer to talk to someone directly in order to get to know their profession may be that they are physically close to these people, it is easy to reach them and they have the opportunity to talk face to face. Secondly, the students stated that they benefited from the internet and books in order to get to know the professions. Internet access and mobile technology ownership are spreading rapidly in the world and in Türkiye, and the usage time of these technologies is also increasing (Güler et al., 2017). In this respect, it can be said that students use the internet to get to know the professions because they have quick and easy access to the internet. In this respect, the use of the internet and mobile technology, which falls until very young ages, can be considered as an opportunity for students' careers. Another tool that is widely used today, such as the internet and mobile technology, and is found in almost every home, is television. Therefore, it can be said that the students were influenced by the TV series and programs and they learned about the professions.

When the opinions of the students about the importance of having a profession, which is another finding of the study, are examined, it is stated that having a profession is economically important. In this direction, more of the students stated that having a profession is important in terms of making money. However, in the study, it was determined that the students stated that it is important to have a profession in terms of meeting their individual needs such as respect and entertainment and contributing to society. Profession; it is defined as a job that is gained through a certain education, based on systematic knowledge and skills, to produce useful goods, to provide services to people and to earn money in return, with determined rules (TDK, 2023). Meeting various needs, primarily social status, expressing himself or herself in various aspects in the public, reaching certain lifestyles and standards, obtaining financial income, developing himself mentally and physically, having a certain social environment and being in production is depends on a suitable profession (İlhan, 2004). Having a profession is a very important field of activity that enables healthy developing individuals to communicate with others, to feel that they are useful, to gain a place and to be respected in society (Kuzgun, 2000). In this respect, it is seen that the students' views on the importance of having a profession are consistent with the relevant literature.

When the opinions of the students about what they pay attention to when choosing a profession is examined, which is the last finding of the study, it was determined that the

students paid more attention to their personal characteristics, such as interest, personality traits and talent when choosing their profession. In addition, the students stated that they take into account the features required by the profession and the money they will earn when choosing a profession. Professional decision-making process for students is a process that requires preparation. In this process, in order for a person to reconcile the profession he/she intends to choose with his/her personality traits, he/she needs to both realize his/her own talents, interests and professional values and discover the characteristics of the professions (Peterson et al., 2002). Choosing a profession is one of the most important issues to be considered in planning a person's life career. Because when the career choice is not made in accordance with life preferences, the possible consequences of this inconvenience in the future will directly affect the life career of the person (Öztemel, 2012). From this point of view, it can be said that students should get to know themselves while choosing a profession, discover their interests, abilities and personality traits in this context, learn about professions, make a choice taking into account the features required by the profession, and get support from an expert if necessary.

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