

The Investigation of Turkish University Students' Vocational Self-Esteem Levels within  
Different Academic Departments

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Abstract

This research investigated the vocational self-esteem (VSE) of Turkish university students in different fields. This study compared the vocational self-esteem of candidates of different professions. The Vocational Self-Esteem Scale and the Personal Information Questionnaire, developed by Aricak (2001), was administered to 779 students from 13 departments. The students were from different regions of Turkey as well as from other countries. There are statistically significant differences between departments. Although students in the Department of English Language Teaching have the highest VSE, students in the Department of Physics have the lowest VSE. Female students obtained significantly higher VSE scores in comparison to male students. Failed students' VSE scores were lower than that of successful students. The VSE mean of the students who enrolled in their preferred academic department, as a first choice, is higher than that of those students whose departmental preference was ten or lower. The VSE of the students who were satisfied with their course of study was higher than that of those who were not satisfied.

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Vocation is a personal and social dimension of overwhelming importance in the developed and developing societies. Career is the realization of vocation during a life-time, vocation that is developmental in nature. Most biographies are stories of vocations or professions, or are the tales of individual character realization as they are told along the central thread of vocation. Vocation, together with age, sex and education, account for the bulk of variance in many measured psychological characteristics. Hence the study and direction of procedures by which individuals determine and enter their careers are of the greatest social and personal significance (Harris, 1974).

Vocation has an important role in the process of describing and giving meaning to one's life and his/herself as a person. A person obtains status in society, makes money by means of his/her occupation, and builds his/her future on this basis. Super and Bohn (1970) suggested that vocation influences directly the individual's life process and life-satisfaction. This is an important phenomenon that gives meaning to man's life. Maslow (1971) expressed that self-actualized people are devoted to their vocation, and when they say "my work", they are referring to their mission in life.

The congruent match of person and career contributes significantly to satisfaction with life and personal self-esteem. Career development is a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout the life-span. When a person's career involves work that contributes positively to the greater society there is greater self-esteem, higher satisfaction with life, and enhanced personal meaningfulness and social connection. For this person, it is a joy to work, and that reinforces pleasure in other aspects of living. All too often, however, the reality is that a person's career detracts from his/her self-esteem, promotes dissatisfaction with life, and contributes to a heightened sense of

meaninglessness and social isolation. In this person's experience, work is simply another energy-draining activity that compounds personal stress and negatively impacts other aspects of life (McIntosh, 2000).

### Self Concept and Vocation

Some psychologists have investigated the relationship between the self and vocation; however, they tended to describe the career development process in very general terms. Their descriptions were probably more general than were useful to researchers or practitioners, unfortunately. The major exceptions were Super's and Holland's revised theories, which have taken on an increasingly applied and operational function. As a conceptual model, Super's theory seems to be the most highly developed and advanced (Osipow, 1973).

Super's most important contribution has been his developmental self-concept theory of vocational behavior. He and his followers have investigated the relationship between self-concept and vocational self-concept; both their differentiation and integration. The discrepancies between self-concepts and vocational role requirements, between ideal vocational concepts and required vocational role, and between actual self-concepts and ideal role concepts are inversely related to job satisfaction. That is, the greater the difference between self-image and job image, the less the satisfaction the person experiences on the job (Super & Bohn, 1970).

According to Super et al. (1963; 1970), self-concept is an organization of a person's perceptions about himself. It has usually been considered to be the picture that a person has of himself. Self percepts are observed facts, and percepts take on meaning as they are related to other percepts. Self-concepts are self percepts which have acquired meaning and

which have been related to other self percepts. Self-concepts differ in level of complexity. Complexity is one of several meta-dimensions of the self-concept. Lower-level or simple self-concepts are derived from one or a small number of related self percepts which have acquired meaning, with the result that a simple stimulus evokes a concept. Simple self-concepts are organized into higher-level or complex self-concepts through abstraction and generalization. In their most complex form, they are organized around some status or role. The complex self-concept is organized within the framework of a role. Briefly, complex concepts are an organization of simple concepts.

### Vocational Self Concept

Vocational self-concept is another important term in vocational development. The term may also be used to denote the various self-concepts which are believed to be relevant to vocational choice and success, which are, in other words, translated into a vocational preference.

According to Super et al. (1963), vocational self-concept is the constellation of self attributes considered by the individual to be vocationally relevant, whether or not they have been translated into a vocational preference. Vocational self-concept develops parallel with self-concept, and is an expression of the self-concept in vocational terms. According to Super (1968), in expressing a vocational preference, a person uses vocational terminology to describe his idea of the kind of person he is; that in entering a vocation, he seeks to implement a concept of himself. Self-actualization is an unintended consequence of a successful vocational choice. The vocation thus makes possible the playing of a role appropriate to the self-concept.

Agreement between the self-concept and one's own vocational concept is related to vocational preferences and to both internal and external criteria of success and satisfaction. Even more, vocational self-concepts are a function of perception of the vocational role expectations of important persons, and are related to the level of attainment in a vocation (Super, 1968).

Vocational self esteem: A derivative definition that is based upon Super's theory

Super (1963), who described vocational self-concept as an expression of self-concept in occupational terms, considered self-esteem as a meta-dimension of self-concept. Super, who suggested that self-esteem has a very important role in vocational preference, likely had not used vocational or professional self-esteem terms since vocational self-concept could explain vocational choice. The terms "*vocational or professional self-esteem*" do not exist in the published books and articles of vocational development theorists. There are very few dissertations on this issue. So what is vocational self-esteem?

Vocational self-esteem is a derivative concept that is based upon Super's theory. It can be defined thusly: "vocational self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness of those self-attributes considered by the individual to be vocationally relevant as they have been translated into a vocational preference". Vocational esteem is a general attitude, but vocational self-esteem is a specific and personal attitude (Aricak, 1999, p.89-90). For example, when we say "respect for the teaching profession" we mean an attitude generally held by people who are not teachers. However, when we say "vocational self-esteem toward teaching", we are referring to an attitude held by a teacher.

If we look at the other literature, we can see some similar definitions about vocational/professional self-esteem. For instance, according to Tinsley (2002, p.16),

“professional self-esteem is an individual’s self-esteem specifically in regard to his or her professional position and acceptance in that professional role”. Also according to Kunes-Connell (1991, p. 34), “occupational self-esteem is an organized view of one’s worth in the work role based on an evaluation of the self in relation to perceptions held about: (1) competency in work-related interpersonal relationships and (2) ability to achieve own role expectations”.

Vocational self-esteem develops along with vocational self-concept. It is strongly linked to vocational self-concept. Its borders begin to appear by vocational preference, become clearer by professional training, and finally consolidate through professional practice.

Very little research exists on vocational and professional self-esteem of different occupations’ members and on university students, worldwide. Kunes-Connell’s (1991) research of psychiatric nurses, Zieff’s (1996) research of clinical psychology students, Ludwig’s (2000) study of physician assistant students and Tinsley’s (2002) study of teacher educators in Texas represent some of them. Generally, these research articles focused on only one vocational or professional group. However, this research was conducted on university students from different fields.

Finally, the purpose of this research is to investigate vocational self-esteem (VSE) of university students in different fields. It is commonly accepted that higher education is the apex of professional training. This level should be very important for developing vocational self-concept and vocational self-esteem. This study will attempt to compare the vocational self-esteem of different vocations’ candidates.

## Method

### Participants

The research population is comprised of the students of Trakya University in Edirne Turkey, who were selected from the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science and Letters, and the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (only the Department of Mechanical Engineering however). Eight hundred and sixty students from thirteen different departments participated in the research, although 81 subjects were omitted from the sampling due to incomplete responses. Three hundred and five of the subjects were male and 474 were female. The students were from different regions of Turkey as well as from other countries. A regional analysis revealed that the largest percentage of participants were from Marmara (37.4%) and Thrace (20.8%). The distributions according to departments (Table 1), year in university (Table 2), and regions (Table 3) are noted in the following tables:

Table 1

*Distribution of Students According to Departments*

Departments	<i>f</i>	%
Elementary Teaching	170	21.8
Science Teaching	47	6.0
English Language Teaching	53	6.8
German Language Teaching	29	3.7
Fine Arts Teaching	24	3.1
Mechanical Engineering	66	8.5
Physics	40	5.1
Chemistry	46	5.9
Biology	137	17.6
Mathematics	65	8.3
History	35	4.5
Turkish Philology	47	6.0
Archaeology & Art History	20	2.6
Total	779	100



Table 2

*Distribution of Students According to Year in University*

Year	<i>f</i>	%
First Year	290	37.2
Second Year	195	25.0
Third Year	170	21.8
Fourth Year	124	15.9
Total	779	100

Table 3

*Distribution of Students According to Region*

Region	<i>f</i>	%
Thrace	162	20.8
Marmara	291	37.4
Aegean	58	7.4
The Mediterranean	47	6.0
Middle Anatolia	53	6.8
The Black Sea	40	5.1
Eastern Turkey	69	8.9
Other Countries	59	7.6
Total	779	100

## Materials

The Vocational Self-Esteem Scale (VSES), developed by Aricak (2001), was used to explore students' VSE levels. VSES is a Likert type attitude scale which consists of five levels. The first level is "I strongly agree"; the second, "I agree"; the third, "I am undecided"; the fourth, "I disagree"; and the fifth, "I strongly disagree". Its content validity and construct validity were tested by Aricak (2001). Its alpha coefficient was .93 (n=152) and test-re-test coefficient was .90 (n=92). The analyses were performed based upon total scores. High scores show high VSE; low scores show low VSE. At the same time, a Personal Information Questionnaire (PIQ) consisting of eight questions was used in the research.

## Procedure

Both the VSES and the PIQ were group administered according to academic departments. It took about 20 minutes for one group. All administration was completed in one month. Then data were entered to computer and analyzed in SPSS for Windows.

## Results

The t-test was applied when differences between two variables were examined. The One-Way ANOVA test was utilized when three or more variables were examined. If the ANOVA results were significant (ie., <.05), the Scheffe test was applied across variables in order to make comparisons. Descriptive analyses are presented below.

Means of VSE, standard deviation, and standard error values of students from different departments are shown in Table 4. One-Way ANOVA was computed for departments. There are significant differences between students' VSE from different departments,  $F(12, 766) = 6.75, p < .001$ .

Table 4

*VSE Means, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of Departments*

Departments	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
Elementary Teaching	170	121.38	19.91	1.53
Science Teaching	47	119.74	20.11	2.93
English Language Teaching	53	131.09	12.11	1.66
German Language Teaching	29	112.62	16.95	3.15
Fine Arts Teaching	24	130.08	15.76	3.22
Mechanical Engineering	66	116.11	21.33	2.62
Physics	40	105.72	20.94	3.31
Chemistry	46	122.76	18.64	2.75
Biology	137	115.75	18.12	1.55
Mathematics	65	119.12	15.98	1.98
History	35	110.80	26.58	4.49
Turkish Philology	47	124.87	16.31	2.38
Archaeology & Art History	20	108.50	16.71	3.74
Total	779	118.94	19.66	0.70

As shown in Table 4, although the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) has the highest mean ( $M = 131.09$ ,  $SD = 12.11$ ), Department of Physics has the lowest mean ( $M = 105.72$ ,  $SD = 20.94$ ).

The Scheffe test was performed in order to make inter-departmental comparisons. The Scheffe test result shows that ELT students have significantly higher VSE than

Physics ( $p<.001$ ), Biology ( $p<.05$ ) and History ( $p<.05$ ) students' VSE. Also Elementary Teaching, Fine Arts Teaching and Turkish Philology students have significantly higher VSE than Physics students' VSE ( $p<.05$ ).

There is a significant difference between students' VSE based upon gender [ $t(777)=-5.89, p<0.001$  (two-tailed)]. Female students' VSE ( $M = 122.20, SD = 18.58$ ) are revealed to be higher than male students' VSE ( $M = 113.88, SD = 20.24$ ).

There is a significant difference noted between students' VSE in terms of their success in coursework, based upon pass/fail criteria [ $t(777) = 2.75, p<0.01$ , (two-tailed)]. Failed students' VSE ( $M = 116.83, SD = 19.96, n = 355$ ) is lower than that of successful students ( $M = 120.71, SD = 19.25, n = 424$ ).

In Table 5, VSE means, standard deviation, and standard error values of the students are reported according to preferential rank. One-way ANOVA test was applied for VSE levels according to departmental preference rankings. There are statistically significant differences between vocational self-esteem means of the students according to their preferential ranking of departments on a university entrance examination,  $F(9, 769) = 6.02, p<0.001$ .

Table 5

*VSE Means, Standard Deviation and Standard Error Values According to Students'*

*Departmental Preference Ranking*

Preferential Ranking	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
First Preference	205	124.89	18.09	1.26
Second Preference	62	123.24	18.34	2.33
Third Preference	50	120.92	18.99	2.69
Fourth Preference	56	115.64	18.35	2.45
Fifth Preference	46	118.43	22.99	3.39
Sixth Preference	42	120.71	18.32	2.83
Seventh Preference	50	119.68	17.69	2.50
Eighth Preference	27	117.67	17.88	3.44
Ninth Preference	34	119.29	15.98	2.74
Tenth and Lower Preference	207	111.86	20.63	1.43
Total	779	118.94	19.66	0.70

As seen in Table 5, students who have the highest mean are those who enrolled in their first departmental choice; those who have the lowest mean are the students who enrolled in their tenth (or lower) departmental choice. The Scheffe test was applied to the data to determine the significant differences between preference groups. In the result of the Scheffe test, only there is a significant difference between first preference and tenth or lower preference.

The levels of VSE of the students ( $M = 122.09$ ,  $SD = 16.98$ ,  $n = 696$ ) who are satisfied with the department in which they study are higher than the VSE levels of the students ( $M = 92.54$ ,  $SD = 20.77$ ,  $n = 83$ ) who are not pleased with their department ( $t = 14.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

## Discussion

This research is the first study regarding vocational self-esteem of Turkish university students studying in different departments at Trakya University. In this researcher's opinion, considering that all Turkish universities draw their student populations from multiple regions of Turkey, this research sample is believed to be representative.

If the students' vocational self-esteem means are examined, it is revealed that there are statistically significant differences between departments. This finding is probably unique because there was no other finding on this issue in the literature. The Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) has the highest vocational self-esteem mean. It is believed that the high mean obtained by the Department of ELT is due to the unique features of that department and ELT's current popularity as a profession in Turkey. One of the most needed branches in both public and private schools in developing countries is English language instruction. This career field is in high demand and thus offers high employability and promise of great economic gain. In addition, the students within the Department of ELT assimilate English culture and literature while learning English language teaching techniques.

The Department of Fine Arts Teaching has a higher vocational self-esteem mean than all other departments save the Department of ELT. This department selects its

students via a special ability examination and consists of students whose creative ability is highly developed in at least one artistic area. It could be expected that the students in this department would endorse test items reflecting high vocational self-esteem because artists in general possess a high degree of independence and intrinsic motivation, and additionally, this profession is considered desirable in Turkey due to its international popularity.

The Physics and Archaeology and History of Art departments produced the lowest vocational self-esteem means. It is hypothesized that students graduating from these departments experience intensive anxiety about the future of their careers since they have serious difficulties finding a job in Turkey after graduation. This post-graduate employment problem is also the same for the students majoring in History and German Language Teaching.

It is an interesting finding that female students possess a higher vocational self-esteem mean than male students. It is important to discuss this finding with respect to Turkey. When it is looked at the literature, it is seen that there are very limited findings on this issue. For example, in Stake's research, he used Performance Self-Esteem Scale (PSES) to examine professional self-esteem of men and women in college, and he found that college men's scores were higher than college women's score (Zieff, 1996). According to Ludwig (2000) there is a difference between males and females, but what real issue is their perception on some professional and environmental factors. In general, the interdependent identity and independent identity describe women and men respectively. The independent identity is one of maintenance of a sense of autonomy, relying only on oneself, and placing one's goals above the needs and goals of others.

Historically, Turkish women have assumed solely the role of housewife and mother regardless of their level of educational attainment. Turkish societal expectations are slowly evolving to embrace the idea that women are competent professionals and can live self-fulfilling lives occupying both roles. Higher education has developed women's self-confidence, self-image, and autonomy, and has given them economic freedom.

The vocational self-esteem mean of students who are academically successful is higher than the vocational self-esteem mean of unsuccessful students. It would seem logical that students whose academic achievements are higher would report greater vocational self-esteem. Fleming and Courtney contend that, just as academic self-esteem is important to the child and adolescent's performance in the school setting, vocational self-esteem may be equally important to the adult's performance in the work setting (Kunes-Connell (1991).

The vocational self-esteem mean of the students who enrolled in their preferred academic department, as a first choice, is higher (ie., at the significant level) than that of those students whose departmental preference was ten or lower. As mentioned in the paragraph above, this would be an expected outcome. Additionally, the vocational self-esteem level of the students who were satisfied with their course of study is higher than that of those who were not satisfied. Westerlund (1996) showed that vocational self-esteem was affected by positive occupational climate. Shak (1980) also stated that person-environment congruence is positively related to vocational satisfaction, vocational self-esteem, and job involvement.

In conclusion, this study identifies variables that affect the vocational self-esteem levels of Turkish university students who receive their education in different departments



at Trakya University. It is believed that replication of this study through cross-cultural research at the post-secondary university level would be a valuable contribution to the field.

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