

CY-ICER 2012

Assessment of Turkish adolescents' future orientations in their life scripts: a qualitative study

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate into Turkish adolescents' future orientations. In the study, both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were used. The research group is composed of a total of 70 eleventh grade students (47 girls, 23 boys) aged between 17-18 years old. The study data was collected through life scripts covering ten years written by volunteer students. The students' scripts were analyzed by using the content analysis method. The categories prepared for the content analysis were formed based on the literature. The content categories used were specified as education, profession, relation with the opposite sex, and military service. The analysis of the data was made by using N-Vivo program. The results of the study indicate that although a great majority of adolescents would like to continue higher education, more than half of those do not have clear thoughts about their future professions, relationships with the opposite sex and military service.

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Keywords: Future, future orientation, life script, adolescence;

1. Introduction

Future orientation is defined as individuals' thoughts and dreams about their future (Nurmi, 1993; Seginer, 2003). Individuals' having aims, plans and expectations about future is an important dimension in their motivating themselves (Nuttin & Lens, 1985) and causes their lives to prolong (Seginer & Lilach, 2004). Future orientation lays groundwork for an individual's recognizing alternatives and making plans for the future and thus guides during an individual's developmental stages (Bandura, 2001; Nurmi, 1991; Seginer, 2003). In adolescence, making plans for the future and being able to define these, and setting up goals are considered as an important developmental task (Havighurst, 1972; Seginer, 2000). Future orientation is a multi-dimensional, important concept including such elements as optimism, pessimism, realism, and sense of control (Mc Kabe & Barnett, 2000; Nurmi, 1989). In western societies, adolescents' dreaming about themselves as adults of the future and making their own preferences are expected to perform traditional tasks to acquire adult status (Arnet, 2000). When moving from childhood into adulthood, on the one hand adolescents develop physically, emotional and cognitively, while on the other they prepare themselves for the future and dream about what kind of a person they will be and what kind of a life they want. For this reason, in the period of adolescence, the concept of "future" is of great importance.

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Adolescents' thoughts about their future and goals they determine in the direction of these thoughts vary in all cultures depending on age (Greene, 1990; Hutchinson, 1996), gender roles (Hutchinson, 1998, Lanz, Rosnati, Marta & Scabini, 2001; Nurmi, Poole & Kalokoski, 1994), family's educational status and socio-economic level (Cooper, Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira & Gullat, 2002), academic success (Salmelo-Aro, Nurmi & Ruotsalainen, 1995), and personality characteristics (Seginer & Lilach, 2004). Educational and school experiences are another factor affecting future orientations. A person's regarding him/herself as a sufficient personality is determined by school experiences (Ruiz Alfonso, Insa & Gonzales, 2003). Adolescents' regarding themselves as academically insufficient affects their future expectations negatively (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi & Ruotsalainen, 1995).

When relevant literature is examined, it is observed that there are two kinds of research traditions in understanding adolescents' thoughts about future. The first of these is related to choices lived in the period of transition to adulthood, composing adult life domain and guiding their future such as higher education, getting a profession, building a career, military service, romantic relationships with the opposite sex and starting a family (Nurmi, Poole, & Seginer, 1995, Seginer & Halbi-Kheir 1998). These choices are regarded as pre-requisite conditions in determining goals, creating alternatives for the future and undertaking the responsibility of transition to adulthood (Nurmi, 1993; Seginer & Lilach, 2004). Moreover, the second type of studies is related to self values (I'm happy, I'm at peace with myself, etc.) and social issues (country problems, wars etc.) (Seginer, 2003; Trommsdorf, 1983).

As summarized above, too, future orientation is of great importance in adolescents' becoming healthy individuals. To plan the future, high school years are the most important years because decisions made in this period shape the future. For this reason, the present study aims to describe Turkish adolescents' thoughts about their future in the above-mentioned life domains such as education, decision about future profession, relationships with the opposite sex, and military service. In this context, the main aim of the present research study is to investigate into what adolescents aged between 17 and 18 years think about their future through life scripts covering ten years of their life that they have written within the framework of the themes of education, career, relationships with the opposite sex and military service.

2. Method

For the purpose of the study, the adolescents' future orientations were investigated through both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The data were analyzed through the method of content analysis and the results were presented in numbers and percentages.

2.1. Research Group

The study was carried out at two state high schools in the province of Bursa in the first half of the 2011-2012 educational year with a total of 70 eleventh grade students, 47 were girls (67.1%) and 23 were boys (32.9%). The mean of the students' ages was 17.1. In the study, convenience and homogeneous sampling method was used (Easton & Mc Coll, 1997)); the study was carried out at two state high schools where the researcher could easily reach and students with middle SES level attended. Moreover, the reason for choosing the eleventh graders is that adolescents at this age have clearer decisions about future.

2.2. Process

The data of the study was collected through life scripts written by students. Firstly, the researcher told the students about the aim of the study in guidance hours, and then asked the volunteer ones to write about a life script including their plans for the next ten years. Moreover, the students were asked to write their ages and genders. The students' life scripts were transferred into electronic environment and analyzed by making content-analysis with N

vivo program. According to Yıldırım & Şimşek (2000), in cases where there is a theory or a theoretical framework underpinning a study while making content analysis, it is possible to prepare a list of codes before collecting data. Code list forms a structure for data analysis by including themes (categories) and concepts under themes. In this study, too, relevant literature was based on when analyzing the data and four main categories (themes) were determined, namely education, decision about profession, relationships with the opposite sex, and military service, and then codes were specified under these categories. For example, for the category of education, the codes of higher education, name of university, and name of department were analyzed; for the category of decision about profession, the code of profession preferences was analyzed; for the theme of relationships with the opposite sex, the codes of flirt, affiance, engagement and marriage were analyzed.

3. Findings

Below are given the findings obtained from the analyses of the scripts written by the students and a sample script. In accordance with the purpose of the study, as a result of the content analysis made according to the main categories of the study, namely education, profession, relationships with the opposite sex, military service, it was found out that while 63 (90%) of the participant students mentioned about their plans with respect to education and higher education, 7 (10%) of them did not mention any plans about education, and did not use the words “education” and “higher education” at all. Additionally, while 61 (87.1%) of the participant students mentioned about their desire to get a profession, 9 (12.9%) of them did not use the word “profession”. Moreover, 37 (52.9%) of the participant students mentioned about relationships with the opposite sex, whereas 33 (47.1%) did not mention about this matter at all. Finally, while 10 (43.5%) of the male students mentioned about military service, 13 (56.5%) did not touch on the matter of military service. These findings are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1- Results regarding Education, Profession, Romantic Relationship and Military Service in Students' Plans for Next Ten Years

Categories (Themes)	Number of People Expressing Views	Percentage	Number of People not Expressing Views	Percentage
Education	63	%90.0	7	%10.0
Profession	61	%87.1	9	%12.9
Relationships with the Opposite Sex	37	%52.9	33	%47.1
Military Service*	10	%43.5	13	%56.5

* Only for male students.

After the life scripts written by the students had been analyzed according to the above-mentioned categories (themes), more detailed analyses were made. With respect to the category of education, higher education, university and department names were analyzed; for the category of profession, names of professions were analyzed; for the category of relationships with the opposite sex, flirt, affiance, engagement and marriage preferences were analyzed. According to the obtained results, 16 (25.4%) of the students specified the name of the university at which they would like to study, whereas 54 (74.6%) did not specify it. The mostly- mentioned university name was ITU (5). Moreover, Hacettepe University (2), Uludag University (2), Ege University (2), Dokuz Eylul University (1), Marmara University (1), Yıldız Technical University (1), GATA (Gulhane Military Medical Academy) (1) and Bosphorus University (1) were the universities whose names were mentioned. While the number of the students mentioning about a department name was 30 (42.8%), the number of those who did not mention about which department they wanted to study at was 40 (57.1%). 28 of these students specified a department name, whereas 2 only stated that they wanted to study at “a good department”. When the profession preferences were examined, it was observed that 28 students specified their profession preferences clearly while 42 students did not specify their preferences clearly. The preferred professions, in order of frequency, were engineering, medicine (7), dentistry, architecture, profession of teaching, physiotherapy, economy and archaeology. While 31 (44,2%) of 37 students expressing an opinion about relationships with the opposite sex stated that they were planning to marry an appropriate spouse-partner, 6 (8.7%) expressed that they wanted to have a lover-girl-boy friend.

3.1. Sample script:

Age: 18, Gender: Girl, Class: 12

"We cannot know what life will bring us tomorrow but my first target is to win a good department at a good university, I have not yet made up my mind about which department it will be, though. As I have just said what life will bring us is not certain; for this reason, I have not yet asked myself what university and what department it will be. My only aim is to get a good mark and win a good department and later get my profession and start a career, etc. Maybe I will marry, but I want to build a career in my profession, marriage is not so important for me."

4. Discussion

In this study, adolescents' future orientations were examined in their life scripts covering next ten years within the framework of the themes of education, profession, relationships with the opposite sex, and military service. According to the findings of the study, 93% of the students stated that they wanted to continue their education (higher education). However, the remaining 7% did not use the words "education" and "higher education" at all. When the fact that general high schools in Turkey do not provide students with jobs but prepare them for university and those who participated in this study were from those schools is considered, it can be stated that 7% of them did not have any thoughts regarding education. In addition to this, while 25.4% of the students specified the name of the university at which they wanted to study, 74.6% of them did not specify a university name. While the percentage of the students specifying a department was 42.8, the percentage of the students not specifying the name of the department at which they wanted to study was 57.1. According to these results, it can be stated that the adolescents did not have clear ideas about education. Education is regarded as a key to adaptation to future. According to Ruiz Alfonso et al (2003), seeing oneself as a competent personality is determined by school experiences. Now that these adolescents regard themselves as incompetent in entering higher education or their present achievement levels are low, they might be thinking that they will not be able to continue their education. According to Salmela-Aro, Nurmi and Ruotsalainen (1995), the adolescents regard themselves as academically incompetent affects their future orientation negatively. A great majority of high school graduate adolescents in Turkey can not enter university. For in Turkey, to enter higher education, adolescents enter the exams held by the Students Selection and Placement Center (OSYM) and the most successful students are selected according to ordering of scores. For example, in the 2004-2005 educational year, about 1.5 million students entered these exams and, according to the book of statistics of OSYM (2005), of these only 263.531 students managed to enter four-year undergraduate programs.

While 61% of the participant students mentioned their desire to get a profession, that the percentage of those not mentioning a profession at all was 12 is rather important. Those adolescents might not yet have made up their minds about what to do in the future or an idea of profession might not have taken shape. However, these ages are the ones during which an idea of profession must take shape. However, if an individual does not regard him/herself as a competent personality, he or she can not be expected to have any little idea in terms of profession. As mentioned above, for those adolescents, it might be difficult to get professions through higher education but two-year vocational schools after high school, various courses can be alternatives. Moreover, when profession preferences were examined, it was observed that while 28 students wrote down clearly their profession preferences, 42 students did not write down their profession preferences clearly. However, it is thought-provoking that half of the adolescents did not have an idea regarding profession. As stated by Seginer and Lilach (2004), choices such as education, getting a profession, building a career and marriage are the pre-requisites in undertaking the responsibility of adult roles.

With respect to relationships with the opposite sex, too, while only 52, 9% of the adolescents expressed opinions, 47.1% did not touch on this matter at all. While 44,2% of those having expressed opinions about this matter stated that they were planning to marry an appropriate spouse-partner, 8.7% of them expressed their desire to have lover-girl-boy friend. These results indicate that the adolescents were under the effect of the culture they lived in about this matter. Turkish culture is a culture limiting sexuality. In cultures limiting sexuality, adolescents' relationships with the opposite sex is partly allowed, but talking about these matters is not tolerated (Fincancioglu & Bulut, 2005). For this reason, even if the participant adolescents thought about this matter, they might have hesitated to express

their opinions. However, adolescence and early adulthood years are the years during which relationships with the opposite sex start and the idea of marriage start to occur. While 10 of the 23 male students participating in the research study stated that they wanted to do their military service within the following ten years, 13 of them did not mention about this matter at all. Although the age of joining the army in our country is 20, those continuing their education and having an excuse are allowed to put off to a later time. Those students might have been thinking of joining the army after putting their lives in order.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The results of the present study indicate that more than half of the participant adolescents do not have clear thoughts for the next ten years especially with respect to the matters of decision about profession, relationships with the opposite sex and military service. These results provide us with important clues in relation to Turkish adolescents' future orientations. Families, teachers and psychological counselors in collaboration with one another can do works directed at increasing adolescents' awareness about this matter by guiding adolescents to think more about their future starting from the primary education. Guidance services at schools can help adolescents, within the framework of the developmental counseling model, to undertake more responsibilities about the matter of thinking about and planning their future and so moving to adulthood more healthily by giving place to programs and activities focusing more on future orientation within the scope of professional, educational and personal-social guidance.

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