

# Vocational Maturity and Hopelessness of Turkish Senior Students<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Vocational maturity is an important part of understanding the vocational development processes of individuals and evaluating their level of development. The aim of this research is to examine whether there is a relationship between the vocational maturity of high school seniors and their hopelessness. “Vocational Maturity Scale (VMS)”, “Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)” and demographic information form were filled in by 523 Turkish 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. According to the results, it was determined that there is a negative significant relationship between the vocational maturity and hopelessness of both female and male students. Evaluation of the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness can provide appropriate targets for the development of interventions that will increase the level of vocational maturity and indirectly limit the emergence of hopelessness before individuals reach the last year of high school, where they encounter the process of making a professional choice.

**Keywords:** Vocational maturity; Vocational development; Hopelessness; 12<sup>th</sup> grade; Gender.

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## Türk Lise Son Sınıf Öğrencilerinde Meslekî Olgunluk ve Umutsuzluk

### Öz

Meslekî olgunluk, bireylerin meslekî gelişim süreçlerini anlamının ve gelişim düzeyini değerlendirmenin önemli bir parçasıdır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, lise son sınıf öğrencilerinin mesleki olgunlukları ile umutsuzlukları arasında bir ilişki olup olmadığını incelemektir. 523 Türk 12. sınıf öğrencisi tarafından “Meslekî Olgunluk Ölçeği” (VMS), “Beck Umutsuzluk Ölçeği (BHS)” ve demografik bilgi formu doldurulmuştur. Sonuçlara göre hem kız hem de erkek öğrencilerin mesleki olgunluk ve umutsuzlukları arasında negatif yönlü anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu belirlenmiştir. Meslekî olgunluk ve umutsuzluk arasındaki ilişkinin değerlendirilmesi, bireylerin mesleki tercih yapma süreci ile karşılaştıkları lise son sınıfa varmadan, mesleki olgunluk düzeylerinin yükselmesini sağlayacak ve dolaylı olarak umutsuzluğun ortaya çıkmasını sınırlandıracak müdahalelerin geliştirilmesi açısından uygun hedefler sağlayabilir. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mesleki olgunluk; Meslekî gelişim; Umutsuzluk; 12. sınıf; Cinsiyet.

### Introduction

High school senior is a critical year for millions of students from all over the world, when they are expected to make a vocational choice. It is important that these choices, which will affect students in the following years, are in accordance with their interests, abilities and values. The vocational choice is defined by Kuzgun (2006) as choosing a profession is when a person evaluates vocations from various aspects and decides to move towards the one that has the most desired qualities in terms of his or her own needs and expectations. In the process where students are expected to make well-informed and suitable vocational choices for themselves, they also need to cope with the difficulties of the adolescence period. (Super, 1990).

Super stated that an individual's success in leaving developmental tasks behind is related to his vocational maturity level (Super and Overstreet, 1960). On the other hand, various researchers have stated that vocational maturity is an obstacle in the vocational choice process for adolescents (Ismail, Abdullah, Mohamad and Khairuldin, 2018; Larasati and Kardoyo, 2017).

The concept of vocational maturity has been addressed by many theorists. The common point in their definitions is to make age-appropriate

professional decisions based on a good information process (King, 1989; Savickas, 1984; Super, 1957). Denga (1986) stated that there is a relationship between an individual's making unreliable and unrealistic vocational choices and his vocational immaturity. It has been stated that a person with high vocational maturity is more capable of making choices more appropriate to his / her own characteristics and wishes, and success continues in the following years (Westbrook, Sanford and Donnelly, 1990).

Looking at Super's vocational development stage, the 12<sup>th</sup> graders are in the exploration stage. With Career Pattern Study of Super he identified six dimensions of the exploration stage of vocational development (Super and Overstreet, 1960). First one is orientation to vocational choice, which Super (1974) defined as attitudes that an individual may be interested in making vocational choices about future. The second is information and planning which means that adolescent has future plans and starts to have specific information about them. The third is consistency of vocational preferences, which suggests that adolescents' verbal explanation about vocational preferences become more consistent in process. The fourth is the crystallization of traits and the adolescent begins to form a self-concept in line with his preferences and exhibits an attitude towards preparing himself for the necessary tasks in the vocational decision-making process. The 5<sup>th</sup> is vocational independence. At this stage, the adolescent develops independence through summer work, part-time work experience or other extracurricular activity experiences. In this way, according to Super, the adolescent has the opportunity to try out the adult role, gain insight into the business world, and this reinforces their independence (Jordaan and Heyde, 1979). The last and 6<sup>th</sup> dimensions of vocational maturity are the wisdom of vocational preferences and the adolescent can make consistent choices in line with his own interests, abilities and values.

There are many studies in the literature that examine the relationship between vocational maturity and various variables. Some of these studies are based on the relationships between vocational maturity and personality traits. Studies have shown that there are positive and significant relationships between high self-esteem and high vocational maturity (Seo and Kim, 2019), high vocational decision-making self-efficacy and high vocational maturity (Bozgeyikli, Bacanlı and Doğan, 2009; Singh and Shukla, 2015), proactive personality traits and high vocational maturity (Park, 2015). On the other hand, Atlı (2017) found that high school students with positive personality

traits such as openness, extroversion, adaptability, and responsibility have high vocational maturity; on the other hand, students with neurotic negative personality traits have low vocational maturity levels in high school.

Some studies also show that high level of vocational maturity increases the motivation and study behavior of high school students (Mabel and Nagarenitha, 2016; Öztemel, 2009), besides, as vocational indecision increases, study motivation and vocational maturity decrease (Hamamcı and Çoban, 2007; Mabel and Nagarenitha, 2016) These findings support the theoretical views of Super (1963) that vocational indecision negatively affects vocational maturity.

In many studies, whether or not the vocational maturity levels of children, adolescents, university students or young adults differ according to various demographic variables such as age, gender, socio-economic level, parental education level, grade level, academic achievement level, or whether or not they show significant relationships with these demographic variables have been investigated. In various studies, age (Creed and Patton, 2003; Mubiana, 2011; Yayla, 2011; Yon, Choi and Goh, 2013), parental education level (Yon, Choi and Goh, 2013), socio-economic level (Harlow and Bowman, 2016; Kutlu, 2012), academic achievement level (Bae, 2017; Creed and Patton, 2003; Çoban, 2005) and grade level (Can and Taylı, 2014; Kutlu, 2012), the higher the level of vocational maturity and vocational development are observed (Mubiana, 2011).

Development and maturation are intertwined concepts. In developmental psychology, gender differences in maturation and maturation are among the subjects that have been studied extensively. Similarly, in foreign and domestic literature, it has been investigated in many studies whether vocational maturity differs according to gender or whether it shows a significant relationship with gender. Indeed, in most studies up to now, it has been found that the vocational maturity levels of women are higher than that of men (Bae, 2017; Cho and Kim, 2014; Harman, 2017; Ismail, Abdullah, Mohamad and Khairuldin, 2018; Kutlu, 2012; Patton and Creed, 2002; Ulaş and Yıldırım, 2015; Zahra and Malik, 2018). In some studies, it has been determined that the vocational maturity level of men is higher than that of women (Flouri and Buchanan, 2002; Kayaş, 2009; Singh and Shukla, 2015). Despite these, there are also studies revealing that vocational maturity does not differ by gender (Can and Taylı, 2014; Cansız and Çakır, 2017; Chae and Ma, 2015; Çınar,

2011; Sürücü, Kontaş and Bacanlı, 2015; Yayla, 2011). Studies were also carried out to determine the effect size of the vocational maturity level in terms of the gender variable by evaluating all these studies, which gave different results, by analyzing the relationship between vocational maturity and gender between various years, by conducting meta-analysis. According to the meta-analysis results of 53 studies conducted between 1987-2014 by Altuntaş, Atlı and Kış (2016), a positive and statistically significant effect size of 0.28 was found in favor of female students. In addition, in the study conducted by Çarkıt and Bacanlı (2019), the meta-analysis results including the data of 17 studies conducted between 2000-2017 showed a significant and small effect size in favor of women.

In a period when the intensity of both university exam preparation and school lessons is high, on the other hand, 12<sup>th</sup> grade students are expected to make a vocational choice in accordance with their interests, abilities and values. One of the basic conditions that will enable them to overcome all these in a healthy way is to have “motivation” and it is thought that the most important factor that increases motivation is “hope”. Traditional theories conceptualize hope as an optimistic emotion that supports goal attainment, life events, life conditions, and strength of character (Menninger, 1959; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Stotland, 1969). The definition of hopelessness is expressed as negative expectations for the future, that is, pessimism (Beck, Steer, Kovacks and Garrison, 1985; Brener, Krug and Simon, 2000). It is seen that among the reasons for the emergence of hopelessness, the individual's negative thoughts about himself, his future and the world (Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy, 1989; Ceyhan, 1993). When a person feels hopeless, it is inevitable that depression will appear (Abela and Seligman, 2000). For example, pessimism, weakness, unwillingness and loss of motivation are observed in individuals who develop depression due to hopelessness in their lives (Ceyhan, 2004).

In the light of all this information, an adolescent with low vocational maturity will have difficulty in making a correct and realistic professional choice for himself, and this process will cause him to lose motivation during the exam preparation process. For students preparing for the university entrance exam, the factor of hope for the future is one of the main factors that will enable them to maintain their working behavior. In other words, when it is considered that students whose vocational maturity is not yet developed may feel hopeless about the future and this situation may negatively affect

their exam performance, studies to improve vocational maturity gain more importance. Based on this point, it is thought that the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness level should be investigated. When we examine the literature, it is seen that it does not examine the relationship between hopelessness level and vocational maturity. This relationship needs to be understood in order to contribute to future studies.

Moreover, it is thought that the research data will guide school psychological counselors for the necessary developmental and preventive counseling programs in order to improve the vocational maturity level of the students. From this point of view, the purpose of this study is to reveal whether there is a relationship between the vocational maturity levels and hopelessness levels of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and whether this differs according to gender. The reason why we look at the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness in terms of gender is to evaluate whether demographic variables such as mother's education level, father's education level, family income and academic success make a difference between genders. In addition, according to the findings of the studies examining the relationship between vocational maturity and gender, it was determined that there was not always a significant relationship between these two variables, and in order to strengthen the literature, the relationship between vocational maturity and gender was examined. In line with this general purpose, the following questions were sought in the study:

1. What is the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness of twelfth grade students?
2. What is the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness in female students?
3. What is the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness in male students?

### **Method**

This section details the methodology used in this study. Research method, participants, instruments, data collection procedure and analysis of data are presented in this section.

### **Research Method**

In this study, the relational screening method was used to examine the vocational maturity of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in terms of gender, mother's education level, father's education level, family income and academic success;

correlational model was also used to examine the relationship between their vocational maturity and hopelessness.

### **Participants**

The sample of this study consisted of students from four high schools in Ankara and İzmir in Turkey. 523 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were selected by convenience sampling procedure. These four schools were determined by regional socio-economic status map of Turkey Statistical Institute. According to this map, two schools from Çankaya in Ankara and Konak-Karataş region of İzmir representing the upper socio-economic regions, and two schools in Ankara-Mamak and İzmir-Buca-Gürçeşme representing the lower socio-economic level were determined to practice.

### **Instruments**

#### **Vocational Maturity Scale (VMS)**

The scale was developed by Kuzgun and Bacanlı in 1996. It is a 40-item, five-point, likert-type scale measuring an individual's vocational maturity level. A total vocational maturity score is given by summing participants' scores across all items, with greater scores indicating greater levels vocational maturity. According to VMS norms, a raw score of 142 and below means that the student is not vocationally mature, a raw score between 143 and 154 means that the student must develop vocational maturity, and a score of 155 and above means that the students are vocationally mature. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the VMS is .89. The correlation coefficient calculated using the test-retest method is .82. This result shows that this scale is decisive for evaluating the professional maturity variable in the studies conducted.

VMS, developed by Kuzgun and Bacanlı in 1996, was prepared in a 5-point Likert type layout and has 40 items. According to VMS, the higher the score achieved by the participants, the higher the vocational maturity level. It is thought that the vocational maturity level of a student with less than 142 points is low, and the vocational maturity level of a student with 143-154 points is close to development. Students with a score of 155 and above are considered to be vocationally mature. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the VMS is .89. The correlation coefficient calculated using the test-retest method is .82. This result shows that the VMS is a determinant in evaluating the desired variable.

In this study, internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) was calculated for

523 12<sup>th</sup> graders and internal reliability for the VMS is .83.

### **Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)**

BHS (Beck, Weissman, Lester and Trexler, 1974) was developed as a 20-item self-report inventory and measures three main aspects of hopelessness; feelings about the future, loss of motivation and expectations for the future. It is suitable for the age range of 17-80. The evaluation of the items was created in the correct / incorrect format and the total score ranges from 0 to 20. The reliability and validity study of the scale was conducted by Seber, Dilbaz, Kaptanoğlu and Tekin (1993). Cronbach Alpha coefficient was determined as .86. The validity study of the scale was tested with the “Beck Depression Scale”. Coefficients between the two scales were found as .68-.71 ( $p < .001$ ) (Durak and Palabıyıkoglu, 1993).

As mentioned in the guide (Beck and Steer, 1988), internal reliability coefficients range from .82 to .93 between seven different normative populations. Although the test-retest reliability is lower (.69 after one week; .66 after six weeks), this may reflect the sensitivity of the instrument to this unstable structure (Dowd, 1992).

In this study, internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) .90 was obtained for the participants.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

After the thesis proposal was accepted, necessary permissions were obtained from owners of the scales and four high schools from provincial directorates of national education of Ankara and İzmir, instruments were administered to twelfth grade students in classroom setting.

The purpose of this study was explained and anonymity was guaranteed. Administration of the instruments took approximately 30 minutes. Scientific and ethical rules were followed during the study process and all responsibility for the commitment to comply with these rules belongs to the authors.

### **Analysis of Data**

Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze and describe the data.



## Results

In this part of the study, the results of the analysis are presented, on whether there is a significant relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness in females and males separately and in the total sample.

**Table 1.** Number of Participants, Means and Standard Deviations of the Vocational Maturity and Hopelessness Scores with Respect to Females, Males and All Participants

	Scale	N	Mean	SD
Female	Voc. M.	341	148.31	17.84
	Hopelessness		5.09	5.08
Male	Voc. M.	182	140.74	18.58
	Hopelessness		6.02	5.32
Total	Voc. M.	523	145.68	18.44
	Hopelessness		5.14	5.18

Note: Voc. M.=Vocational Maturity

**Table 2.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Vocational Maturity and Hopelessness in the Total Sample

Scale	n	r	Sig.
Hopelessness and Voc. M. - Total	523	-.45*	.000

Note: \*Correlation is significant at  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

As seen as Table 2, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant correlation between the scores from VMS and BHS of in total sample. The scores of both scales show a negatively significant correlation between vocational maturity and hopelessness ( $r = -.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that greater vocational maturity levels mean lower levels of hopelessness.

**Table 3.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Vocational Maturity and Hopelessness in Females

Scale	n	r	Sig.
Hopelessness and Voc. M. - Females	341	-.44*	.000

Note: \*Correlation is significant at  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

As can be seen in Table 3, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant correlation between the scores from VMS and BHS of females. The scores of both scales show a negatively significant correlation between vocational maturity and hopelessness in females ( $r = -.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 4.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Vocational Maturity and Hopelessness in males

Scale	n	r	Sig.
Hopelessness and Voc. M.- Males	182	-.46*	.000

Note: \*Correlation is significant at  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

According to Table 4, results indicated that there was a negatively correlation between the hopelessness level and vocational maturity level of males ( $r = -.46, p < .05$ ).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study, the relationship between the vocational maturity level of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and their level of hopelessness was examined. In the light of the data obtained, 219 (41.9%) of the students participating in the study had low vocational maturity level, 132 (25.2%) had medium level of vocational maturity and 172 of the students (32.9%) had high level of vocational maturity. These results mean that the majority of the students are not at a level to make a healthy and realistic vocational choice for themselves, and that they cannot overcome some vocational development tasks. When the studies were examined, many studies (Çoban, 2005; Hamamcı and Çoban, 2007; İşgör and Sezer, 2008; Kağnıcı, 1999) revealed that the vocational maturity level of the students is low. It is seen that the findings in the literature are in parallel with the results of the research. These findings might emphasize that school psychological counselor and the other who has common responsibilities for students in educational process are not performing effectively and/or studying with students equally. Whereas, one of the needs of young people when making vocational choices is being supported by psychological counselors in schools and their parents who are responsible for their vocational development (Devi, 2018; Narramore, 1992). With the transition to adolescence, physical, psychosocial and cognitive changes begin to appear with the onset of puberty and some of the developmental processes continue until the mids of the 20s (Merrick, Tenenbaum and Omar, 2013). For adolescents, it may be difficult to adapt to this developmental process. On the other hand, an adolescent attending the 12<sup>th</sup> grade should have sufficient information about his / her personal characteristics and desires in order to make a healthy and suitable occupational choice. School psychological counselors are among the most important people who can facilitate this process with their knowledge and professional skills. Adolescents in high schools need qualified vocational guidance studies that can help them gain independence in their career choice (Harris-Bowlsbey and Sampson, 2005). Another name that emphasizes vocational guidance should start as early as possible is Edna Mora Szymanski. She argued that proactive vocational guidance planning should begin during the secondary school years and should include a longitudinal, career-oriented focus rather than a one-off, occupational choice perspective (Szymanski, 1994). In

order for the students to realize their vocational development in a healthy way and to realize their vocational preferences in accordance with their own characteristics, studies that will enable them to recognize their own characteristics, interests, abilities and values should be carried out regularly from the primary school level. Studies that enable students to have information about characteristics of professions and working conditions, think about aspects of professions that overlap with their own characteristics, participate individual and group work conducted by school counselor, participate presentations, conversations and panels encouraged by professions' staff are thought to be supportive and empowering for vocational development.

Main purpose of research was to evaluate the relationship between the vocational maturity and the hopelessness. However, there is not enough information in previous studies. According to results, there is a negatively significant correlation between hopelessness and the vocational maturity. Although the importance of vocational guidance is not fully understood to date, a number of studies with delinquent children reveal the positive effects of vocational guidance on problem behaviors. According to these studies, it was observed that individuals' levels of hopelessness decreased, internalized locus of control, self-esteem, self-knowledge and autonomy increased and interpersonal skills improved (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2007; Weinger, 2000). A study conducted by Fuqua, Seaworth and Newman (1987) revealed that as the level of anxiety increases, an individual's vocational decision-making and planning skills are negatively affected. This study supports their (Fuqua, Seaworth and Newman, 1987) findings showing that individuals with high vocational maturity level have low anxiety levels. In addition, in a study investigating the effects of anxiety, Hill and Wigfield (1984) determined that exams cause increased anxiety in students and that increased anxiety causes stress and hopelessness. In addition, many other studies on anxiety show that individuals with increased anxiety levels make little effort, have low achievement and problem solving skills (Chang, 2006; Moran and Hughes, 2006).

Another aim of the research was to examine the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness according to gender. Since there is no other study examining the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness, this research is the first to state that the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness does not differ by gender. In other words, hopelessness decreases as vocational maturity increases for both female and

male students. The increase in vocational maturity means that the individual can recognize his own interests, abilities and values and can choose the most suitable profession for himself by recognizing the professions that are suitable for his characteristics. It is thought that a decrease in the level of hopelessness of a male or female student with these characteristics, on the contrary, an increase in the level of hope is a very appropriate result. The fact that this research revealed that gender did not make a difference in the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness underlined once again the importance of counseling services to be able to reach all students while continuing their work on getting to know the individual and vocational guidance.

Also in this study, the relationship between vocational maturity and hopelessness was investigated specifically for the 12<sup>th</sup> graders. It has been supported by this research that increasing vocational maturity is important in terms of both making a healthy occupational choice and being more hopeful in the present time.

When the findings about the hopelessness level were evaluated, according to the norms of the “Beck Hopelessness Scale”, 49.1% of the participants were not hopeless, 28.1% were mildly hopeless, 13.4% were moderately hopeless and 9%, 4 were found to be highly hopeless. In addition, it is observed that the hopelessness scores of the female students are lower than the males. This result is consistent with the findings of Özmen, Dündar, Çetinkaya, Taşkın and Özmen (2008). On the other hand, these findings contradict with the findings of other studies that stated that women have higher levels of hopelessness than men (Hugh, Judith and Priscilla, 2006; Ullman and Brecklin, 2002). Therefore, new studies are needed to make a specific evaluation.

New studies should be conducted on enriching the functioning of school psychological counseling services and on the effects of vocational development studies conducted in schools on variables that will contribute positively to the general mental health and their vocational choice process such as their level of self-actualization, life satisfaction and self-esteem. Also, working with some variables such as whether they have participated in counseling activities aimed at getting to know themselves since primary school, perceived social support, parental attitudes, environmental conditions, school types etc. is recommended.

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