

## Examination of University Students' Perceptions of The Career Future in Terms of Tolerance For Uncertainty and Cognitive Flexibility

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### Article Info

### ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to examine university students' career future perceptions in terms of intolerance of uncertainty and cognitive flexibility. The study group of the research consisted of 300 undergraduate students studying in different departments of Necmettin Erbakan University in the 2022-2023 academic year. "Personal Information Form" was used to determine the demographic information of the students participating in the research, the "Career Future Scale " to determine their attitudes towards their career future, the "Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale" to determine their intolerance to uncertain situations, and the "Cognitive Flexibility Inventory " to determine their cognitive flexibility levels. As a result of the research, it was concluded that there is a negative and low-level significant relationship between university students' perceptions of their career future and their intolerance to uncertainty. It was observed that there was a medium significant positive relationship between students' career future perceptions and cognitive flexibility levels. It was determined that there was a negative and low-level significant relationship between cognitive flexibility and intolerance to uncertainty levels. In the study, it was determined that intolerance to uncertainty and cognitive flexibility variables were significant predictors of career future perception.



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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of career can be defined as a general structure that covers all the experiences, jobs, and roles that shape the lives of individuals (Kuzgun, 1999, 2009). Career structure is created by individuals themselves. This formation takes place in a multi-stage process that continues throughout life, including all the roles that people have acquired in their lives and the activities required by these roles (Eryılmaz ve Mutlu, 2017; Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 2008; Super, 1953, 1980; Yeşilyaprak, 2016). It would not be the right approach to limit this dynamic formation process, which continues throughout life, to only performing a profession. For a more qualified assessment, when it comes to career structure, it is necessary to consider all roles and activities that occur before, during and after the profession (Arslan ve Sart, 2021; Bahadır ve Sürücü, 2019; Girgin Büyükbayraktar, Kesici ve Bozgeyikli, 2018; Koçakoğlu ve Yalçın, 2020). While planning the formation of the career structure, individuals need to make various choices and make decisions at all these stages. One of the phases in which these critical decisions that will be effective in the whole life of individuals are made is the university years, and the decisions made in these years fundamentally shape the careers of individuals (Almıaçık ve diğerleri, 2021; Duru, Bayraktar ve Gültekin, 2020; Mann, Harmoni ve Power, 1989).

Individuals carry out educational activities for their profession during their university years. In addition to gaining professional equipment, individuals make plans for their career future in this period. Planning for a career sometimes brings with it concerns about the future of the profession (Akman, 2022; Gizir, 2005; Kalafat, 2014; Mayda ve diğerleri, 2014; Türküm, Kızıldaş ve Sarıyer, 2004). Since anxiety has inhibitory effects as well as being a motivator (Yalçın, 1998), it is thought that it is important to examine the career perceptions of individuals affected by the anxiety experienced in that period.

Perception of career future can be expressed as individuals' belief in their ability to adapt to future processes related to their career. This perceptual structure of the individual towards the career process consists of three dimensions. These dimensions are defined as career adaptability, career optimism and knowledge about career options (Kalafat, 2012). The belief that individuals can keep up with the changes that may occur in the future career process and that they can gather themselves in unexpected situations constitutes the dimension of compatibility. In the dimension of optimism, there is the expectation that individuals will achieve positive results in their career future. The last dimension corresponds to the ability to perceive the labor market and employment trends (Kalafat, 2012, 2014; Rottinghaus, Bluelow, Matyja ve Schneider, 2012; Rottinghaus, Day ve Borgen, 2005). Individuals' view of themselves and their perceptual processes related to all these areas create their attitudes towards their career future.

Future experiences, plans, and situations involve uncertainty. Unpredictable structure of the future and not knowing what future will be predicted brings uncertainty (Korkut-Owen, 2021). Uncertainty is defined as a situation that cannot be adequately structured or categorized by individuals due to lack of clues (Budner, 1962). Intolerance of uncertainty refers to the tendency to react negatively to an event or situation that contains uncertainty. These reactions can consist of cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Buhr ve Dugas, 2002, 2006). The attitude towards uncertain situations has a structure that can cause negative effects in the lives of individuals (Bayram, Özkamalı ve Çiftçi, 2021; Öztürk, 2013; Sarıçam, Erguvan, Akın ve Akça, 2014). From this point of view, the variability of individuals' attitudes towards various situations can provide benefits.

The ability to vary in one's attitudes brings to mind the concept of cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility is defined as the ability to change ways of thinking or acting in order to perceive, process and react to situations in different ways (Eslinger ve Grattan, 1992). Cognitive flexibility is a multidimensional process similar to social problem solving. Being able to show cognitive flexibility requires being able to process more than one information at the same time, produce more than one idea, and change plans to adapt to a particular situation or context by considering alternatives (Stevens, 2009). Cognitive flexibility, which represents the vitality of an individual's thoughts, can also be expressed as the ability to change perspective (Fukuzaki ve Takeda, 2022). With the cognitive flexibility ability, individuals will have more options and alternative ways of association when thinking about their problems or making decisions (Kim ve Runco, 2022). The decrease in cognitive flexibility will cause individuals to have difficulty in changing their thought processes and perspectives. This situation will make it impossible for individuals to be fixed on their existing ideas and think flexibly (Fukuzaki ve Takeda, 2022).

Considering the subject of the research, it was thought that the career future view of university students might be related to the intolerance to uncertainty variable, as it contains some uncertainties. The cognitive flexibility variable was included in the study, considering that the flexibility skill could be beneficial since it is expected that the fixed attitudes towards the uncertainties about the future will bring along various negativities. In the study, it was aimed to examine the career future perceptions of university students in terms of intolerance of uncertainty and cognitive flexibility. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. Is there a significant relationship between university students' career future perceptions with intolerance to uncertainty and cognitive flexibility skills?
2. Does the level of intolerance to uncertainty of university students significantly predict their career future perceptions?
3. Do university students' cognitive flexibility skills significantly predict their career future perceptions?

## METHOD

In this section, the method of the research is given. The research model, study group, data collection tools and processes are discussed in this section.

### Research Model

The research was carried out in accordance with the general screening model. Studies in the general survey model are survey studies applied on a group or sample to be taken from the whole universe or a part of the universe in order to reach a general opinion about the universe in which there are many elements (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz ve Demirel, 2017a; Karasar, 2012).

### Participants

The study group of the research consisted of undergraduate students studying in various departments of Konya Necmettin Erbakan University Faculty of Education in the 2022-2023 academic year. Convenience sampling method was used in the formation of the study group (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz ve Demirel, 2017b). The data

were obtained from a study group of 300 people in total. The group consisted of 241 women and 59 men. It has been determined that the ages of the students are between 18 and 45.

### **Measures**

"Personal Information Form", "Career Future Scale", "Uncertainty Intolerance Scale" and "Cognitive Flexibility Scale" were used to collect data in the research. Before starting the data collection process, the necessary application permissions for the use of the scales were obtained. After obtaining the scale application permissions, the scales were prepared in Google Forms. The scales transferred to Google Forms were delivered to the students via link submission. It has been determined that the application time takes approximately 10-15 minutes.

#### ***Personal Information Form***

The personal information form used in the research was created by the researcher in accordance with the purpose of the research. The personal information form included students' gender, age, department and grade level information.

#### ***Career Future Scale***

The "Career Future Scale" developed by Rottinghaus, Day and Borgen (2005) and adapted into Turkish by Kalafat (2012) was used in the research. The scale consists of 25 items in total. There are three sub-dimensions in the scale: career adaptability, career optimism and knowledge about the job market. In the results of the scale obtained from the Turkish sample, the internal consistency coefficient of .88 was calculated for the whole scale. In addition, the internal consistency coefficients obtained for the subscales were calculated as .83 for career adaptability, .82 for career optimism and .62 for perceived knowledge dimension. The test-retest correlation coefficients of the scale, obtained fifteen days later, were calculated as .75 for career adaptability sub-dimension, .81 for career optimism, .73 for perceived knowledge dimension, and .87 for the whole scale (Kalafat, 2012).

#### ***Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale***

The "Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (BTÖ-12)" developed by Carleton, Norton, and Asmundson (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Sarıçam, Erguvan, Akın, and Akça (2014) was used. The scale consists of 12 items in total. There are two sub-dimensions in the scale: prospective anxiety and inhibitory anxiety. In the results of the scale obtained from the Turkish sample, the internal consistency coefficient of .88 was calculated for the whole scale. In addition, the internal consistency coefficients obtained for the subscales were found to be .84 for the prospective anxiety sub-dimension and .77 for the inhibitory anxiety sub-dimension. The test-retest correlation coefficients of the scale obtained after twenty-eight days were calculated as .74 for the whole scale, .75 for the anxiety sub-dimension, and .71 for the inhibitory anxiety sub-dimension (Sarıçam ve diğerleri, 2014).

#### ***Cognitive Flexibility Inventory***

The "Cognitive Flexibility Inventory-CFI " developed by Dennis and Wal (2010) and adapted into Turkish by Sapmaz and Doğan (2013) was used in the research. The scale consists of 20 items in total. There are two sub-dimensions in the scale: alternatives and control. In the results of the scale obtained from the Turkish sample, the internal consistency coefficient was calculated as .90 in the first application and .91 in the second application for the entire scale. The internal consistency coefficients obtained for the sub-dimensions of the

scale were calculated as .91 for the alternatives dimension in both applications. For the control dimension, which is the second sub-dimension, the internal consistency coefficient was .86 in the first application and .84 in the second application (Sapmaz ve Doğan, 2013).

### Data Analysis

In the data analysis phase of the research, first of all, the scales were examined and no data that was thought to be incomplete or incorrectly filled was found. The data obtained by the data collection tools were analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 package program. The relationship between the perception of career future, cognitive flexibility and intolerance to uncertainty scores obtained from the participants was calculated with the Pearson Product Moments Correlation Coefficient Technique. Linear regression analysis technique was used to calculate the power of cognitive flexibility and intolerance to uncertainty to explain the perception of career future. Before using the statistical methods in the research, the suitability of the data for using these methods was examined and it was seen that all the assumptions required for the analysis were met. Calculations were made in line with examining and meeting the assumptions for the analyses.

### Ethic

In order to carry out the research, a decision was taken by the Necmettin Erbakan University Social and Human Sciences Research and Scientific Research Ethics Committee on 10.06.2022 with the decision number 2022/233 that there is no ethical objection to the research. The research was conducted for university students as a result of the document obtained from the ethics committee.

## RESULTS

**Table 1:** *Correlation Table of Perceptions of Career Future, Intolerance of Uncertainty, and Cognitive Flexibility Scores*

	Perception of Career Future	Intolerance of Uncertainty	Cognitive Flexibility
Perception of Career Future	1	-.199*	.589*
Intolerance of Uncertainty	-.199*	1	-.196*
Cognitive Flexibility	.589*	-.196*	1

p\* < .001

In Table 1, the relationships between university students' perception of career future, intolerance to uncertainty level and cognitive flexibility scores were examined through correlation analysis. As a result of examining the relationship between career future perception and intolerance to uncertainty, it was determined that there was a negative, low-level and significant ( $r = -.199$   $p < .001$ ) relationship between the variables. It has been determined through the obtained data that there is a positive and significant relationship between the perception of career future and cognitive flexibility. It was determined that the relationship between the variables was at a medium level ( $r = .589$   $p < .001$ ). It was concluded

that there was a negative, low and significant ( $r = -.196$   $p < .001$ ) relationship between students' intolerance to uncertainty and cognitive flexibility scores.

**Table 2:** *Regression Analysis Table Regarding the Intolerance of Uncertainty Level to Predict Career Future Perception*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	$\beta$	Standard error	p
Intolerance of Uncertainty	.199	.040	.036	12.307	-.199	.087	.001*

Predictor Variable: Intolerance of Uncertainty  
The Dependent Variable: Career Future Perception  
p\* < .001

In Table 2, the ability to explain and interpret the career future scores of the level of intolerance to uncertainty was examined by linear regression analysis. Students' levels of intolerance to uncertainty explain 4% of the variance in their career future perception total score ( $R^2=.04$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $F= 12.307$   $p <.001$ ). When examined in terms of predictiveness, intolerance to uncertainty ( $\beta=-.199$ ,  $p <.001$ ) is a significant negative predictor of career future perception.

**Table 3:** *Regression Analysis Table on the Predictions of Cognitive Flexibility Skills for Perception of Career Future*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	$\beta$	Standard error	p
Cognitive Flexibility	.589	.347	.345	158.618	.589	.056	.000*

Predictor Variable: Cognitive Flexibility  
The Dependent Variable: Career Future Perception  
p\* < .001

In Table 3, the ability to explain and interpret career future scores of cognitive flexibility skill was examined by linear regression analysis. Students' cognitive flexibility skill scores explain 34% of the variance in their career future perception total score ( $R^2=.34$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $F= 158.618$   $p <.001$ ). When examined in terms of predictiveness, cognitive flexibility scores ( $\beta=.589$ ,  $p <.001$ ) are a positive and significant predictor of career future perception.

## DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

According to the findings obtained in the study, it was determined that there is a low negative correlation between university students' attitudes towards their career future and their intolerance to uncertainty. In addition to the relationship finding, the effect of the intolerance of uncertainty variable in predicting students' attitudes towards their career future was also examined within the scope of the research. It has been determined that intolerance to uncertainty is a significant negative predictor of 4% in terms of career future.

Although it allows to make various predictions about the course of the career of individuals in the following years of their life, it contains a large amount of uncertainties. It is known that intolerance to uncertain situations is characterized by being anxious about the future and the need for more foresight about what will happen in the future (Yılmaz, Bahadır



ve Erdoğan, 2020). It is also emphasized in the studies that the inability to tolerate the uncertain experiences can lead to a tendency to react negatively (Buhr ve Dugas, 2002, 2006). There are various studies dealing with the effects of uncertainty situations on career life. The current uncertainties about an individual's career opportunities can be a source of career stress (Günay ve Çelik, 2019). It is known that individuals who avoid experiences that cause uncertainty are more likely to be exposed to career stress (Emirel ve Bozkurt, 2022). It has been determined that the uncertain, variable and unpredictable experiences of people in their career life bring anxiety and this feeling causes a very negative perception about the career future (Pisarik, Rowell ve Thompson, 2017). Considering this relationship, it was expected that negative future-oriented career attitudes were related to coping with uncertain situations. Therefore, it can be stated that having positive attitudes towards the career future is related to the ability to tolerate uncertainty. This inference made in line with the literature can be supported by the negative correlation and 4% explanatory result obtained in the research.

Accepting the uncertainties arising from ignorance and having the ability to cope with these experiences ensure compatibility with life. Considering the uncertainties involved in career life, it is thought that it will be meaningful to deal with the issues related to the development of the ability to cope with uncertainty in the career psychological counseling process (Korkut-Owen, 2021) and may contribute positively to the formation of positive attitudes towards the career future. In order to ensure progress in the career process in uncertain times, university students can be informed by conducting studies on various subjects. When it comes to uncertainty, shifting the focus to controllable issues, emphasizing confidence in problem solving and adapting skills when coping with a challenge, and directing students to consult their advisors and faculty members to brainstorm in uncertain situations can be beneficial in terms of progress (Sara, 2020).

In the study, it was observed that there was a medium significant positive relationship between university students' attitudes towards their career future and cognitive flexibility skills. In addition to the relationship obtained, the effect of the cognitive flexibility variable in predicting students' attitudes towards their career future was also examined within the scope of the research. According to the findings, 34% of the total career future perception scores are explained by cognitive flexibility at a significant level. Therefore, it has been determined that the role of the cognitive flexibility variable is more dominant in explaining the attitudes of university students towards their career future.

When cognitive flexibility is considered in the conceptual framework, it is seen as the ability to perceive environmental stimuli in a different way, to change their perspective on the situation, and to discover various ways of action (Scott, 1962). As it can be understood from the definition, cognitive flexibility plays an important role in the ability of individuals to adapt to changing environments and to show target-oriented behaviors (Demirtaş, 2019). Considering that university students are in a period when they determine their career goals, it is expected that being able to evaluate different alternatives in their plans for the future is related to cognitive flexibility. In the results of multiple regression analysis of a study conducted with undergraduate students, it was determined that emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility and resilience are the predictors of Turkish youth to build their careers (Kırıkkanat, 2022). Studies conducted in the field, in which the cognitive flexibility levels of university students predict their career future plans at a statistically significant level, support the finding obtained from this study (Yıldız Akyol ve Boyacı, 2020).

One of the concepts emphasized in studies that focus on cognitive flexibility in terms of career is career adaptability. Career adaptability plays an important role in helping



individuals effectively cope with uncertainties in their career processes. On the basis of career construction theory, it has been emphasized that cognitive flexibility is positively correlated with career adaptability, and this relationship is supported by different research findings (Chong ve Leong, 2017). According to the research findings, having cognitive flexibility allows individuals to evaluate professional uncertainties in more detail and appropriately, to create more than one alternative coping strategy before making a choice, and thus to have a better career adaptability (Demirtaş ve Kara, 2022; Yıldız Akyol ve Boyacı, 2020). The relationship between coping with uncertainty and cognitive flexibility skills can be supported by the results obtained in this study. Among the research findings is the conclusion that there is a significant negative relationship between cognitive flexibility and intolerance to uncertainty. There are different studies that detect the existence of a negative relationship between cognitive flexibility and intolerance to uncertainty (Güvenç, 2019).

It is seen that cognitive flexibility skill is one of the important skill areas that should be addressed during university years, as it has a decisive predictive power both in terms of coping with uncertain situations and in explaining the perception of career future. Considering that the university process equips students professionally and also prepares them for the career process, it is thought that skill acquisition in the direction of cognitive flexibility will make positive contributions to future career process attitudes. From this point of view, including cognitive flexibility in psychoeducational studies that can be planned in career centers of universities can help students create a more positive career future attitude. While studying cognitive flexibility, it is thought that it would be useful to emphasize the relationality of this skill with career adaptability, the ability to evaluate alternatives, to cope with uncertainties and to make appropriate choices. In line with the psychoeducation provided at universities, it is thought that directing students who feel a higher need for skill development to career psychological counseling services will bring positive career future attitudes in individuals.

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