



The Predictive Role of Life Skills on Career Anxiety: The Case of Vocational and Technical High Schools

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between life skills and career anxiety among students attending Vocational and Technical High Schools and investigated the predictive role of life skills in explaining career anxiety. The study was conducted with 385 eleventh- and twelfth-grade students enrolled in vocational and technical high schools in Ankara, Türkiye, during the 2023–2024 academic year. A quantitative correlational research design was employed. Data were collected using the Life Skills Scale and the Career Anxiety Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product–moment correlation analysis, and simple linear regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that students reported relatively high levels of life skills, with career planning emerging as the highest-rated dimension. Career anxiety levels were found to be moderate overall. Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant but weak negative relationship between life skills and career anxiety. Regression analysis showed that life skills significantly and negatively predicted career anxiety; however, the explained variance was limited ($R^2 = .02$). The findings suggest that students with stronger life skills tend to report lower levels of career anxiety, although life skills represent only one of several factors associated with career-related concerns. The study highlights the potential contribution of life skills education and career guidance practices in supporting students' career development processes within vocational and technical education settings.

Keywords: life skills, career anxiety, vocational and technical education, high school students, career planning

1 Introduction

Career development constitutes one of the most important developmental tasks during adolescence. In this period, students are expected to make educational and occupational decisions that may significantly influence their future lives. However, increasing uncertainty regarding educational pathways, labor market conditions, and occupational opportunities may create concerns about future careers. Such concerns are often reflected in career anxiety, which has become an important topic in educational and vocational research.

Career anxiety refers to concerns, uncertainty, and tension associated with career choice and future occupational outcomes (Çetin Gündüz & Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz, 2016). Given the developmental tasks associated with adolescence, such concerns may complicate career exploration and career decision-making processes, while personal resources such as career adaptability may facilitate more effective career development (Rudolph et al., 2017; Santilli et al., 2017).

At the same time, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of personal competencies that may help young people cope with developmental and career-related challenges. Among these competencies, life skills have received considerable attention. The World Health Organization (1999) defines life skills as adaptive and positive behaviors that enable individuals to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills encompass competencies such as self-awareness, effective communication, responsibility, problem-solving, decision-making, and future planning.

Previous research has demonstrated that life skills contribute positively to adolescents' psychological adjustment, resilience, interpersonal relationships, self-regulation, and well-being (Nasheeda et al., 2019). These competencies are particularly important during adolescence because students are required to make increasingly complex educational and occupational decisions while simultaneously coping with social, emotional, and academic demands.

Recent studies have further suggested that life skills may play an important role in career-related outcomes. Individuals possessing stronger self-awareness, communication, responsibility, and planning skills tend to demonstrate higher levels of career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, and future orientation (Rudolph et al., 2017; Santilli et al., 2017). Such competencies may enable students to evaluate career alternatives more effectively, cope with uncertainty, and make informed decisions regarding their future educational and occupational pathways. Consequently, life skills can be viewed as important personal resources that facilitate successful school-to-work transitions and career development processes.

Despite the growing literature on life skills and career development, relatively limited research has focused on the relationship between life skills and career anxiety, particularly among students attending Vocational and Technical High Schools. Existing studies have primarily examined academic achievement, psychological well-being, career adaptability, or career decision-making processes, whereas empirical evidence regarding the potential contribution of life skills to reducing career anxiety remains limited. This gap appears especially important within vocational education contexts, where students are expected to make career-related decisions at relatively early stages of their educational trajectories.

In this context, it is assumed that students' individual and social competencies may play an important role in coping with career-related anxiety. For students attending Vocational and Technical High Schools, life skills are important not only for managing daily life but also for making career-related decisions more realistic and manageable. In particular, the career planning dimension of life skills emerges as a critical factor in students' processes of goal setting and developing alternative pathways for the future.

Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to examine the extent to which life skills predict career anxiety among students attending Vocational and Technical High Schools. Within this framework, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the level of students' life skills?
2. What is the level of students' career anxiety?

3. What is the relationship between life skills and career anxiety?
4. Do life skills statistically significantly predict career anxiety?

2 Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the predictive role of life skills on career anxiety among students attending Vocational and Technical High Schools. Correlational research aims to determine the direction and strength of relationships among variables and to investigate the extent to which one variable predicts another (Karasar, 2015). In line with this purpose, the relationships between students' life skills and career anxiety levels were examined using correlation and regression analyses.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of 99,506 students enrolled in Vocational and Technical High Schools located in Ankara, the capital city of Türkiye (Ministry of National Education, 2023). Based on a 95% confidence level, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 382 participants. Accordingly, the final sample consisted of 385 students attending the 11th and 12th grades of Vocational and Technical High Schools in Ankara during the 2023–2024 academic year.

Participants were recruited through a convenience sampling procedure from Vocational and Technical High Schools in Ankara. Although the sample was not randomly selected, efforts were made to include students from different grade levels and socioeconomic backgrounds to enhance sample diversity. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, and 398 were returned, yielding a response rate of 94.8%. Following a review of the returned questionnaires, 13 forms were excluded because they contained incomplete or inconsistent responses. Consequently, the final analyses were conducted using data obtained from 385 students.

The sample consisted of 255 female students (66.2%) and 130 male students (33.8%). Regarding grade level, 191 students (49.6%) were enrolled in the 11th grade and 194 students (50.4%) were enrolled in the 12th grade. In terms of monthly family income, 87 students (22.6%) reported an income of 22,500 TRY or below, 181 students (47.0%) reported an income between 22,501 and 45,000 TRY, 80 students (20.8%) reported an income between 45,001 and 67,500 TRY, and 37 students (9.6%) reported an income of 67,501 TRY or above.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using the Life Skills Scale and the Career Anxiety Scale.

2.3.1 Life Skills Scale

Students' life skills were measured using the Life Skills Scale developed by Kutsal and Nazlı (2021). The scale consists of 16 items grouped into four dimensions: self-awareness, career planning, interpersonal communication, and problem solving. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of life skills.

In the original scale development study, confirmatory factor analysis supported the four-factor structure of the scale. Model fit indices indicated acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.62$, SRMR =

.05, RMSEA = .07, GFI = .92, NNFI = .91, and CFI = .93). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported for the overall scale were .83 and .81 across two independent samples.

In the present study, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the overall scale was calculated as .88. In addition, corrected item-total correlations ranged between .40 and .61, indicating satisfactory item discrimination and reliability.

2.3.2 Career Anxiety Scale

Career anxiety was assessed using the Career Anxiety Scale developed by Çetin Gündüz and Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz (2016). The scale consists of 14 items and two dimensions: anxiety related to career choice and anxiety related to family influence. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), with higher scores indicating higher levels of career anxiety.

The original validation study supported the two-factor structure of the scale. Confirmatory factor analysis yielded acceptable model fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.93$, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .07, GFI = .92, NNFI = .95, and CFI = .96). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported as .80 for the career-choice anxiety dimension and .74 for the family-influence anxiety dimension.

For the current sample, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as .92. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .51 to .75, indicating high internal consistency and strong item discrimination.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected during the 2023–2024 academic year with the cooperation of school administrators and teachers. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Prior to data collection, students were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

No personally identifying information was collected, and all responses were analyzed anonymously. Only students who agreed to participate voluntarily were included in the study.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Prior to the main analyses, the dataset was screened for accuracy, completeness, and compliance with statistical assumptions. No missing data were identified among the questionnaires included in the final analyses.

The normality assumption was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis coefficients. For the Life Skills Scale, skewness and kurtosis values were $-.52$ and $.61$, respectively, whereas for the Career Anxiety Scale, these values were $.16$ and $-.42$. Since all values fell within the acceptable range of ± 2 , the data were considered normally distributed (George & Mallery, 2010).

Additional evidence for normality was obtained by comparing mean, median, and mode values. The proximity of these statistics for both variables further supported the assumption of normality. Therefore, parametric statistical techniques were employed.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between life skills and career anxiety. Subsequently, simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine whether life skills significantly predicted career anxiety.

Prior to the regression analysis, assumptions related to normality, linearity, independence of errors, and multicollinearity were examined and found to be satisfactory. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

3 Results

The descriptive statistics indicated that students reported a relatively high level of life skills ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.72$). When the subdimensions were examined, self-awareness ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.94$), interpersonal communication ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.84$), problem solving ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.99$), and career planning ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.81$) were all found to be at a high level. Among these dimensions, career planning yielded the highest mean score, whereas self-awareness had the lowest mean score.

The overall level of career anxiety was found to be moderate ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.89$). Regarding the subdimensions, anxiety related to family influence was relatively low ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.90$), whereas anxiety related to career choice was at a moderate level ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.07$).

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between life skills and career anxiety. The results revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between the two variables ($r = -.14$, $p = .006$). This finding indicates that students with higher levels of life skills tend to report lower levels of career anxiety. However, according to conventional effect size criteria, the magnitude of this relationship was weak. Table 1 presents the correlation coefficient between the study variables.

Table 1: Correlation Between Life Skills and Career Anxiety

Variable	1	2
1. Life Skills	—	
2. Career Anxiety	-.14**	—

Note. $N = 385$. ** $p < .01$.

To determine whether life skills significantly predicted career anxiety, a simple linear regression analysis was performed. Prior to the analysis, the assumptions of regression were examined and found to be satisfactorily met.

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 383) = 7.71$, $p = .006$. Life skills significantly and negatively predicted career anxiety ($B = -0.175$, $SE = 0.063$, $\beta = -.140$, $t = -2.776$, $p = .006$). The 95% confidence interval for the unstandardized regression coefficient ranged from -0.299 to -0.051 .

The model explained approximately 2% of the variance in career anxiety ($R^2 = .020$, Adjusted $R^2 = .017$). Although the predictive effect was statistically significant, the explained variance was relatively small, suggesting that additional personal, familial, educational, and socioeconomic factors may contribute substantially to students' career anxiety.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Career Anxiety

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	3.157	0.240	—	13.169	< .001	[2.686, 3.629]
Life Skills	-0.175	0.063	-.140	-2.776	.006	[-0.299, -0.051]

Note. $R = .140$, $R^2 = .020$, Adjusted $R^2 = .017$, $F(1, 383) = 7.706$, $p = .006$.

4 Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between life skills and career anxiety among students attending Vocational and Technical High Schools. Students reported relatively high levels of life skills, particularly in the domain of career planning, whereas their overall career anxiety levels were found to be moderate. These findings suggest that although students generally perceive themselves as competent in managing daily and future-oriented challenges, concerns regarding educational and occupational transitions remain evident.

The correlation and regression analyses demonstrated that higher levels of life skills were associated with lower levels of career anxiety. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that personal competencies such as self-awareness, decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication function as psychological resources that facilitate adaptation to educational and career-related challenges (Kutsal & Nazlı, 2021; Santilli et al., 2017). Students who possess stronger life skills may be better equipped to evaluate career alternatives, cope with uncertainty, and manage future-oriented concerns, thereby experiencing lower levels of career anxiety.

Although life skills significantly predicted career anxiety, the magnitude of the relationship was weak, and the regression model explained only 2% of the variance in career anxiety. This finding suggests that career anxiety is a complex and multidimensional construct that cannot be adequately explained by a single predictor. Career-related concerns among adolescents are likely influenced by a combination of personal, familial, educational, and socioeconomic factors. For example, career adaptability, self-efficacy, parental expectations, perceived employability, academic achievement, labor market uncertainty, and access to career guidance services may play important roles in shaping students' career-related concerns (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Rudolph et al., 2017). Therefore, life skills should be regarded as one contributing factor among several variables influencing career anxiety.

An important finding of the study was that career planning emerged as the highest-rated dimension of life skills. This result may reflect the increasing emphasis placed on career decision-making during the final years of secondary education. Nevertheless, despite relatively high career planning scores, students continued to report moderate levels of career anxiety. This finding indicates that possessing career planning skills alone may not be sufficient to eliminate uncertainty regarding future educational and occupational opportunities. Particularly in vocational and technical education settings, concerns regarding employment prospects, university entrance examinations, economic conditions, and labor market expectations may continue to generate anxiety even among students who actively engage in career planning.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits causal interpretations. Second, the data were collected through self-report instruments, which may be affected by social desirability and response biases. Third, the sample was limited to students enrolled in Vocational and Technical High Schools in Ankara, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings and regions. Future studies may benefit from including additional variables such as career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, parental support, academic achievement, and perceived employability to develop more comprehensive explanatory models of career anxiety.

Several practical implications emerge from the findings. First, life skills education should be systematically integrated into guidance and counseling services in Vocational and Technical

High Schools. Programs focusing on self-awareness, problem-solving, communication, and decision-making skills may contribute to students' ability to cope with career-related challenges. Second, career guidance interventions should move beyond information provision and incorporate structured activities such as career exploration workshops, mentoring programs, individual career counseling, and career decision-making training. Third, family involvement initiatives may be beneficial, given that family-related expectations can influence students' career development processes. Finally, the effectiveness of such interventions should be evaluated through measurable outcomes, including changes in career anxiety, career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, and perceived employability.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that life skills are negatively associated with career anxiety among vocational and technical high school students. Although the predictive effect was modest, the findings highlight the potential role of life skills as a protective personal resource during the transition from school to work or higher education. Strengthening students' life skills through educational and counseling interventions may therefore represent one component of broader efforts aimed at supporting healthy career development and reducing career-related anxiety among adolescents.

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