

“Visions About Future: Hope, Optimism, and Pessimism” as Predictor of University Students’ Proactive Career Behavior

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Proaktif Kariyer Davranışının Yordayıcısı Olarak Gelecek Vizyonları: Umut, İyimserlik ve Kötümserlik

ABSTRACT

Current conditions in the labor market stimulate the individual to have a negative view of the future. The current working world requires individuals to be more active in their careers today. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between university students' proactive career behavior and their visions about future (hope, optimism, and pessimism). The participants consist of university students in Türkiye. Participants are 435 university students (207 female, 228 male). The age of the participants is between 17-27. The Visions About Future Scale and The Career Engagement Scale were used to collect the data. Pearson Correlation Analysis and path analysis based on Structural Equation Modeling were used in the analyzes. As a result of the analysis, a positive relationship was obtained between visions about future consisting of hope, optimism, and pessimism and proactive career behaviors. In addition, visions about future positively predicted proactive career behavior. Visions about future account for about 30 percent of the variance in proactive career behavior. The obtained result supported that strengthening the visions about future of university students will increase their proactive career behavior. The findings were discussed in the light of the relevant literature and some suggestions were presented to researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: Visions about future, Proactive career behavior, Hope, Optimism, Pessimism

ÖZET

Bu araştırma, ortaokul öğrencilerinin pandemi dönemi uzaktan eğitim süreci hakkındaki işgücü piyasasındaki mevcut koşullar, bireyi geleceğe dair olumsuz bir görüşe sahip olmaya teşvik etmektedir. Mevcut çalışma dünyası, bireylerin bugün kariyerlerinde daha aktif olmalarını gerektirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, üniversite öğrencilerinin proaktif kariyer davranışları ile gelecekle ilgili vizyonları (umut, iyimserlik ve karamsarlık) arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Çalışma grubu, Türkiye’de bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören üniversite öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılar 435 üniversite öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır (207 kadın, 228 erkek). Katılımcıların yaşları 17-27 arasındadır. Verilerin elde edilmesinde Gelecek Vizyonları Ölçeği ve Kariyer Adanmışlık Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Pearson Korelasyon Analizi ve Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesine dayalı yol analizi kullanılmıştır. Analiz sonucunda umut, iyimserlik ve karamsarlıktan oluşan gelecek vizyonları ile proaktif kariyer davranışları arasında pozitif yönde bir ilişki elde edilmiştir. Ayrıca gelecek vizyonları, proaktif kariyer davranışını pozitif olarak yordamıştır. Gelecek vizyonları proaktif kariyer davranışlarına ait varyansın yaklaşık yüzde 30’unu açıklamıştır. Elde edilen sonuç, üniversite öğrencilerinin gelecekle vizyonlarının güçlendirilmesinin proaktif kariyer davranışlarını artıracakını desteklemektedir. Bulgular ilgili literatür ışığında tartışılmış, araştırmacı ve uygulayıcılara birtakım öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gelecek vizyonları, Proaktif kariyer davranışı, Umut, İyimserlik, Kötümserlik

INTRODUCTION

Future employment is expected to change with the spread of Industry 4.0 technologies (Ginevra et al., 2018). The world of work is becoming increasingly unstable and volatile (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011). Individual’s career is becoming more frequent periods of career transition and uncertainty (Strauss et al., 2012). This change influences individuals' perspectives on their careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Today, the instability in business and working conditions and the decrease in job security cause individuals to have negative expectations for the future (Ginevra et al., 2020; Nota et al., 2015).

The current job market is nonlinear, protean, and kaleidoscopic (Savickas et al., 2009). Individuals are required to be able to seize most of opportunities, have personal initiative, and be willing to take risks (Ginevra et al., 2018; Greenhaus et al., 2010). In today's working world full of uncertainties, individuals have had to be more active and self-directed than before. Therefore, today's working world considers it important for individuals to have proactive career behaviors (Fay & Kamps, 2006).

Ozan Korkmaz¹ 

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¹ PhD., Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Education, Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Karaman, Turkey

Proactive Career Behavior

Hirschi et al. (2014) define proactive career behavior as “the degree to which somebody is proactively developing his/her career as expressed by diverse career behaviors”. In the definition of Chan (2017), proactive career behavior is defined as “the degree to which individuals are proactively engaged in a range of overt and self-directed career behaviors to enhance successful career development”. When the definitions are examined, it is seen that proactive career behavior is self-directed career behavior consisting of diverse behaviors. The individual uses proactive career behaviors in career development and preparation. These behaviors are career planning, skill development, career exploration, networking, career consultation, or career initiative (Guan et al., 2017; Hirschi & Freund, 2014; Strauss et al., 2012).

Proactive career behavior enables individuals to navigate more successfully against various career challenges and risks (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2019). It is one of the important behavioral patterns that facilitates students' transition to the job role (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998). It is a variable that strengthens the career development of individuals and therefore is important for a successful career (Herrmann et al., 2015; Verbruggen et al., 2007).

Visions About Future

Recent studies in career development, positive psychology, and organizational behavior has demonstrated that visions about future are critical resources related to individual's life. Visions about future reflect the individual's general well-being regarding real-life situations (Ginevra et al., 2017). It has the characteristics of a structure consisting of hope, optimism, and pessimism. The first evaluation of visions about future was made by Bryant and Cvenegros (2004). They argued that hope, optimism, and pessimism are distinct but related constructs, with unidimensional and global dimensions. Hope, optimism and pessimism are sometimes used interchangeably. However, each concept has a different set of features (Akca et al., 2018). Strong visions about future (high level hope, and optimism and low level of pessimism) shows positive orientation towards to future (Korkmaz & Doganulku, 2022).

Hope is core construct in the positive psychology and an important psychological resource for career development (Hirschi, 2014). When the definitions of hope are examined, it is seen that it is an emotional and/or cognitive structure (Averill et al., 1990; Scioli et al., 2011; Snyder, 2000; Staats, 1989; Sun & Shek, 2012). In the definition stating that hope includes an emotional structure, it is stated that it is a future-oriented concept that affects thought and behavior, and continues the action (Scioli et al., 2011). In another definition, which states that hope includes the cognitive structure, it is defined as a concept that reflects the motivation of individuals and the capacity of individuals to strive for their goals (Snyder, 2000).

Optimism is related to the individual's future planning (Ginevra et al., 2017). Optimism is defined as reflecting an individual's tendency that good things will happen (Scheier & Carver, 1985). In another definition, it is explained as people's interpretations of themselves in the face of success and failure (Seligman, 1990). Akca et al. (2018) stated that optimism indicates a thought that generally includes positive expectations about a situation or the future. Optimistic individuals are future-oriented and more likely to design their life (Ginevra et al., 2020). The high level of optimism pushes the individual to expect more and as a result, causes the individual to strive more (Ginevra et al., 2017). When the literature is examined, it is seen that optimism and pessimism are handled together. At the other end of optimism is pessimism. The positive side of this bipolar structure reflects optimism and the negative side reflects pessimism (Carver & Scheier, 2013; Segerstrom et al., 2011). Pessimism is associated with negative career outcomes (Ginevra et al., 2020).

The Relationship between Proactive Career Behavior and Visions About Future

Hope, optimism, and pessimism are associated with individuals' career variables (Ginevra et al., 2020). It is known that university students who are more optimistic are more interested in their education and career plans (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Optimism plays a facilitating role in positive development, improve adaptive behaviors, and educational and professional future design (Ginevra et al., 2020). It is stated that high level of optimism may be associated with positive career life (Akca et al., 2018). Higher optimistic university students are more engaged in their career planning (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Individuals who are pessimistic about the future have little motivation for exploratory activities. Therefore, these individuals are more passive in their behavior (Bryant & Cvenegros, 2004). Pessimism can prevent individuals' proactive behaviors because it is related to individuals' indecision about their careers (Braunstein-Bercovitz et al., 2012). Hope is linked with positive career-related variables (Amundson et al., 2013). In the literature, it is suggested that hope promotes proactive career behaviors in vocational pursuits and career management (Hirschi, 2014). Hope, by its nature, is a variable that provides support for proactive career behaviors (Lopes & Cunha, 2008).

Visions about future are a useful variable in individuals' careers. Strong visions about future are positively related to the behavior of individuals (Ginevra et al., 2017). It is stated that strong visions about future of individuals will be related to their positive career life (Akca et al., 2018). It is stated that in cases where individuals' visions about future

are weak, it may be difficult to realize behaviors that can be considered proactive career behaviors such as career planning, career choices, and positive outcome work transitions (Ginevra et al., 2017; Niles et al., 2011). It is stated that the relationship between future visions and career variables can be discussed (Ginevra et al., 2020). In the light of this literature, it can be said that visions about future consisting of hope, optimism, and pessimism will be related to proactive career behaviors.

The Present Study

University years are important in terms of being one of the important starting stages of students' careers (Sharf, 2016). School to work transition period is critical for newcomers (usually university graduates) to labor market. This period is beginning of one's career and the first career transition (Zhang et al., 2022). Proactive career behaviors contribute to successful school to work transition (De Vos et al., 2009). Proactive career behaviors are seen as an important behavioral pattern in university students who are in career transition (Thomas et al., 2010). This current study is important in terms of providing information on developing proactive career behaviors that university students who will be employed in the near future can use in their transition to an uncertain career environment.

The youth population (15-24 years) in Turkey constitutes approximately 15% of the total population of approximately 85 million (Turkish Statistical Institute TURKSTAT, 2022a). About 64% of this youth population are university students (The Council of Higher Education CoHE, 2022). According to the latest official statistical data in Turkey, there is an increase in youth unemployment. With the last increase, unemployment among the youth population covering the 15-24 age group has been calculated as 21.9%. In addition, when we look at the employment of the workforce over the age of 15, unemployment is 10.2% according to the latest data (TURKSTAT, 2022b). At the same time, according to the latest statistical data from the European Union (EU), youth unemployment is 15.1% (Eurostat, 2022). Youth people seem to be more likely to face unemployment, both in the EU and in Turkey which is a European country. For this reasons, it can be said that university students, who constitute a significant part of the population in Turkey, may need proactive career behaviors that will support their participation in the workforce more than other individuals in the process of joining the workforce.

It is stated that there is a need to examine the relationship between proactive career behaviors and cognitive and emotional resources of the individual (Korkmaz et al., 2020). It is emphasized that there are still many questions about how to make proactive career behavior more active (Peng et al., 2021). Therefore, the antecedents of proactive career behavior require further studies. Therefore, the aim of this research is to reveal the relationship between proactive career behaviors and visions about future. For this purpose, an answer to the question "Do visions about future (hope, optimism, and pessimism) significantly predict higher levels of proactive career behavior?" was sought in the current study.

METHOD

The current study was carried out in the relational design. This design reveals the effects of independent variable (predictor) on the dependent variable (predicted) (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In the current study, the visions about future are the predictive variable. In addition, proactive career behavior is the predicted variable.

Participants

The participants of the study are university students in Turkey. 207 (%47.6) of the participants are female and 228 (%52.4) of them are male (N = 435). Ages of the participants vary between 17-27 (Mean = 21.09, SD = 1.67). The distribution of the participants according to the classes is as follows: 61 participants (14.02%) are in the 1st year, 82 participants (18.85%) are in the 2nd year, 118 participants (27.13%) are in the 3rd year, and 174 participants (40%) are in the 4th year. In addition, the socioeconomic levels perceived by the participants are as follows: 57 participants (13.10%) are low, 343 participants (78.85%) are moderate, 35 participants (8.05%) are high.

Measures

Visions About Future

The Visions About Future Scale (VAFS) was used to measure individuals' visions about future (hope, optimism, and pessimism). The VAFS was developed by Ginevra et al. (2017) and was adapted into Turkish by Akca et al. (2018) for high school students. The scale is three-dimensional (18 items) and measures hope, optimism, and pessimism in individuals' career structures. VAFS has a 5-point Likert type (1: 'It does not describe me at all' to 5: 'It describes me very well'). Increasing scores in VAFS indicate that individuals have a positive view of the future.

The current study was carried out on university students in Turkey. Therefore, the construct validity of the scale was re-examined with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The fit indices obtained regarding the structure of the scale as a result of the second order CFA are as follows: $\chi^2 = 419.785$, $df = 132$, $\chi^2/df = 3.18$, $p < .001$; GFI = .903; CFI = .914, RMSEA = .07 (LO = .06, HI = .08). Item factor loads in the scale ranged from .51 to .79. The Cronbach Alpha obtained from the current study on the scale values are as follows: the total score is .76, optimism is .84, hope is .87,

and pessimism is .79. It can be said that the validity and reliability values of VAFS obtained from the current study are at acceptable levels for university students.

Proactive Career Behavior

The Career Engagement Scale (CES) was used to measure the proactive career behaviors of participants. The CES was developed by Hirschi et al. (2014) and was adapted into Turkish by Korkmaz et al. (2020). The scale consists of one dimension and nine items. CES has a 5-point Likert type (1: 'Almost never' to 5: 'Very often'). Higher scores in CES reflect that individuals engage in more proactive career behaviors. The Cronbach Alpha obtained from the current study on the scale value is .86.

Procedure and Ethics

The data were collected with the paper-pencil method in the classroom. Data collection took approximately 10 minutes. All participants participated in the study voluntarily. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. All procedures in the current study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1975 Helsinki Declaration.

Data Analysis

Before the analysis, the normality of the data was examined. For normality, the skewness and kurtosis values were examined. The fact that skewness and kurtosis values are between ± 1.5 means the data is distributed normally (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). When the values of the data are examined, it is seen that normality is achieved (Table 1). Pearson Correlation Analysis was performed to determine the relationships between the variables of the study. Structural Equation Modeling-based path analysis was performed to reveal the predictor of independent variables on dependent variables. The evaluation of the structural model was based on the criteria of χ^2 being significant, $\chi^2/df < 3$, GFI > .90, CFI > .90, RMSEA < .10 (Marcoulides & Schumacher, 2001; Meydan & Sesen, 2015; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 and IBM SPSS Amos 24.0.0 were used in the analysis of the data.

FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables of the study are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation values of variables

| Variables | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | Mean | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-------|-------|----------|----------|
| 1. Hope | .87 | | | | | 24.97 | 5.12 | -.20 | -.46 |
| 2. Optimism | .62 | .84 | | | | 19.82 | 4.75 | -.23 | -.17 |
| 3. Pessimism | -.38 | -.39 | .79 | | | 8.91 | 3.75 | .94 | .02 |
| 4. VAF | .85 | .85 | -.68 | .76 | | 65.87 | 11.04 | -.32 | -.39 |
| 5. PCB | .45 | .35 | -.18 | .42 | .86 | 29.96 | 6.06 | -.02 | .01 |

Note₁: $N = 435$.

Note₂: All correlation values are significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Note₃: Diagonals show the Cronbach Alpha values.

As seen in Table 1, there is a positive and significant relationship between proactive career behavior and visions about future total scores ($r = .42, p < .001$). In addition, there is a positive and significant relationship between proactive career behavior and optimism ($r = .35, p < .001$) and hope ($r = .45, p < .001$). On the other hand, there is a negative and significant relationship between proactive career behavior and pessimism ($r = -.38, p < .001$).

The results of the path analysis performed using the maximum likelihood method in order to reveal the effect of the independent variable (the visions about future) on the dependent variable (proactive career behavior) are given in Figure 1.

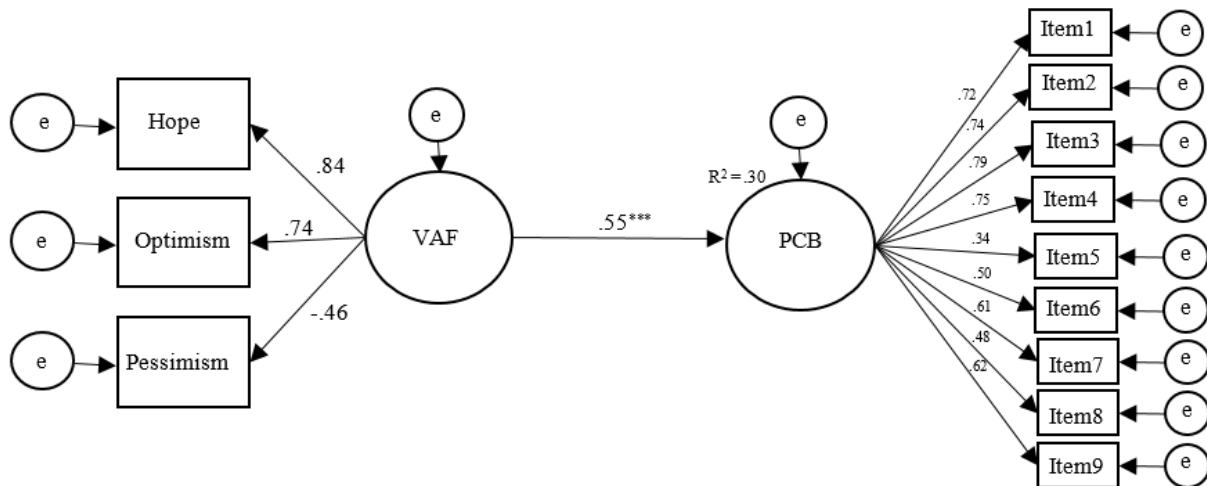


Figure 1: The Model of Path Analysis

Note. *** $p < .001$.

The model fit indices values obtained for the path analysis based on Structural Equation Modeling are as follows: $\chi^2 = 169.944$, $df = 49$, $\chi^2/df = 3.47$, $p < .001$; GFI = .936; CFI = .940, RMSEA = .08 (LO = .06, HI = .09). When the fit indices are examined, it is seen that the fit values of the model are above acceptable levels. In the model, visions about future consisting of hope, optimism, and pessimism were found to positive predictor of proactive career behavior as shown in Figure 1 ($B = .084$, S.E. = .01, C. R. = 8.42, $p < .001$). The visions about future account for 30% of proactive career behavior ($R^2 = .30$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the university student's visions about future predicting the proactive career behavior by using path analysis. The results showed that visions about future (hope, optimism and pessimism) predicted proactive career behavior. This finding has indicated that individuals with a higher level of visions about future are more likely to actively exhibit proactive career behavior. The results of the current study emphasize that university students need to have and further strengthen visions about future including hope, optimism, and pessimism.

The main finding of the current study is that visions about future predicted proactive career behavior. In the literature, positive orientation toward future is relevant to coping with the current career contexts (Santilli et al., 2017). When the studies are examined, it is seen that the studies that directly examine the relationships between visions about future and career outcomes are limited. Doganulku (2022) examined the mediating role of visions about future in his study with university students. In this study, a positive relationship was obtained between visions about future and proactive career behaviors. Similarly, Doganulku and Guneslice (2022) examined the moderating role of career decision regret in the relationship between visions about future and proactive career behaviors. In this study, a positive relationship was obtained between university students' visions about future and proactive career behaviors. In their study, Bolukbasi & Kirdok (2019) examined the mediating role of future orientations consisting of hope and optimism in the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction of high school students. The study showed that future orientation has a full mediating role in the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction. In addition, in the study of Santilli et al. (2017), it was found that hope and optimism have a partial mediating role between career adaptability and life satisfaction. Korkmaz & Cenkseven-Onder (2019) examined the mediating role of hope in the relationship between high school students' life goals and career adaptability. According to the findings, hope has a partial mediating role in this relationship. Hirschi et al. (2015) found that hope is related to career exploration in university students. Buyukgoze-Kavas (2014) found a positive relationship between career adaptability and hope, and optimism in her study. When the literature is examined, it is seen that optimism and hope are associated with proactive career behavior such as career planning (Patton et al., 2004) and career exploration (Hirschi et al., 2015). Hirschi's (2014) study in university students indicated that hope is an important resource that motivates students to proactively engage in shaping their careers. The relevant literature supports the main finding of the current study.

Hope is an important concept that is used before and after problems arise and is used in solving problems (Atik & Kemer, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that hope is related to proactive career behaviors in terms of problem-solving structure. On the other hand, hope is an important source for the individual to take action (Hirschi, 2014). It has features that determine the capacity of the effort that individuals will make (Snyder, 2000). With this, hope has future-oriented features that perpetuate the actions of the individual (Scioli et al., 2011). Umut contains a support for proactive behaviors in its structure (Lopes & Cunha, 2008). Therefore, it can be said that hope is a concept that determines the capacity of proactive career behaviors to be displayed, affects, and maintains these behaviors. The finding from the study advocates that hope is an important potential psychological resource that determines how

much proactive career behavior individuals can display and how much of these behaviors can be activated and sustained.

Optimism is known as a concept related to important concepts in the career development of the individual, as well as many individual variables (Maruta et al., 2000). Patton et al. (2004) revealed in their study that optimism predicts career planning and career exploration, which reflects proactive career behaviors. Optimism pushes the individual to expect more about their future, and as a result, it causes the individual to try harder (Ginevra et al., 2017). Therefore, optimism, due to its nature, can push individuals to have excessive expectations about their careers. On the other hand, pessimism can reduce or eliminate the individual's future expectations. As a result, individuals with high optimism and low pessimism may try harder to achieve their career prospects. The finding obtained from the study advocates that optimism and pessimism can predict proactive career behaviors by meeting the career expectations of the individual.

Proactive behaviors include behaviors that are controlled by the individual and include future-oriented actions (Parker et al., 2006). Future orientation was positively associated with career exploration and career planning (Janeiro & Marques, 2010; Schacter et al., 2008). Therefore, the reason why proactive career behaviors are predicted by visions about future may be due to the future-oriented nature of proactive career behaviors.

Individuals with high hope, and optimism and low levels of pessimism (i.e., poor future visions) are capable of actively constructing their career life, participating in working life, and coping with career developmental tasks (Ginevra et al., 2020; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). It is stated that hope, optimism and pessimism are future-oriented positive belief that enables the individual to pursue their own personal goals and desires (Sun & Shek, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that future-oriented positive beliefs in the structure of visions about future are supporting the increase of proactive career behaviors.

Strong visions about future positively support the problems faced by individuals (Maruta et al., 2000). Higher levels of hope and optimism support individuals to cope with stressful situations (Li & Wu, 2011). Therefore, the results of the study show that the visions about future of individuals can be an important positive resource that supports proactive career behaviors that they use to cope with the problems they encounter in their careers. In conclusion, in this current study, it was found that the bipolar structure consisting of optimism, and pessimism and hope together unidimensionally strongly predicted the general degree of proactive career behaviors consisting of different career behaviors of individuals. This result showed that hope, optimism, and pessimism together can be the trigger and maintainer of an individual's proactive career behaviors.

Limitations and Recommendations

The current study has some limitations. The study was carried out in cross-sectional design. In future studies, real cause-effect relationships can be revealed by using experimental or longitudinal designs. In addition, studies to be carried out will contribute to increasing the validity of the findings. In the experimental study to be done, a psycho-educational intervention consisting of future visions can be applied to individuals. The effect of the intervention based on the developed visions about future on proactive career behaviors can be tested. Findings from the research emphasize the importance of preventive career studies. It is very important for university students to include visions about future in preventive career interventions. Thus, students may be more inclined to use proactive career behaviors in the challenging labor market. According to the findings obtained from the research, it can be said that strengthening the visions about future of individuals will increase their proactive career behaviors. Therefore, studies can be conducted to regulate and improve the levels of hope, optimism, and pessimism in order for university students to be more effective and self-directed in their careers. These studies can be carried out by the departments of universities that offer career psychological counseling services. In future studies, the moderating and mediating roles of other variables (e. g., life goals, career goal feedbacks, self-efficacy, career beliefs, career distress) can be examined in order to reveal the relationship between visions about future and proactive career behaviors in more depth.

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