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A K20 Center Research Brief

Contribution of Job Shadowing Experience to the Career Development of Secondary Students

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Introduction

Rapid changes in labor markets, higher education pathways, and career expectations have increased the importance of intentional career development support in secondary schools. Prior research shows that effective career development interventions help students strengthen self-awareness, clarify career options, increase motivation, and make more informed postsecondary decisions. However, much of the existing research on workplace-based career exploration, particularly job shadowing, has focused on vocational education or higher education settings.

Apaydın and Çakır Çelebi (2024) identify a gap in the literature related to academic-oriented secondary schools, especially within the Turkish education context. While job shadowing is recognized internationally as a promising career exploration strategy, there was limited empirical evidence examining how a structured job shadowing experience contributes to the career development processes of academically focused secondary school students.

The purpose of the study was to examine how a one-day job shadowing experience, implemented as part of a school counseling and guidance program, contributed to students' self-awareness, career awareness, and career decision-making. The study addresses a practical concern for schools: whether short-term, workplace-based experiences meaningfully support students during the critical career exploration phase of adolescence.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study used a qualitative case study design. This design enabled the researchers to examine one specific career development activity, job shadowing, within its real-school context and to explore students' experiences in depth rather than measuring outcomes through standardized assessments.

Sample:

Participants included:

- 38 high school students. Grade level: 11th grade
- Gender: 21 female, 17 male



- Age range: 16-18 years (mean age = 17.01)
- School type: Academically oriented high school that admits students based on national entrance exam scores (LGS)
- Location: Metropolitan city in Turkey
- Socioeconomic context: Students' families were reported as mostly middle to upper socioeconomic status

Students were selected using purposive sampling, and participation required both involvement in the job shadowing activity and voluntary consent.

Intervention Descriptions:

The intervention consisted of a one-day job shadowing experience integrated into the school's guidance and psychological counseling program.

Key components included:

- Students completed a form identifying three occupations they wanted to explore.
- Students were grouped based on career interests.
- 35 workplaces and institutions were identified across public and private sectors.
- 48 mentors volunteered from these institutions.
- Students participated in small groups, accompanied by their classroom guidance teachers.
- Each group observed professionals in their actual work environments.

Students observed daily work routines, learned about tools, equipment, and work conditions, asked mentors questions about career paths, education, challenges, and opportunities, and engaged in informal discussions about career development and decision-making.

Workplace settings included hospitals, courthouses, law offices, construction firms, banks, an airport, government offices, therapy centers, factories, and architecture firms.

Dosage:

The intervention dosage can be calculated as follows:

- Number of sessions: 1 job shadowing session
- Length of session: One full day
- Duration: Conducted across three days total to accommodate all student groups, but each student participated for one day only

Calculated Dosage:

- Total sessions per student: 1
- Approximate total instructional time: One school day

Data Analysis:

Researchers analyzed students' responses to open-ended questionnaire items using content analysis. Both authors independently coded responses, compared categories, developed shared themes, and resolved discrepancies through discussion. This process strengthened credibility by ensuring agreement on how students' experiences were interpreted.

Results

Findings revealed meaningful contributions of the job shadowing experience across three interconnected areas:

Career Decision-Making Of 37 students who responded to pre- and post-career questions:

- 54.1% changed or clarified their intended career choice
- 45.9% did not change their choice but reported stronger confidence
- Students reported increased career decision-making and confidence in their selections.

Self-Awareness students gained clarity about:

- Personal strengths and interests
- Skills requiring improvement
- Alignment (or misalignment) between personal traits and career demands
- Many students identified career barriers and supports, including perceived gender norms, academic requirements, and workplace realities.

Career Awareness students developed a more realistic understanding of:

- Daily work tasks
- Working conditions and expectations
- Education and training pathways
- Career advancement opportunities
- The experience helped correct misconceptions

Overall, students reported increased academic motivation, stronger connections between school learning and careers, and improved confidence about postsecondary planning.

Application into Practice

This intervention demonstrates how short-term, structured job shadowing can be embedded into existing school counseling or career guidance programs to support students' career development.

1. Integrate job shadowing into counseling services. Position the experience as part of ongoing career development, not a standalone field trip.



2. Elicit student voice. Ask students to identify careers they want to explore prior to placement.
3. Build community partnerships. Recruit public and private sector workplaces and voluntary mentors.
4. Place students in small groups to improve access to observation and discussion.
5. Schedule strategically. Allow flexibility across multiple days so that all students can participate.
6. Provide adult supervision. Assign teachers or counselors to accompany student groups.
7. Include post-experience reflection. Use post-activity questionnaires to record reflections.

Work Cited

Apaydın, S., & Çakır Çelebi, S. G. (2024). Contribution of job shadowing experience to the career development of high school students. *Journal of Kırşehir Education Faculty*, 25(2), 1053-1090. <https://doi.org/10.29299/kefad.1332561>