ISMC 2017
13th International Strategic Management Conference

AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF CAREER OPTIMISM AMONG TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

With the increasing popularity of positive psychology movement in the literature, optimism has attracted many researchers from a various field; however, career optimism has rarely been indicated in the organizational behaviour and human resource management literature. Career optimism, as a part of career planning attitude, is an important factor for career decision making which is a complex process. Indeed, we know little about what career optimism is, its antecedents and consequence in career decision making process among university students. In this study, we empirically demonstrated the relationship among emotional support, task performance, exhaustion at schoolwork and career optimism. By investigating 324 university students (age between 18 and 21) in Turkey, we found that parental emotional support and perceived task performance influences career optimism positively. We also found that exhaustion at schoolwork does not have a significant effect on career optimism. In this regard, theoretical and managerial implications of the study findings are discussed.

1. Introduction

Like many organizations there is competition among universities and students are the most important component in the institutions. In this respect, for enhancing competitive advantage universities emphasize students' career success. Grad student's career success influence the decision of choosing or attending to university. Career has become a more complex phenomenon by the rapid changes in work life that brings new necessities such as globalized workforce, flexible working conditions, and adaption to new situation and requirements (Greenhaus et al., 2009). Hence, researches on career development literature focused mostly on career competencies substantial for the flexibility and adaption.

Since the last decade in psychology and organizational psychology there has been considerable interest to positive oriented researches and positive psychology perspective become so popular in the

organizational behaviour literature. Specifically, positive organizational behaviour and positive organizational scholarship, -which indicates positive states, outcomes, human strengths and virtues-attracts both scholars and practitioners. Related literature indicates that in the light of positive psychology perspective, different aspects of positive attitudes play important role in career planning (Stober et al., 2016). For example, optimism which is a one of the widely known attitude in the positive psychology, has been studied in the both work-related (Tuten, and Neidermeyer, 2004; Youssef and Luthans, 2007) and school-related (Smith and Hoy, 2007; Aspinwall and Taylor, 1992) studies as an important variable for desirable outputs. Researches indicates that optimism is tightly relating to adoption to change (Thériault, 1994), coping (Nes and Segerstrom, 2006), performance (Kao and Tienda, 2005) social support (Ruthig et al., 2009) and goal adjustment (Wrosch and Scheier, 2003).

Additionally, increasing research on career development has focused on career optimism (Friedman et al., 1998). However, as Raymund et al. (2015) states the career optimism studies mostly focused on outcomes instead of antecedents of it. While studies about optimism shows antecedents of state and trait optimism, optimism about future expectations career -specific antecedents need to be examined as well.

The purpose of the study is to contribute the gaps in the literature by examine the effects of perceived task performance and emotional support as strengthen factors of career optimism, besides exhaustion at school work as weaken factor. While perceived task performance is mostly about the students focus and efforts on responsibilities about school; exhaustion at school work is both about his or her perception and attitudes of teachers. Because in that ages parents are active on future decisions, beside school and student oriented antecedents we also focus on parental emotional support as another important component in career optimism process of students.

Although university and colleague students' career optimism is studied by the researchers (Tolentino et al., 2014; Hennessey et al., 2008; Creed et al., 2002) in U.S., there are very few studies about the university students' career optimism (exp. Siyez and Yusupu, 2015) in Turkey. Specifically, this study sample consists of both private and public university students in Turkey.

Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, the study investigated (a) the role of parental emotional support on career optimism, (b) the impact of exhaustion at schoolwork on career optimism and (c) the role of perceived task performance on career optimism among university students.

In the following the paper continues by the literature review of the variables of the study. According to related literature, related hypotheses and conceptual model are developed. Then paper continues with the methodology section. Scales, data collection and analysis results are explained in this part. And lastly the findings, limitations and recommendations are discussed in conclusion and discussion part.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Career Optimism

As Freud said, on the assumption that having a good work life, working means health. Work life in other words career as a way of personal identity is a very important aspect to understand individuals' life

(Hall and Heras, 2012). Since career has such an import in one's life, creating positive meaning is vital both individual and organizational outputs.

A career can be defined as "the unfolding sequence of a person's work experience over time" (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; cited in Haynie and Shepherd, 2011). Career can be observed in subjective and objective perspective. Objective career is an outside view and associated with events such as promotions and job assignments and outcomes such as pay and other rewards (Seibert et al., 1999). Mostly researches discuss objective perspective (Hall and Heras, 2012). On the other hand, subjective career takes in individual's perception and personal experience and newly literature focus on concepts such as career optimism based on subjective career.

In the career development literature, the career maturity theory was about the adolescents' vocational and educational choices (Super and Sverko, 1995). Then researchers (Super and Knasel, 1981) used the career adaptability term and the term became widely acceptable in the literature. Empirical studies showed that optimism has positive effect on career process (Patton et al., 2004; Spurk et al., 2015). Following studies about career adaption which refers to career optimism as an essential source in career adaptation process (Rottinghaus et al., 2005) while others such as Raymund et al. (2015) identifies as a career competency.

Scheier and Carver's (1985) widely known definition of optimism (dispositional optimism) refers to a generalized expectation that good things will happen in the future (Rottinghaus et al., 2005) and parallel to this career optimism is described as "expect the best possible outcome or to emphasize the most positive aspects of one's future career development" (Garcia et al., 2015).

Optimism has been studied relatively much in organizational behaviour literature whereas career optimism is a new concept for the literature. Recent studies found that career optimism positively relates to self efficacy, proactive personality, academic success, social support (McLennan et al., 2017; McIlveen and Perera, 2016; Chatterjee et al., 2015; Garcia et al., 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014; McIlveen et al., 2013; Hennessey et al., 2008; Friedman et al., 1998). Summarizing the related literature indicates that increasing number of studies need to address strengthen and weaken factors and also direction of the variables need to be identified.

2.2. Emotional Support and Career Optimism

Social support is defined as guidance of important relations such as co-workers, managers and family members about emotional, informational and instrumental areas (Thoits, 2011).

Recent opinions imply that comparing to emotional distance, demonstrating close relationships with parents in adolescence helps being more confidence and independence. In addition to this relationship with parents are effective on personal schemata and relationship with others (Cutrona et al., 1994). From goal oriented perspective, young people either set themselves goal or others (parents, educational system) do instead of them. Similarly career decisions are also influenced by others as an important goal (Creed, Patton, & Prideaux 2007). There are also studies examine family factors and work decisions. For instance, family factors found effective on start, stay and quit decisions about the business (Powell and Greenhaus, 2010). In the study as sample's age level and career experience taken into

consideration, parental emotional support is proposed as an antecedent of career optimism as stated in introduction section.

There are few studies demonstrates relationship between the emotional support and career optimism. In 1997, Young and colleagues investigated career and parental support in their studies. After positive psychology movement some studies such as Chong et al. (2006) discuss support and optimism relationship and recently published studies investigate the relationship among emotional support and career optimism relationship (Garcia et al., 2015). As well as empirical findings promotes emotional supports' positive effective on optimism, little known about social support and career optimism (Raymund et al., 2015). Because replication in different samples is needed in the related literature, our first hypothesis is like in the following.

H1: Parental emotional support is positively related to career optimism.

2.3. Exhaustion at School Work and Career Optimism

Exhaustion generally accepted as a dimension of burn-out in the literature beside cynicism and lack of accomplishment (Maslach, 1976). Burnout or specifically exhaustion is studied especially for workers and can be significant for students as well. Based upon original definition, exhaustion at school work can be defined as feelings of strain and chronic fatigue caused by overtaxing schoolwork. This study-based emotional tiredness may arise when students work hard without the adequate prerequisites to reach the set objectives and also when the exhaustion continues it may be turn to a clinical problem (Kuittinen and Meriläinen, 2011).

Previous studies imply that adolescents' perceptions and experiences of school are related with adjustment outcomes (Salmela-Aro et al. 2009). Additionally under heavy stress, people seem to focus on the here-and-now and lose their capability to make long-term action plans (Kuittinen and Meriläinen, 2011). Also career oriented expectations can be effected from exhaustion as well.

There are few studies concerning negative school experiences based on exhausting or generally burn out (Van Maele, and Van Houtte, 2015; Kremer, 2016). And also there is little empirical evidence in organizational behaviour literature about the relationship between burnout and optimism (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Herbert, 2011). Some researchers accept the engagement as opposite of burnout (exp. Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Studies examine engagement and career relationship indicates positive association with career adaptability (Rossier et a., 2012) and also career optimism (McIlveen and Perera, 2016; Perera and McIlveen, 2014). From this point of view, it is possible to propose negative association between career optimism and exhaustion at school work. Hypothesis for this relationship is in the following.

H2: Exhaustion at schoolwork is negatively related to career optimism.

2.4. Task Performance and Career Optimism

Achievement goals help to determine the individuals' view to achievement situations either at work, on the sports field, or in the classroom (Van Yperen, 2006) that is achievement goals related with achievement behaviours (van Dierendonck and van der Gaast, 2013). Studies on psychology and organizational behaviour explain goal oriented perspective for task performance. Dweck and others

(1988) added learning as a goal for good performance and since then performance studies mentioned attaining new skills and experiencing new challenges (Porath, & Bateman, 2006). In this study perception of task performance is individual-level behaviour focused directly or in support of task accomplishment (LePine et al., 2000).

Generally, optimism and performance relationship is supported by recent studies (exp. Luthans et al., 2008), additionally early studies indicate that educational achievements have effect on objective career success, but especially when it comes to subjective career success, there are limited studies (van Dierendonck and van der Gaast, 2013). Also evidence in literature about direct relationship among career optimism and performance is inadequate (exp. El-Anzi, 2005). This gap motivated us for the following hypothesis.

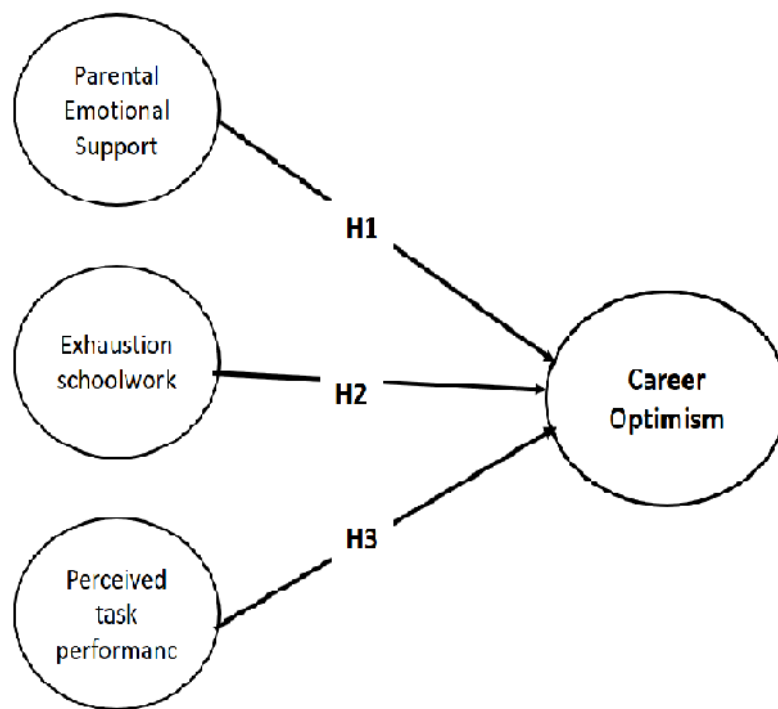*H3: Perceived task performance is positively related to career optimism.*

Figure 01. Research Model

3. Research Design

The sample of this research consists of 324 Turkish university students who studied in Istanbul and Kocaeli. Data were collected during the autumn and spring semester academic year 2016-2017. We used questionnaire and collected date through online and face to face survey.

Of the 324 students were 68,5% females and 31,5% males. The average age of the university students was among 18 and 21. Students are participated the study voluntarily and were informed that their responses would remain anonymous. Additionally, we informed students that there were no right or wrong answers.

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The questionnaire composed of four parts. The first part includes demographics of students, second section is designed to measure exhaustion at schoolwork, third part includes career optimism, fourth part involves task performance and last part is designed to measure emotional support. We prepare questionnaire through an extensive literature review and we use existing scales. All items were measured on a five point Likert scale to 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

3.1. Measures

Exhaustion at school work was adopted from Salmela-Aro et al. (2009) and measured through four items, an example item is "I feel overwhelmed by my schoolwork". Career optimism consists of eleven items and was adopted from Rottinghaus et al. (2005). An example item is "Thinking my career inspires me". Task performance was measured by five items and adopted from Brownlee and Motowidlo (2011). An example item is "I stay focused on the task at hand". Emotional support was measured by six items and adopted from Turner (2003). An example item is "My parents talk to me about what fun my future job could be".

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Measure Validity and Reliability

The reliability and validity of the constructs is evaluated by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Anderson and Gerbing,1988). After eliminating problematic items, the resulting measurement model was found to fit the data reasonably well: $\chi2(164) = 373,515$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .901, incremental fit index (IFI) = .903, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .89, $\chi2/df = 2.278$, and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) = .724. Additionally, all items loaded significantly on their respective constructs and support for convergent validity. Furthermore, we follow Fornell and Larcker (1981) for evaluating discriminant validity. As they suggested for each construct the squared root of AVE is greater than the latent factor correlations between pairs of constructs.

Table 1. Indicates reliabilities, correlations and descriptive statics for the scales. Moreover, Table 2 shows all reliability estimates, for each variable and Amos-based composite reliabilities.

Table 01. Correlation and descriptive statistics

Variables		1	2	3	4
Emotional Support	1	(.69)			
Exhaustion at Scholl	2	.-14**	(.63)		
Task P	3	.28**	.07	(.70)	
Career Optimism	4	.38**	.-05	.35**	(.63)
Mean		3.8	3.2	4.0	3.8
S. Deviation		.81	.93	.57	.64
CR		.81	.72	.83	.79
Cronbach Alpha		.81	.72	.83	.79

**p<.05, ***p < .01. Note: Numbers on diagonals indicate square root of AVE. No correlation is greater than the corresponding square root of AVE.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

In order to test the hypotheses (i.e. H1, H2, H3) we performed a structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis using AMOS. Table X demonstrates that the model adequately fits the data ($\chi2 : 402.03$ (df: 167), $\chi2$ /df: 2.40; RMSEA: 0.06; CFI: 0.89; IFI: 0.89). The findings also are indicated in Table X. For the relationship among emotional support and career optimism, we found that emotional support is positively related to career optimism ($\beta = .61$ $p < .01$). The findings for H2 -which predicted a negative relationship among exhaustion at schoolwork and career optimism- ($\beta = -.004$ $p > .01$) suggested that there is not a significant relationship among exhaustion at school work and career optimism in university students. For the relationship perceived task performance and career optimism, we found that perceived task performance is positively related to career optimism ($\beta = .29$ $p < .01$).

Table 02. Path Model

Hypotheses	Path	Path coefficient	t-value	Result
H1	Emotional Support.→ Career Opt	0,61	5,70[***]	Supported
H2	Exhaustion at schoolw→ Career Opt	0,04	-0,76	Not Supported
H3	Perceived Task P→ Career Opt	0,29	3,74[***]	Supported
	$\chi^2_{(681)}$ =402,03 CFI =,89 IFI =,89 TLI =.89 PNFI= .74 χ^2/df = 2,40 RMSEA=0,06			

*p < .1. , **p < .05. , ***p|<.01

5. Discussion and Implications

In this study our aim is to examine how various types of support (i.e. emotional) from the family domains and school related factors influence career optimism among university students. First, the findings of the study provide empirical evidence to human resource management literature that antecedents of career optimism. This study suggests that emotional support from the parents encourages students to be more optimistic in their career expectation. For example, if parents talk about the students' future anxieties, worries or fears it will provide an optimistic view to students' career planning attitudes. These findings tell parents that creating a family environment which encourages their children can have a great impact on individuals' career path. Additionally, parents' positive expectations about their children future job provide career optimism.

This study also contributes to career literature by presenting the relationship among perceived task performance and career optimism. First, this study empirically demonstrated that perceived task performance among university students is positively related to career optimism. It appears that students can be more optimistic about their future career by considering getting the task done and or accomplishing the tasks. The results provide evidence that task performance is important to career and influences students' optimism view of the career.

Interestingly, this study did not demonstrate any significant relationship among exhaustion at schoolwork and career optimism. The reason for this finding might be related to pressure of the schoolwork and want to escape from school and school works.

From a practical perspective it is important to note that parent support could be beneficial for young people to join labour market, specifically in Turkey which the unemployment rate is %13 (TUIK, 2017). By increasing students' optimism parents could provide to encourage young people for seeking job opportunities. Additionally, the research model could be evidence for the importance of enhancing an optimist view for future career. As a state (Kluemper, Little and DeGroot, 2009) optimism can be developed and or learned among university students.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Using cross-sectional design with questionnaire is our first limitation. Through questionnaire we cannot provide the real causality between variables. In this respect, experimental design can be performed for future studies.

Another limitation is the generalizability of the sample. We conducted this study with Turkish university students in Istanbul. Future studies can be investigated the effects of emotional support and exhaustion on career optimism in different cultural contexts and geographic areas.

We assessed only parental emotional support in this study. Future studies can assess friends and university support. For example, researchers can investigate what kinds of university policies (e.g. career days, career offices, training courses) influence career optimism. It may be beneficial to empirically investigate the role of family, friend and university support to students' career optimism or career path.

Furthermore, the study can guide future studies. For example, we focus on antecedents of career optimism; future research can examine the effects of career optimism on job success, job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment or task performance in workplace. In this respect, longitudinal studies can be conducted.

In sum, our findings emphasized the antecedents of career optimism in university students, which has received less attention in the related literature. The results indicate the importance of emotional support on career optimism and we believe that our findings encourage the researchers for future investigations.

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