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# An International Comparative Study: Exploring Students' College and Career Readiness Needs

## **About the Author(s)**

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## **Keywords**

College Readiness, Career Readiness, School Counseling, Need Assessment



## AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE STUDY: EXPLORING STUDENTS' COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS NEEDS

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### **Abstract**

This international quantitative study was designed to investigate the college and career readiness needs of students in the U.S. and Turkey. Results indicated that there are various factors including gender, country type, academic achievement, parent education, and parent socioeconomic status influence the students' perception of college and career readiness. The significant findings and discussions provide school leaders, policymakers and counselors with valuable information to improve student achievement and school effectiveness through identifying and prioritizing the specific attitudes, knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate for their college and career readiness.

### **Introduction**

Preparing college and career ready students is crucial for a wealth of nations because it is related to developing high-quality human capital for the sustained growth and stability of a country's economy (Brimley, Verstegen, & Garfield, 2015). With the globalization of the industry and shifts in supply and demand for a wide variety of careers and occupations, the federal governments around the world have been focusing on creating effective academic and counseling services to help their students achieve at higher levels and to compete for both nationally and internationally (Grossman, 2009). Since there is a high global economic competition among countries, it is imperative that K-12 schools develop the talent of today with the skills for tomorrow. However, building a high-quality education workforce is not an easy task. As Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) note, helping our K-12 students' college and career readiness is a long-term investment that requires systemic approaches and collaborative efforts among educators and policymakers. With the goal of preparing college and career ready students who have 21<sup>st</sup>-century career skills, all federal and local governments are trying to develop data-driven analyses and implement innovative career development solutions (Dahir & Stone, 2012).

Consistent with these efforts, it is important to scientifically explore what matters to K-12 students' career readiness and acknowledge what counseling activities K-12 students need to be prepared for college and life after their high school experience. Therefore, middle and high school students from the United States and Turkey were invited to participate in this international comparative research study. Particularly, a comprehensive need assessment survey is designed to help the USA and Turkey schools exploring what students believe they need in terms of their college and career preparation. The findings of this study have the potential to assist the K-12 schools, educational leaders and policymakers to plan systematic and effective programs for the students' college readiness and career development.

In this study, data were collected from Turkey and the U.S. because the school counseling programs and K-12 guidance activities in Turkey were highly affected by American scholars and American school counselor educators (Dogan, 2000). These two countries are also

relatively comparative regarding college and career readiness expectations. Like in the U.S., millions of high school students in Turkey spend a significant amount of time to prepare for college entrance exams. As in Turkey, highly selective colleges in America use rigorous academic standards to accept their students. In other words, both Turkish and American colleges use high school grade point average (GPA) and standardized college entrance test scores (Yavuz, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that college and career readiness terms are defined symmetrically in both countries.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, federal and state governments have significantly focused on increasing the college and career readiness of their students (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). However, many countries still have been struggling to find highly qualified employees for demanding and high-skill jobs. Particularly, skilled workers are in high demand in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) industry (Knowles, Kelley, and Holland, 2018). Besides failing to expand access to and preparation for careers in high-skill, high-wage jobs, the current school leaders and counselors lack the adequate knowledge to develop and lead successful comprehensive counseling programs in their schools (Yavuz, Dahir, Gumuseli, 2017). Since school leaders have lack of knowledge and skills related to evidence-based counseling services, this study may be of value to school leaders, counselors, policy makers, and educators interested in improving their comprehensive school counseling services to meet the complex college and career counseling needs of students in contemporary K-12 schools.

As noted by the previous studies, preparing college and career ready students who have leadership, creativity, communication and technical skills for changing world is important for wealth of a nation (Brimley, Verstegen, & Garfield, 2015). Therefore, the federal and local authorities have been focusing on effective school initiatives and leadership strategies to ensure that every student graduating from high school is ready for college or a career, regardless of their income, gender, race, ethnicity or language background, or disability status (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Particularly, there is a continued emphasis on building a strong working relationship between the school administrators and the professional school counselor to improve student academic success as well as college and career readiness (ASCA, 2012; Dahir, Burham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010). However, in order to build an effective and working relationship between school administrators, professional school counselors and key stakeholders systemically need to determine the comprehensive and complex needs of K-12 students.

Moreover, this quantitative explorative study analyzed survey data from a comprehensive needs assessment to identify college and career needs of students to improve current counseling services in American and Turkish schools. As such, the following research questions were central: (1) What are the highest and lowest college and career needs of students in the USA and Turkey? (2) Is there a significant difference between the USA and Turkey students' perceptions of the total college and career readiness scores? (3) How the various factors including gender, country type, academic achievement, parent education, and parent socioeconomic status influence the students' perception of college and career readiness?" With compiled results from the college and career readiness need assessment, district and school administrators, educators, and counselors can apply findings to practice and policy associated with improving student outcomes. Ultimately, the results of the comprehensive need assessment will help school leaders and counselors develop a systemic approach to increase attitudes, behaviors, and skills that lead to academic achievement and college readiness for all students.

### **School Counseling and College Readiness Practices in America**

ASCA (2012) defines school counseling programs as collaborative efforts benefiting K-12 students, parents, classroom teachers, school leaders, and the overall community. They also recommend school counseling programs to be comprehensive, preventative and connect with students' daily educational environment. The ASCA school counseling program framework consists of four components: foundation, program management, delivery, and accountability. School counselors deliver their programs in career and social and emotional development domains. In order to maximize school counselors' effort and increase positive student outcomes, ASCA recommends a school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250 and those school counselors are recommended to spend 80 percent or more of their time in direct and indirect counseling services to all students (ASCA, 2012).

School counselors focus on improving students' college and career readiness. Some of these efforts are encouraging college aspirations, providing academic preparation, helping students through a college application process, encouraging parent involvement in the process, and helping students develop a college mission for themselves (Belasco, 2013). However, there are many obstacles restricting counselors from providing comprehensive college and career services. For instance, although the ASCA (2012) clearly states that school counselors are responsible for providing direct and indirect only counseling-related services, which are delivery of the total program through school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services, many school counselors still engage in many non-counseling activities (Stone & Dahir, 2012). Some of these non-counseling activities are performing disciplinary actions, teaching classes, supervising classrooms or common areas, assisting with some duties in the principal's office, serving as a data entry clerk, and signing excuses for students who are absent (ASCA, 2012). In addition, high student-to-counselor ratios and prioritizing other responsibilities over college and career readiness services are considered other obstacles to create a comprehensive college and career counseling programs (Perna et al., 2008).

Moreover, previous research studies indicate that students who attend schools those have larger number of school counselors tend to contact their school counselors for college information more than the ones who go to larger schools with less number of school counselors (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). The type of expectations that school counselors have for their students is another factor that impacts the likelihood of students seeing their school counselors related to their college and career readiness. For instance, Bryan et al. (2009) found that public school students who perceived their counselors expecting them to go to college saw their counselors more than the ones who perceived that their school counselor believe they should pursue a non-college career. Moreover, regardless of students' socio-economic status, student-counselor contact is less likely to happen when the counselor does not show the inspiration for his or her students (Bryan et al., 2009).

In order to improve students' academic success and adequately prepare them for higher education, every student needs to be held to high academic standards regardless of the student's SES, race, religion, and geographic location (Yavuz, 2014). This is especially true for American students where a third of them have required a remedial education when they attend a college (The U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Besides the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative, U.S. Department of Education (2012) releases a blueprint to transform career and technical education. Therefore, recently the states have taken initiative in developing and adopting new rigorous standards in English language, arts, and mathematics promoting college

and career readiness. Almost all the states in the U.S. adopted these standards and the federal government supports the states to adequately implement the standards for all students. The states either upgraded their existing standards or they adopted and implemented new standards developed by other states toward college and career readiness. The U.S. Department of Education provided more than \$350 million to support this effort for having higher standards and high-quality assessment (The U.S. Department of Education, 2012.).

Although the college-going rates are increasing for all groups, a wide disparity remains across SES and ethnic groups. More specifically, students from low SES homes, whose parents did not attend college, and those of African American and Hispanic/Latino are less likely to go to college (Perna et al., 2008). When students among these disadvantaged groups attend college, they usually go to public two-year community colleges or less prestigious public universities. Researchers have proposed three explanations for this disparity: inadequate economic resources, inadequate academic preparation, and inadequate knowledge and information regarding the college and financial aid (Perna et al., 2008; Thomas & Perna, 2004; Yavuz, 2014).

### **School Counseling and College Readiness Practices in Turkey**

Turkey is a transcontinental Eurasian nation located between Europe and Asia. Turkey is seen as a bridge between East and West. Initial steps of development of counseling in Turkey were taken the early 1950s. One of the crucial events taking place around this time was the visits of some American experts on counseling, which fundamentally influenced Turkish counseling movement (Dogan, 2000). According to Dogan (2000), development of counseling in Turkey consists of five steps: (1) taking initial steps (1950–1956); (2) formative years (1957–1969); (3) establishing counseling services in K-12 schools (1970–1981); (4) establishing undergraduate programs in school counseling (1982–1995); and (5) assigning certified counselors to schools (1996–present). In almost every stage, the school counseling reforms in the USA have a direct and/or indirect influence on school counseling practices and policies in Turkey.

Like the ASCA National Model (2012) recommendations, the Republic of Turkey's Ministry of National Education also encourages professional school counselors to provide academic advisement and counseling activities toward college and career readiness. Particularly, according to the Ministry of National Education Official Communications Journal (2009), in Turkey, guidance and psychological counselors are expected to plan and implement appropriate educational and career guidance activities for all students based on the school types and needs. In Turkey, a school counselor is also encouraged to serve as a guide, leader, and resource manager to deliver and lead individual, small and school-wide counseling services. Finally, conducting a counseling program that is geared towards getting to know students to help their educational and career development can be considered as another role of professional guidance and psychological counselors.

Furthermore, every year millions of high school students spend a significant amount of their time and efforts get into colleges. Based on the new regulations, in Turkey, students are placed in universities based on the college entrance exams. For instance, all candidates who want to enroll in higher education must take the first stage university entrance exam. The basic qualification exam covers the basic level of knowledge, skills, readiness, and competence that candidates must possess in verbal and numerical fields. On the next day, the candidates take the second part of the college entrance exam. Based on their high school grade point average and test results, students are placed in colleges. Different from the USA, the colleges in Turkey, they do not require a college essay, recommendation letter, and interviews.

Özoğlu, Gür, and Gümüş (2016) discuss the rapid expansion of higher education in Turkey. With the continuous increase in the number of high school students who apply for university entrance, school counselors can utilize their school counseling skills to focus on college and career readiness for all students (Byrd, Crockett, & Erford, 2012). Even though college preparation strongly relies on test scores in Turkey, professional school counselors play an important role in students' college selection and college enrollment process by providing one on one counseling sessions. They also help prepare candidates for test-taking by providing a comprehensive book list that are of good quality and literary value. Moreover, they offer time management and test-taking strategies to improve their skills such as analytical thinking, problem-solving, and abstract thinking.

Besides similarities, there are several differences related to the counseling practices in the U.S. and Turkey. For instance, being a school counselor in the U.S. requires graduating from a graduate level counseling certification program. However, in Turkey, a candidate can serve as a school counselor after he/she completes an undergraduate program. Therefore, an undergraduate degree is enough to work as a school counselor in Turkey. Second, counseling training programs in Turkey have not been specialized in different areas like school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, career counseling or community counseling, as seen in the U.S (Korkut-Owen & Güneri, 2013). As a result, in Turkey, all the students in counseling programs receive the same training, are assigned the same internship sites which are K-12 schools, and supervision although they will need different knowledge and experiences based on what they do. Therefore, the school counseling programs mostly prepare candidates for K-12 school counseling positions since the great majority of the graduates' work as school counselors (Stockton & Güneri, 2011).

The Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education encourages guidance and psychological counselors to prepare and maintain student progress reports addressing program management and school counselor accountability. However, as Stockton and Güneri (2011) noted, most rules and regulations issued by the Turkey Ministry of National Education do not adequately define the roles and functions of K-12 school counselors. Unfortunately, Turkish school counselors are perceived by school teachers and administrators as privileged personnel with more time and less work since school counselors do not have teaching responsibility (Stockton & Güneri, 2011). As a result of these inconsistent counseling practices, similar to the USA school counselors in Turkey are often asked by school administrators to assist in performing non-counseling and administrative tasks such as taking attendance, monitoring hallways, scheduling, sub-teaching, keeping clerical records, dealing with tardy or absent students, proctoring the state tests, and serving as a data entry clerk (Stone & Dahir, 2012; Davis, 2014).

Even though the Turkish Ministry of National Education and research focus on the importance of career counseling activities, it is noted that most K-12 students do not receive systemic and ongoing college and career counseling services from their school counselors (Paskal, 2001). Camadan and Sezgin (2012) showed that school guidance and counselors in Turkey deliver some college readiness and career counseling related programs to help students improve their career development starting from elementary level, but these efforts are not considered as systemic. Since both the USA and the Turkish federal government encourage professional school counselors to provide effective college and career readiness counseling services, it is important to explore the comprehensive and complex needs of students in these two countries.

### **Broader Impacts of College and Career Readiness**

There are over 4000 United States colleges and university. Therefore, it is crucial that K-12 students have accurate college and career-related information, which influences their college access and enrollment. For example, research shows that students coming from low SES homes are more likely to have inaccurate information regarding college cost, available financial aid, and the academic prerequisite to college attendance (Belasco, 2013; Deil-Amen, & Tevis, 2010). Since school counselors are the primary and the most important source of providing college-related information (McDonough, 2005), for disadvantaged students, Belasco (2013) studied school counselors' influence on college-going behavior. As a result, he found that students' likelihood for college attendance is significantly affected by visiting their school counselor to obtain college-related information. This is especially true for students who have the most difficulty accessing colleges such as who come from low SES families, are the first generation to go to college, and come from an immigrant family (ACT, 2004; Belasco, 2013; Reid & Moore, 2008).

Moreover, students need adequate career counseling services for making better career choices. In order to provide better career counseling services, it is important to know the level of students' career readiness, the factors contributing career readiness, and whether there is a statistically significant difference between students in Turkey and the U.S. so counselors can provide the needed services. Since this study focuses on exploring student perceptions of college and career readiness within American and Turkish schools, the multilevel theoretical framework and findings will inform school leaders of developmentally appropriate and individually tailored intervention and prevention programs (ASCA, 2014). Particularly, this study focused on exploring students' needs related to the college and career readiness, the findings provide information that benefits society in several ways, as described below.

First, from an economic perspective, both federal and state governments provide billions of dollars per year for public K-12 and post-secondary institutions by allocating grants, loans, and work assistance, as well as tax credits and deductions, to help students finance college education (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Hanson, 2012). However, if students are poorly prepared and not succeed in their post-secondary education, financial resources as well as their unique talents, skills, time, and significant efforts will be wasted, not only for the individual but for society. The findings of the study have the potential to benefit society by contributing knowledge about how to better K-12 students get ready for their college and future careers.

In addition to the economic returns to individual, Williams and Swail (2005) have found that college education improves the quality of life for a society in a variety of ways. For example, individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to be a part of important volunteer work, vote, and give back to their communities in many other ways. As Watts (2001) indicated other social benefits also include decreased reliance on financial public assistance, increased tax revenues, lower demands on the criminal justice system, better personal and parenting skills, and increased leadership and entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, the investment in improving college and career readiness has been linked to lower incarceration rates, more volunteerism, and more democratic participation. In reference to these statements, this international comparative research study will help the school communities, as well as individuals, by exploring and presenting the high college readiness needs of students.

In order to make an informed decision about the design and delivery of the college and career counseling services, it is important to understand students' college-going behaviors. Researchers suggested a conceptual framework explaining the factors impacting students'



college-enrollment decision (Perna, 2006; Perna et al., 2008). According to this framework, students' college enrollment behavior is influenced by student and family context, school and community context, higher education context, and the broader social, economic, and political context. Therefore, educators' efforts to increase the college-going rate for all must go beyond individual-level services. Their effort should be comprehensive, inclusive and address the systemic challenges.

### Method

The primary purpose of this quantitative exploratory study was to investigate college and career needs of students in the USA and Turkey. Additionally, this study seeks to identify how various factors may influence students' perceptions with the hope to better understand the college readiness phenomena and how it may inform educational policy and procedures related to K-12 school counseling activities.

#### Setting and Participants

In this study, purposeful sampling and convenience sample techniques are used for the identification and selection of participants. In order to compare and generalize the results, participants especially were selected from certain locations and certain grade levels. For instance, all USA schools included in these analyses were in the Northeast region in the USA. Similarly, in order to have a similar student profile in terms of socio-economic students and student achievement, all schools included in these analyses were in the Northeast region in Turkey. Both in Turkey and America, the Northeast regions have a relatively high level of socio-economic status compared to other regions of the country.

Table 1

#### *Participants' Demographic Information*

Categories	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Country		
America	620	47.3
Turkey	691	52.7
Grade Level		
Middle School	616	46.9
High School	695	53.1
Gender		
Male	605	46.3
Female	702	53.7
Parent Education		
No College Degree	917	69.9
Hold a College Degree	394	30.1

As a part of purposeful sampling method, pre-school, kindergarten and elementary students were not invited to participate in the study. Besides purposeful sampling, a convenient sampling technique was utilized for college data. The sampling can be also considered as convenient because the sample being drawn from that part of the population that is close to the researchers' working place. Participants were comprised of 1311 middle and high school students who had successfully completed the survey. Since the participants were not selected randomly,

relatively small sample size and convenient sampling technique can be considered as a limitation of this study. Table 1 provides demographic information on the participants.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The research project and consent forms were approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. At each research site, the authors described the project to school leaders and directors who assisted in getting permission to conduct the online surveys. The survey was administered in 2017-2018 calendar year. Procedures were put in place to provide participants with the least amount of risk possible while maintaining their comfort throughout the completion of the survey. It was the participants' decision whether they would like to take part in this study. If they chose to participate, they were able to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process.

During the data collection process, online surveys were used for this investigation. Survey items were finalized based on the pilot study and peer reviews; the survey was prepared in the online system. With the approval of school administrators, emails including the survey link were sent to students, requesting their completion of the online college and career readiness need assessment survey. Surveys were collected and coded, they were uploaded to the SPSS program. The same protocol was applied in both Turkey and America. Completed surveys were automatically collected through the online survey system. All responses in the survey were recorded anonymously it means no student and school name archived.

### **Instrumentation**

In 2014, ASCA developed Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success based on a survey of research and best practices in student achievement from a wide array of educational standards and efforts. The survey questions in this study were aligned from the 2014 ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success expectations. The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (2014) focuses on K-12 college- and career-readiness standards for every student and explains school counseling students' needs in knowledge, skills, and attitudes to provide effective academic, career, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2014). There are 35 mindset and behavior standards helping to develop and employ counseling programs, strategies and activities to promote students' efforts to achieve their highest potential. ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors are categorized into domains, standards, and grade-level competencies. ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors are organized into three domains: academic, career, and social/emotional development. The standards consist of Mindset Standards and Behavior Standards categories. While the Mindset Standards category is related to students' psychosocial attitudes or beliefs, the behavior standards including learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills, which are associated with being a successful student. The grade-level competencies are particularly measurable expectations that students achieve as they make improvement toward the standards.

This instrument was developed to assist schools in the selection, design, and evaluation of school counseling programs intended to meet student needs in areas of academic, social-emotional and college and career readiness. The first three sections of the survey included only multiple-choice items under the following categories: (1) Academic Development Program Needs, (2) College and Career Readiness Program Needs, (3) Social-Emotional Development Program Needs. For the purpose of this report, only the results related to college and career readiness are explored and presented (see Table 2. for a list of students' statements related to college and career readiness). Aligned with the research questions, in this study, researchers used and analyzed the second section of the survey which includes 10 college and career readiness statements.

The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. In each section, participants were asked to rate the level of agreement to several statements regarding their college and career readiness by using the following Likert-type scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree. Demographic information was collected from each participant. Internal consistency of the college and career readiness statement was assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and it was determined that internal consistency was in an acceptable range for an exploratory study of .69 to .94. Overall, the instrument was found to be highly reliable (10 items;  $\alpha = .80$ ). To validate the assertion that the 10 items can be classified as one whole category that represents college and career development related activities, the researchers solicited the opinions of a panel of school counseling professionals who were familiar with college and career readiness activities and the roles of school counselors. The panel of counseling professionals included experienced practicing professional school counselors and three counselor educators at state universities. The panel of counselor confirmed that all 10 items are aligned with student college readiness and career development.

### Data Analyses

Quantitative data analysis of the survey was done, which included 10 colleges and career readiness related items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" response format. To analyze the perceptions of students, as the highest and lowest college and career readiness level of Turkish and American students, as indicated in Table 2, the descriptive statistics were used and ranked the total mean scores and standard deviation of each 10 items from the highest need to lowest need.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for American and Turkish Students' College/Career Readiness Scores*

College and Career Readiness Statements	Country	N	M	SD
1. I am aware of my abilities, interests, and values for my college and career planning	Turkey	688	4.12	1.03
	America	618	4.09	1.11
2. I have explored many colleges and career options/pathways	Turkey	690	3.51	1.21
	America	616	3.69	1.24
3. I understand that postsecondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success	Turkey	688	4.20	0.96
	America	616	4.09	1.04
4. I understand the college application, admission, and transition process	Turkey	687	4.01	1.04
	America	617	3.52	1.26
5. I am knowledgeable about financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study	Turkey	684	3.06	1.25
	America	617	3.24	1.18
6. I am very responsible and persevere to achieve both long-term and short-term college and career goals	Turkey	688	3.69	1.05
	America	615	3.85	1.04
7. I am self-confident in my ability to succeed in school, career, and life	Turkey	688	3.94	1.01
	America	618	3.94	1.08
8. I am knowledgeable about effective cover letter and resume writing, interviewing, and career portfolio creation	Turkey	683	3.23	1.21
	America	618	3.63	1.19
	Turkey	688	2.59	1.49

9. I have early career experiences including a career fair, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeship and summer jobs	America	617	3.09	1.32
10. I have a counselor and/or mentor to guide me for college and career success	Turkey	686	3.11	1.43
	America	616	3.33	1.42

In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential statistics are also utilized. For instance, an independent-samples t-test was performed to investigate if being in the USA and Turkey is associated with statistically significant different mean total College and Career Readiness Score. Finally, a multiple linear regression was conducted to explore how well the gender, country type, academic achievement, parent education, and parent socioeconomic status predict the students' college and career needs.

### Findings

The findings of this quantitative study were organized and presented by three major research questions.

**Research Question 1:** *What are the highest and lowest college and career needs of students in the USA and America?*

The descriptive statistics results indicate that the lowest total college and career readiness score is consistent between Turkish students and American students. It was surprising to see that in both America and Turkey, the following three items were rated as the lowest mean scores: (1) Having early career experiences such as career fair, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeship and summer jobs ( $M_{Turkey}=2.59$  and  $M_{America}=3.09$ ), (2) Being knowledgeable about financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study opportunities ( $M_{Turkey}=3.06$  and  $M_{America}=3.24$ ), and (3) Having a counselor and/or mentor to guide me for college and career success ( $M_{Turkey}=3.11$  and  $M_{America}=3.33$ ). It is also noticed that except item 1 and item 3, compared to Turkish students, American students indicated a high level of agreement with the college and career readiness standards. It is also important to notice both American ( $M=4.09$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ) and Turkish ( $M=4.20$ ,  $SD=.96$ ) students report highly that they understand that postsecondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success.

**Research Question 2:** *Is there a significant difference between the USA and Turkey students on the total College and Career Readiness Scores?*

The USA student group ( $N=611$ ) was associated with total College and Career Readiness Score  $M= 36.49$  ( $SD= 7.72$ ). By comparison, the Turkey student group ( $N=671$ ) was associated with numerically smaller College and Career Readiness Score  $M= 35.41$  ( $SD= 6.55$ ). To test the hypothesis that the USA and Turkey students were associated with statistically significant different mean total College and Career Readiness Score, an independent-samples t-test was performed. Both groups of students scores were normally distributed, as assessed by Skewness test  $<1$ . Consistent with the descriptive statistics, the independent-samples t-test results indicated that there was a statistical significant difference in the total College and Career Readiness Score between the USA ( $M= 36.49$ ,  $SD= 7.72$ ) and Turkey ( $M= 35.41$  ( $SD= 6.55$ );  $t(1280) = -2.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The effect size as measured by  $d$  was 0.32, a value that can be considered as between medium and small effect size. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis that is "There is a significant difference between the USA and Turkey student scores on the total College and Career Readiness Scores" can be accepted.

**Research Question 3:** To address the third research question, "How well the (1) gender, (2) country, (3) academic achievement, (4) parent education and (5) socioeconomic status predict the

students' college and career needs?" a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The five factors were entered simultaneously into this regression analysis. The dependent variable was recording the total college and career readiness score. The purpose of this analysis was to assess which of the five factors explained the greatest amount of variance in students' self-reported total college and career readiness score. The regression model, including all five predictors, was statistically significant,  $F(5, 1283) = 17.52$ ,  $p < .001$  with  $R^2 = .06$ . In other words, college and career readiness scores could be predicted from this set of five variables, with approximately 6% of the variance in scores accounted for by the regression.

Table 2

*Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Total College and Career Readiness*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.	$Sr^2$
Country	.175	.417	.012	.420	.675	.011
Gender	-.377	.384	-.027	-.982	.326	-.027
Parent Education	.296	.502	.019	.590	.555	.016
SES	.358	.443	.025	.809	.419	.022
Academic Achievement	1.707	.203	.240	8.422	.000*	.229

Regarding the contribution of each predictor to the equation one by one, it can be said that only students' academic achievement variables explained around 25% of the variance, and it had a high relationship with the outcome variable. Since the academic achievement has a statistically significant effect on the students' college and career readiness scores when the multiple regression controls and combines the other related independent variables, the researcher conducted follow up descriptive statistics to explore how students' total college and career readiness scores vary by academic achievement scores. As indicated in Figure 1, increases in students' achievement were correlated with increases in total college and career readiness scores. In other words, compared to low achiever students who mostly get Fs, Ds and/or Cs, higher achiever students who mostly get As and Bs are more like to get high college and career readiness scores.

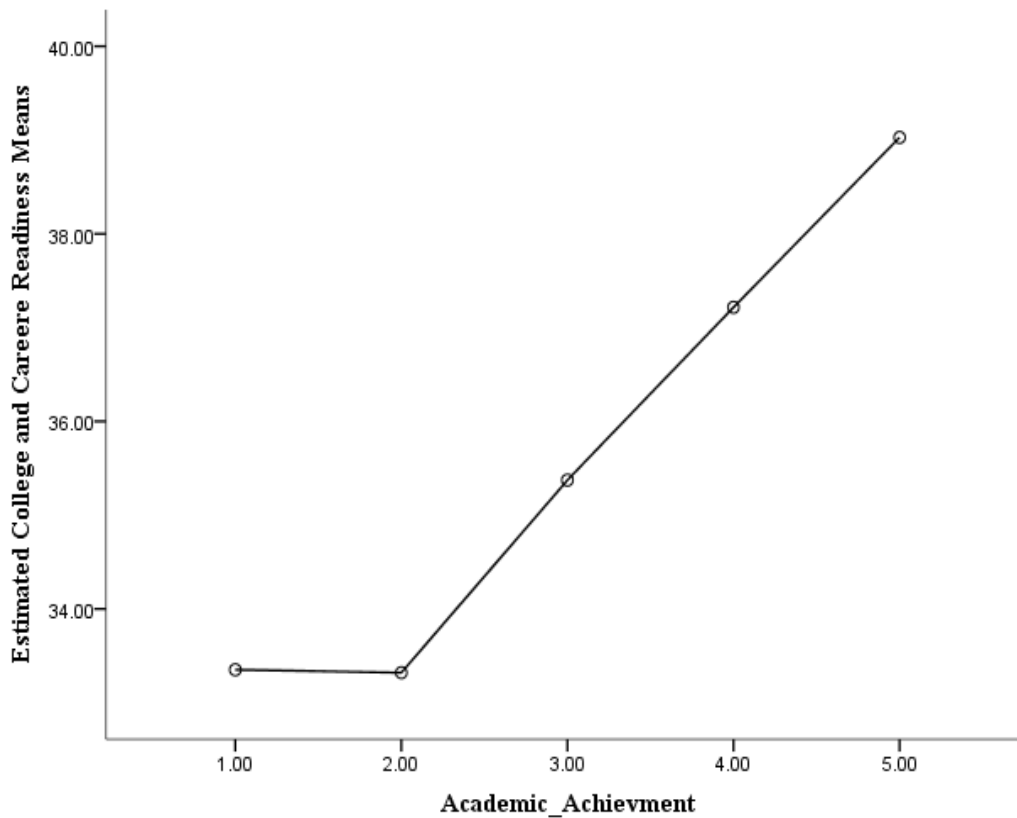


Figure 1. Total College and Career Readiness Scores by Academic Achievement  
**Discussion**

### Improving Early Career Experiences

One of the most interesting findings from the comparative analysis, in both American and Turkish students, reported that they have low early career experiences such as career fair, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeship and summer jobs. This is an important finding related to improving college and career readiness of K-12 students because early career awareness is an important component of students' engagement and career development. Offering limited or no early career experiences can be explained by a lack of time or a poor organization because designing and delivering high-quality early career experiences take a significant amount of planning and implementation time. If professional school counselors spend too much time on non-counseling tasks, they will be less likely to focus on preparing comprehensive early career awareness programs.

In order to prepare students for making healthy career choices, it is crucial to make career counseling a part of school life. In this regard, career consultation seminars, workshops, career orientation, school visits, and parental involvement in career and course elections could be done (Nasir, Hashmi, Siddique, Adnan & Kanwal, 2017). Moreover, school counselors are encouraged to work with school administrators, teachers, and other key stakeholders to overcome the program implementation barriers by offering practical suggestions for creating early career awareness programs (Yavuz, 2014).

For example, the partnership between school counselor-principal-teacher positively affects the development and implication of effective career counseling activities that help

students' college readiness and enrich their career awareness. School counselors can consider working with classroom teachers to arrange classroom guidance activities such as college and career awareness workshops, internship finding strategies, writing a resume, improving study and time management skills, job shadowing, and effective interview techniques. Moreover, recently, while measuring schools' performances in college and career readiness, most states solely focus on students' participation in standardized college readiness tests. Instead of only relying on students' test participation and test scores, states can consider developing an authentic and comprehensive college and career readiness portfolio assessment that requires each student to develop and present his/her own individualized digital portfolio.

### **Financial Aid Counseling**

Both Turkish and American students reported that compared to other ten college and career readiness items, they do not feel very knowledgeable about financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study opportunities. Since every year a significant amount of college students stop their college education because of financial related issues, it is crucial that high school students receive proper support and guidance to fund their college tuitions. In other words, there is a need for providing a consistent and systemic way of college funding information to students. The absence of a systemic way of providing information about educational opportunities and financial aid in high schools usually causes negative educational outcomes (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon & Perna, 2009).

Especially, the ones who come from poor families, whose parents do not hold a college degree, and the ones who rely on their families for college-related information have significantly lower educational attainment (Perma, 2004). When there is a lack of a consistent mechanism to provide financial aid counseling, they mostly receive information from the Internet, family, relatives, and friends. However, usually, information gained from the Internet is unfiltered, complicated, and could be frustrating. In the family and friends' case, which is usually a case for students from low SES families, these people may not have first-hand college information; the information they have might be inaccurate, inadequate or insufficient. Therefore, it is crucial to provide college, career and financial aid information to families because they are the key sources of information for numerous students.

Moreover, the first generation and low-income students have lack of access to economic capitals (Yavuz, 2014). This current capital inequality causes disadvantaged students to fall behind in college access and financial readiness. Therefore, the limited financial resources of urban schools in preparing students for college and career can be considered as a social justice issue that needs to be addressed. Both school leaders, counselors, and teachers should be trained about comprehensive financial aid, scholarships and grant programs increase disadvantaged students' access to these financial capitals provide promise for reducing the gap in college readiness and access.

### **Mentoring and Role Modeling for College and Career Readiness**

In the third place, it was also interesting to see that compared to other college readiness statements, both Turkish and American students do not have very strong agreement on having a counselor and/or mentor to guide them for their college and career success. In K-12 schools, counselors are the only professionals who are certified to help students' academic success, social development, and career readiness. School counselors are the most important support system to coordinate career counseling services and interventions that support career preparation and transition (Bryan et al., 2011). According to Bryan et al. (2011) contact between student and school counselor is found to be a positive indicator for college application.

Moreover, students have better results in application to post-secondary education, planning their future lives, and financing their education when they receive help from school counselors. When high school students work with school counselors, they are more likely to develop stronger hopes for continuing post-secondary education and to register and continue their education (Lapan & Poynton, 2017). In this context, students who participated in this study report less agreement on having a counselor to guide them for their college success. This can be explained that participants may not receive ongoing and systemic counseling from their school counselors.

### **Improving College and Career Counseling Services**

Compared to Turkish students, in general, American students indicated a high level of agreement with the college and career readiness standards. Both in Turkey and in the USA, school counselors face several challenges to effective implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program which includes an emphasis on college and career readiness. For instance, in the latest report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the average student to school counselor ratio is 1:491, which is higher than the 2011 NCES report of 1:469 (NCES, 2012). The ASCA recommended ratio is 1:250 (ASCA, 2012). The previous empirical studies indicate that because of increasingly high caseloads, it is very difficult to implement individual planning and responsive services (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012). A very high student to counselor ratio can explain why Turkish students have a relatively low agreement for their college and career readiness.

Besides the student and counselor ratio, the quality and content of school counselor training programs are also important to prepare and develop effective school counselors. For instance, in Turkey, previous studies indicate that school counselors have limited career counseling training during their formal counseling program (Yeşilyaprak, 2012). Despite the revision of the class guidance programs in Turkey, high schools did not adequately make activities related to career guidance for high school students (Siyez, Kaya & Uzbas, 2012). There are differences in perceived barriers to integrating career counseling in schools (Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer & Scanlan, 2006). If school counselors provide comprehensive career counseling services, this can be misinterpreted in Turkey. Parents and some educators might think that focusing on career counseling might lead to fewer efforts to get into college. Since the college entrance exam and GPA are the only two factors to get into college, Turkish students mostly focus on test preparation instead of early career awareness. Therefore, the opportunity to reach career information and job market information for young and adults in Turkey is limited (Yeşilyaprak, 2012). In addition, career counseling that is offered to students does focus on students' career interests and personal abilities. In other words, based on the students' test scores and grade point average, they have been guided to select a university and career path.

When school counselors do not adequately be prepared to design and deliver career counseling services, they are less likely to include career counseling tasks into their time schedules. If the school counselors do not make a targeted effort to integrate career counseling in their program delivery, it may lead to their students not being well informed about various opportunities in their career journeys. Unfortunately, there are many school counselors who do not provide career counseling services as much as it is needed. For example, Osborn and Baggerly (2004) found that three-quarters of middle and high school counselors do not spend enough time on career counseling activities.

In order to prepare and develop school counselors who have career counseling knowledge and skills, the national regulations for career counseling are just being recently



discussed in Turkey. Even though the national government is trying to increase the effectiveness of counselors in schools, their roles and responsibilities are not defined efficiently. For instance, according to the revised Ministry of National Education Guidance Services Regulation (MEB Guidance Services Regulation [RHY], 2017: art. 34) new additional non-counseling tasks have been defined for school counselors, such as serving as and taking part in examinations. In order to help school counselors not to involve in non-counseling tasks, school counselors are recommended to build a positive relationship with their school leaders. Particularly, in the USA over the past three decades, there has been a growing awareness on developing an effective school principal and counselor partnership to boost the college and career counseling services (Dahir & Stone, 2012).

### **Achievement Gap and College and Career Counseling**

The findings of this study indicated that compared to low achiever students who mostly get Fs, Ds and/or Cs, higher achiever students who mostly get As and Bs are more likely to get high college and career perception of readiness. This can be also considered as social justice issue because if the students with low academic achievement feel less agreement about college and career readiness behaviors, they are less likely to get into a college. Stipanovic, Stringfield, and Witherell (2017) conducted a study to investigate whether high school students' career feelings and academic self-efficacy change based on the provision of a model of career direction and career counseling services. In this process, students participated in several career exploration activities, such as learning career paths, taking career tests, experiencing work-based learning experiences, discussing with individual counselors about graduation plans, and discussing career and after high school goals.

As a result, they found that provision of the model and career services resulted in an increase in high school students' career feelings and the level of academic self-efficacy. Students tend to pursue tasks of career exploration more as their self-efficacy for career decision-making increases (Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer & Scanlan, 2006). The students who have lower career self-efficacy level may show less participation in career fairs, job shadowing, apprenticeship, and internships. Therefore, K-12 educators and counselor should pay extra attention to students who have low-grade point average and who face academic difficulties in their schools.

The previous studies indicate that both in Turkey and in the USA, more research studies need to be conducted to make evidence-based decisions for improving college and career counseling services. According to the screening study conducted by İçtüzzer on Turkish youth (2007), in order to support the career development of high school students, studies are mostly carried out to inform the conditions of entry to higher education programs and at least to inform their students about different professions. Many of the students understand that counseling services in high schools support students to acquire knowledge and skills to help them complete the academic preparations that will help them make post-secondary education choices (İçtüzzer, 2007). This suggests that the previous studies are useful but not enough for obtaining the desired results in career counseling.

### **Conclusion**

In the growing race for economic development, countries are revising their educational systems and leadership development programs to provide knowledge and skills necessary to prepare students for future jobs and demanding careers all around the world (Sellar & Lingard, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to create an evidence-based and research supported a comprehensive school counseling program to develop a high-quality career-focused education program that will lead to well-paying jobs and long-term careers.

School counselors are well positioned to deliver a program which includes an emphasis on college and career readiness, as they are trained to provide career development education for all students. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has provided counselors with a national model and framework to build their comprehensive program (ASCA, 2012). Without meaningful administrative support, the implementation of comprehensive college and career readiness activities will involve a chain of activities with no clear goals and measurable outcomes. Therefore, related to college and career counseling services, it is important to develop the capacity of school and district leaders so they can collaboratively work to create a college and career culture in their schools.

School leaders, counselor, and key stakeholders can apply the findings of this study related to the students' perspective on their college and career readiness to create comprehensive career counseling programs in their schools. Particularly, school leaders could utilize these results to look at time allocation in prevention/education versus reactive/responsive services. Moreover, aligned with the identified needs of students, school administrators and counselors might consider developing a systemic career counseling approach to improve college and career readiness for all.

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