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Program Evaluation of Career Development Services in Five Turkish Schools: A Preliminary Study

ABSTRACT

School counselors in Turkey, like in many other countries, are tasked with providing career development services within the broader school curriculum. Yet, both globally as well as in Turkey, the unemployment rate among youth continues to rise. In addition, Turkey is home to thousands of Syrian refugees largely concentrated in four cities, creating another layer of challenge for school counselors as career development providers. Effective programs are essential more than ever before, yet very few rigorous efforts at evaluating such programs are in place. In Turkey there are some recent policies governing both career practices and their evaluation, which represents a promising beginning for evaluating these programs locally and nationally. This preliminary qualitative study aims to provide such an example of program evaluation by measuring six key components as identified by the *Career Builders Toolkit*, an empirically based tool designed to develop and evaluate career and workforce development programs. Five school counseling programs in the city of Gaziantep, Turkey (which is among the cities with a very high Syrian refugee populations), were purposefully selected. Their program materials were content analyzed and, encoded around the *Career Builders Toolkit* six key components, were rated as

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being *Sufficient*, *Existing*, or *Absent*, thus providing information about the growth areas still needed in these school-based career development curricula. Among the largest growth areas identified were trainer curriculum and evaluation. Implications for policy, research, and practice are provided based on a Tripartite Model of Program Evaluation.

KEYWORDS: career development programs, program evaluation, school counseling, career practice, the tripartite model, career builders toolkit.

High school years are crucial for career development as well as academic and social/emotional growth of young people (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). The question is when and how to introduce and prepare youth for the world of work. Being proactive and preventive, school counseling curricula should attend to best practice guidelines in order to maximize positive student outcomes (ASCA, 2012; Whiston, Tai, Rahrdja, & Eder, 2011).

Similarly, the European Commission pointed out the role of schools in promoting vocational development competencies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2003). Congruent with international attempts, Turkey has recently identified school counselors' roles as assessing students' academic, social, and career needs, developing school counseling programs accordingly, and continuously evaluating and improving upon these programs (Mesleki Yeterlik Kurumu [MYK], 2017a).

Despite such inherent aims within educational systems, global youth unemployment and poverty rates are increasing at alarming rates in both developing and developed countries (International Labour Organization, 2016). The Turkish Statistics Institution (2017) Youth Report of 2016 indicated that 24% of youth in Turkey are neither enrolled in education programs nor employed, with a rate of increasing youth unemployment rate by 19.6 percent. Moreover, the refugee crisis created by the 2011 Syrian civil war has dramatically increased Turkey's informal employment sector (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, 2016). Furthermore, 54 percent of Syrian refugees in Turkey are aged 0–18; 830,000 of

refugee children are school-aged, and the rate of newborn babies has been rapidly increasing since these refugee families have resettled (UNICEF, 2016). These dynamics pose serious implications for the potential workforce of the future and the need for effective career development programs in Turkey.

In Turkish schools, the role of school counselors, and at times, classroom guidance teachers, are prominent in the delivery of both academic and career/guidance services (Korkut, 2007). In sum, career guidance is integrated into the school curriculum in Turkey. Best practice templates are provided by guidance and research centers, and school counselors are tasked with developing their own programs to meet the unique needs of their schools.

The existing literature highlights the importance of program evaluation as well as a connection between policy, research, and practice (Nassar, Al-Qimlass, & Karacan, 2019). The current preliminary study serves to illustrate a systemic process of evaluating effectiveness of career programs and services incorporated into annual school counseling programs in Turkey. The research questions guiding our preliminary study are: to what extent are the specific evaluation criteria *Sufficient*, *Existent*, or *Absent* in the career development programs selected for our study. To respond to the increasing demands for effective career development programs (Simons, Goddard, & Patton, 2000), it is our hope that our study results will inform practitioners (and researchers and policy makers) in their evaluation efforts, and subsequently, to enhance and improve upon their career development programs accordingly.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative study. Document analyses were conducted on annual school counseling programs, specifically by employing content analysis. The sample consisted of five high

schools purposefully selected from within the city of Gaziantep (Turkey), located in the district with the highest unemployment rates nationally (Turkish Statistics Institution, 2018).

An evaluation tool selected as relevant for this study was the *Career Builders Toolkit: A Guide for Creating, Evaluating, and/or Enhancing Career Counseling and Youth Support Programs in Global Workforce Development* (Nassar, Al-Qimlass, Tovar, & Karacan-Ozdemir, 2017). This tool was developed based on the results of a Delphi study conducted world-wide to attain consensus among experts across policy, research, and practice domains (Nassar, Al-Qimlass, Karacan-Ozdemir, & Tovar, 2019). The Toolkit details 41 considerations for career practitioners (also researchers and policy makers), organized around its six key components: 1) Holistic, Systemic, Comprehensive Framework, 2) Needs Assessment, 3) Trainer Curriculum, 4) Participant Curriculum, 5) Delivery, and 6) Program Development. One of the intended uses for the *Toolkit* is program evaluation, utilizing the following criterion to determine growth needs within career and workforce development programs: *Sufficient* (2) signifies that there is no additional growth need for that consideration; *Existent* (1) denotes that the program already has some features included in this consideration but should be improved; and *Absent* (0) indicates that there is a high need for growth as features addressed within this consideration are lacking.

We obtained school counseling program documents for the 2017–2018 academic term from school counselors across the five participating schools. Based on Schreier's (2014) recommendation, the *Toolkit* was used as a encoding schema for the evaluation of the programs and by applying the associated evaluation criteria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we provide a numerical representation of the evaluation of the six Key Components in the Toolkit; along with a subsequent discussion in terms of strengths and weaknesses of the programs regarding their respective career and workforce development interventions (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Results on the Components and their corresponding considerations.

Component 1: Holistic, Systematic and Comprehensive Framework	Absent	Existing	Sufficient
1. Include programs that are both developmental and progressive (age-specific, lifelong).	0	1	4
2. Address the unique characteristics and needs of the participant groups (customizable, culturally appropriate).	0	1	4
3. Utilize conventional and new, innovative theories to inform career and workforce development programs for youth.	5	0	0
4. Focus on programs, trainings, and information that have practical applications (evidence-based, information and/or access to financial services).	0	5	0
5. Be rooted within the community (input from multiple institutions and organizations, awareness and support throughout the community).	0	5	0
Component 2: Needs Assessment			
1. Aspects of implementation (process, logistics and accessibility issues).	3	2	0
2. Include a wide range of factors impacting youth (talents, skills, values, etc., should consider challenges that have traditionally impacted youth).	3	2	0
3. Current state of the community (current/pre-existing community factors, labor demand, etc.).	2	2	1

4. Individual stakeholder groups (parents, counselors and researchers/scholars).	2	2	1
5. Programmatic stakeholder groups (educational, employment and social programs, including other youth and advocacy organizations).	1	1	3
6. Professional stakeholder groups (local and regional agencies, private sector industry, trade unions and professional associations).	5	0	0
7. Collaboration between all stakeholders (system for communication with stakeholders, and diverse and specific goals agreed upon by multiple stakeholders).	0	5	0
Component 3: Trainer Curriculum			
1. Utilize the most appropriate personnel in providing career and workforce development programs for youth.	5	0	0
2. Include theories and techniques of helping and career development.	5	0	0
3. Develop using multiple sources.	5	0	0
4. Address psychosocial needs.	2	3	0
5. Include operational and business components of an effective global youth workforce development program.	5	0	0
Component 4: Participant Curriculum			
1. Develop using multiple sources.	0	4	1
2. Include a curriculum for parents/family members.	4	0	1
3. Include a curriculum for other community members/stakeholders.	5	0	0
4. Recruit target participants through various avenues.	3	1	1
5. Incorporate effective career education and guidance components.	0	4	1
6. Incorporate effective technical and vocational training components.	5	0	0

7. Incorporate effective soft skills training components.	0	2	3
8. Incorporate effective transferable skills training components.	0	4	1
Component 5: Program Delivery			
1. Respond to the realities of its participants and the community.	4	1	0
2. Be feasible and accessible to its participants.	0	4	1
3. Include different approaches to curriculum delivery.	2	3	0
4. Make sure that an effective delivery of career and workforce development programs incorporates participants and stakeholders.	1	4	0
5. Include individual interventions.	3	1	1
6. Include group interventions.	0	3	2
7. Include peer-to-peer interactions.	4	1	0
8. Incorporate technology.	1	4	0
Component 6: Evaluation			
1. Utilize the fundamentals as related to its development and implementation.	0	5	0
2. Utilize clear operational definitions of items to be measured.	3	2	0
3. Include observations from multiple aspects of the program.	5	0	0
4. Include intervention research with a view to analyzing and evaluating the program itself.	5	0	0
6. Include key outputs and outcomes related to participant variables.	5	0	0
7. Include key outputs and outcomes related to program and community related variables.	1	4	0
8. Utilize methodological rigor when identifying and measuring the key outputs and outcomes.	4	1	0

Component 1 considerations were frequently addressed by the programs. In particular, developmental and progressive characteristics such as being age-specific and lifelong were *sufficient* as mentioned in the relevant literature. Bimrose, Barnes, and Brown (2005) summarized the characteristics of effective guidance as immediate (e.g., promoting enhancement of skills), intermediate (e.g., supporting career planning activities), and long-term outcomes (e.g., prompting productivity), which implies being progressive and age-specific, and parallels the European Commission's directive that career education and guidance programs apply a developmental approach (OECD, 2003). The programs addressed unique characteristics and needs of the participant groups (e.g., customizable and culturally appropriate programs) *sufficiently* such as focusing on the reality of Turkish university entrance exams in keeping with the previous literature (Yeşilyaprak, 2012). On the other hand, the *consideration* of utilizing conventional, new and innovative theories, to our mind, was weakly represented in the programs. Most of them employed traditional trait-and-factor approaches, seemingly inconsistent with prior research findings (e.g., Akkök & Watts, 2003; Karacan-Ozdemir & Ayaz, 2018).

A regards Component 2, *Needs Assessment*, some of the considerations were rated as *insufficient*, such as implementation (i.e. logistic and accessibility issues), a wide range of factors impacting young people, inclusive of individual or professional stakeholder groups such as parents, teachers, local agencies, etc. Conducting needs assessment has recently become compulsory through a recent regulation of MoNE (2017). In some ways this preliminary study meets that directive.

Component 3, *Trainer Curriculum*, was largely lacking in the school counseling programs. In particular, the first consideration suggests special training as best practice. In Turkey, school counselors do four-year undergraduate courses to take theoretical and practical classes in vocational guidance. However, profession-

als affiliated with different disciplines, such as sociology and philosophy, can work as school counselors by only having attended a one-month training course (Doğan, 1998; Stockton & Yerin-Güneri, 2011). This one-month course is not enough for them to be able to adequately deal with crisis, trauma, and other psychosocial issues. Therefore, it is still necessary to train trainers. The remaining considerations, such as applied and practical theories and techniques, curriculum input from multiple sources and operational and business components (e.g., social entrepreneurial skills, coaching and marketing skills) were *absent* and not consistent with best practice advice offered by the literature (e.g., OECD, 2003; Hooley, Marriott, Watts, & Coiffait, 2012) or with the continuous learning competencies expected from career counselors and professionals in Turkey and Europe (e.g., Cedefop, 2009; MYK, 2017b; Schiersmann et al., 2012).

Component 5, *Program Delivery*, was represented across programs, but *not sufficiently*. For instance, the criteria that responding to the realities of students and schools (e.g., socio-economic conditions, feasibility and accessibility, inclusion of individual and group interventions, and incorporation of technology) were all *observed* in the programs. Yet, the existing literature underscores the criticality of addressing career developmental needs and barriers of different cultural groups in counseling programs and the entire K-12 curriculum (Mau & Bilkos, 2000; Krass & Hughey, 1999). The school programs were chosen from Gaziantep which has absorbed 19.22% of Syrian refugees (Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, 2017), with 1515 Syrian students enrolled in its schools in 2014 (Sandal, Hançerkıran, & Tıraş, 2016). It does not appear that these programs responded adequately to the realities of the refugee crisis within its community. Another *consideration* that was deemed weak in the programs is the incorporation of technology, which is not inconsistent with the situation in other areas of Turkey (Yeşilyaprak, 2017) and also in many other countries (Bimrose et al., 2005; Institute of

Educational Sciences, 2012). The National Vocational Information System (NVIS), launched in 2010 through MoNE as an online career assessment and planning platform (Korkut-Owen & Yerin Güneri, 2015), was almost the only web-based technology incorporated in the school programs.

Most critically, *Evaluation* was assessed as the sixth and final key consideration for effective career and workforce development programs. The use of the fundamentals for developing and implementing programs (such as determining common goals and outcomes regarding the program and community) and the employment of simple evaluation tools were represented in the programs, but *not sufficiently*. For instance, school guidance committees met at the beginning of the academic year to consider student needs and to set goals accordingly, and eventually evaluate the programs and interventions applied. In addition, the evaluations required by the MoNE annually only reflect outputs (e.g., numeric values of interventions and attendees (see http://orgm.meb.gov.tr/) rather than detailed evaluation data such as that referenced in the *Tookit*. Despite the oft-cited need for stronger evaluation of career guidance programs (e.g., Baudouin et al., 2007), our finding is consistent with the prior research findings in Turkey and elsewhere underscoring the need for better comprehensive evaluation (e.g., Akkök & Watts, 2003; Akkök, 2006). For example, while one study suggested that nearly 35% of practitioners reported evaluating their work (Lalande, Hiebert, Magnusson, Bezanson, & Borgen, 2006); another study showed that 40% of them did not (Conger, Hiebert, & Hong-Farrell, 1994).

CONCLUSION

This preliminary study sought to evaluate school counseling programs in terms of career and workforce development interventions in five Turkish schools. As mentioned in the introductory

section, program evaluation efforts are the most effective if they are carried out across the three inter-connected domains of policy, research, and practice, as shown in Figure 1, the *Tripartite Model of Program Evaluation*. The evaluation process should be guided by best practices such as those of provided nationally in Turkey, inform the synergistic connection across the three domains, and ultimately yield reiterative best practices. Below are some implications for each of these inter-connected domains as well as some prospective best practices that this preliminary program evaluation study indicates.

Figure 1. *Tripartite Model of Program Evaluation* (Nassar, Al-Qimlass, & Karacan-Ozdemir, 2019).

In Turkey, the provision of career counseling and guidance is one of the main tasks of school counselors (Yerin-Güneri, Büyükgöze Kavas, & Koydemir, 2007), and as such is integrated into annual school guidance programs. This preliminary examination of five Turkish schools suggests that the career services in the schools evaluated are more or less adequate in their response to the realities of the surrounding community and the broader Turkish education system, especially in implementing age-specific, life-long programs. In addition, most likely in response to re-

cently mandated policies, to some extent the programs included needs assessment procedures and included community, schools, and teachers. At the same time, they still lack parental involvement, which needs to be better incorporated. Another finding of this preliminary study is that there is the still critical need for systematic evaluation of the programs. As prescribed in the *Career Builders Toolkit*, school counselors should be mindful of implicit and explicit purposes of their programs and then outline expected outputs and outcomes accordingly. They can also elect to incorporate other considerations provided within the evaluation component of this tool to evaluate and improve their evaluation method and process. What is more, MoNE can use the findings of this preliminary study to improve its evaluation template for school counselors to gather better information that can be more relevant for the guiding policy-makers. Furthermore, this study implied a need for those professionals in school counseling roles who do not have the traditional educational training in school counseling. This also represents a critical initiative that will need to be driven by a policy change and corresponding national funding. In summary, while the programs that were evaluated in this preliminary study are providing adequate services, there are several areas in need of enhancement and improvement.

In summary, several limitations of the study should be pointed out. The sample consisted of only five Anatolian high schools in Gaziantep, a city in eastern Turkey, where the Syrian refugee population is exceptionally high, thus the findings cannot be generalized for other regions. Nevertheless, future research can evaluate the programs from other types of high schools such as science, art, and vocational high schools as well as schools from different regions of Turkey. Next, this study assumed that school counselors' self-reports provided an accurate representation of their school-based career guidance services. Future developments in program evaluation of career and guidance interventions in Turkish schools could involve a Turkish version of the *Career*

Builders Toolkit so that school counselors will be empowered to evaluate their own program initiatives and efforts.

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