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Bridging Research and Practice in Career Education: The Role of Ankara University Career Planning and Human Resources Application and Research Center (KARMER) and the "Adaptation to Professional Life" Course

Kocaman, Nazli Gonul
nazlikocaman@yahoo.com, Ankara University

Abstract

Context: Ankara University Career Planning and Human Resources Application and Research Center (KARMER) has the advantages of functioning both as a research center and a career services office within a Higher Education Institution, which allows it to directly facilitate the transfer from research to practice in the career development field. KARMER aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical fields while offering support to the students and graduates of our university through their transition to work life. KARMER's core services include: Individual Career Counselling personalized guidance to improve workforce skills and job placement. Consulting and Training Services support for private employment agencies and job seekers on CVs, interviews, labour market trends, and soft skills. Scientific Research and Academic Activities conferences and events to promote career development knowledge and collaboration.
KARMER collaborate with universities, public/private employers, and is regulated by Turkiye Presidential Human Resources Office (CBİKO). It partners with The Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) to provide career counselling and group training, coordinating through faculty Career Coordinators and instructors.
Approach: In line with its mission, KARMER developed the online course "Adaptation to Professional Life" for third-year university students to boost their career readiness by helping them identify skills, values, and providing practical career planning tools. The course uses digital resources like videos, e-books, İŞKUR media, and labour market platforms such as Talent Gate[1], with over 10,000 students expected to participate. This article discusses the course design and implementation process, institutional collaborations, and plans for future quantitative eval-

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uation of its impact on students' self-awareness and career planning skills. The course development involved collaboration among CBİKO, İŞKUR, faculty, and instructors, building on existing digital career education materials and incorporating feedback from İŞKUR and academic staff to tailor content to diverse student needs. The program is designed to help students increase their self-awareness about their interests, skills, personality traits, and career values, allowing them to be able to make well-informed career choices in the future. It highlights career planning as a vital lifelong process, encouraging students to set both short-term and long-term career goals and create practical plans to achieve them. Students will learn about the advantages of participating in national and international exchange programs for personal and professional growth. Additionally, the program focuses on developing key employment skills, including crafting effective CVs and excelling in job interviews. It also underscores the importance of internships for career exploration and job opportunities, as well as the value of engaging in extracurricular activities to enhance their overall university experience.

Findings: In order to systematically evaluate the course's impact on students' self-awareness and career planning skills, quantitative assessments will be conducted using entrance and exit surveys. Student demographics to be collected via survey include: Age, Gender, Use of KARMER services, Course Related Expectations and Course Related Suggestions. The Career Decision-Making Self Efficacy Scale (CDSS) (Ulaş & Yıldırım, 2016), is also utilized as basis for a 30-item questionnaire focusing on students' career competencies in the areas of Job/Vocational Information, Self-Recognition, Career Preference, Ways to Create a Career Plan, Following Occupational Updates. The structure of the aforementioned scale is based on Crites' (1978, 1969) Career Maturity Model and aims to adapt this model to the Turkish context. The data to be collected from the pre- and post-application surveys will be utilized in future years as part of a longitudinal study to assess the career needs and development of our students throughout their academic journey.

Conclusions: As part of our trajectory, we seek to continue and expand collaboration with academic units, administrative departments, and industry partners to strengthen the course's impact and sustainability. We will keep working towards building stronger relationships with internal stakeholders (faculty, advisors, management) and external stakeholders (employers, non-governmental organisations, alumni) to keep the course aligned with changing career trends and expectations. In addition to helping meet these objectives, the course "Adaptation to Professional Life" helps us gather and analyze annual student feedback to assess course effectiveness, identify improvements, and guide data-driven updates that meet student and educational needs. At this early stage, the Adaptation to Professional Life course offers a compact tool for educators and Career Guidance Services providers with elements of both research and application by evaluating students' needs and competencies as well as providing the necessary tools to develop those while also connecting students to a wider ecosystem of employers and academia.

Keywords

career education, career competencies, digital career development tools

1 The Role of KARMER

Ankara University Career Planning and Human Resources Application and Research Center (KARMER) uniquely integrates its dual roles as a research center and career services office to bridge research and practice in career development. KARMER supports students and alumni

in their transition to professional life by fostering collaborations with public and private sector organisations. Announcements regarding job postings, internships, trainings, and career events are shared via Talent Gate, a platform managed in cooperation with Turkiye Presidential Human Resources Office. Additionally, students are guided to leverage the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) platform[2] for a wider range of private sector opportunities.

In line with its mission, KARMER has developed the online course "Adaptation to Professional Life", designed for third-year university students, with the aim of enhancing their career readiness in terms of career decision making competency. The course helps students identify their abilities, skills, and career values while offering practical tools for realistic career planning. The curriculum incorporates digital tools such as educational videos, a career planning e-book, and İŞKUR's digital media, alongside opportunities for students to explore the labour market through platforms like Talent Gate. Notably, over 10,000 students across the university in a span of 5 years are expected to participate in this course, making it a large-scale initiative with the potential for significant impact.

This article will focus on the process of designing and implementing the course, highlighting how the curriculum was developed to address students' career development needs and the institutional collaborations involved. By detailing the creation and early implementation phases, this article offers insights into the practical steps required to integrate research and practice in career education. Additionally, the planned quantitative evaluation of the course will be outlined, showcasing how the course's impact on students' self-awareness and career planning competencies will be systematically assessed in the future.

As KARMER we provide services to our students and alumni, our external stakeholders and broader academia in three core domains:

1. Individual career counselling

We offer personalized guidance to help our students and alumni assess their personal qualities and interests. These services aim to enhance workforce development, support job placement strategies, and improve the career planning skills of job seekers. Our training programs cover a range of topics, including CV preparation, interview techniques, labour market trends, and soft skill development. Career Counselling support is provided by our academic staff with post graduate degrees on Management and Industrial Organisational Psychology.

2. Consulting and Training Services

We offer consulting and training services to employment agencies and individuals. These services aim to enhance workforce development, support job placement strategies, and improve the career planning skills of job seekers. Our trainings cover a range of topics, including CV preparation, interview techniques, labour market trends, and soft skill development.

3. Scientific research and academic activities

We organize conferences and events in the fields of labour market, human resources and career planning. These events create platforms for sharing research findings, discussing policy

developments, and fostering collaboration among scholars, professionals, and students interested in career development and employment issues.

Our external stakeholders are other universities, and the public and private sector employers. Turkiye Presidential Human Resources Office (CBİKO) regulates our activities and we collaborate with İŞKUR via a signed protocol which assigns an İŞKUR Official to our university tasked with providing individual career counselling and İŞKUR Job Club group trainings to our students. We also communicate with our students through our Career Coordinators in each faculty and assigned instructors guide students through open access career education materials used in our university.

2 The "Adaption to Professional Life" Course

During the process of curating the "Adaptation to Professional Life" course, we navigated an ecosystem that included CBİKO, İŞKUR, faculty/department coordinators, and course instructors. The existing course materials on CBİKO Talent Gate and Youth Talent TV (YTNKTV) Digital Media used for career education in our university served as our starting point. İŞKUR and BTK Akademi (Information and Communication Technologies Authority Academy) course materials were also utilized. A literature review on the subject matter has yielded several approaches and related scales (Bandura, 1997; Betz & Luzzo, 2000; Betz et al., 1996; Crites, 1969; Dalkılıç et al., 2022). Meetings with İŞKUR officials helped shape the course in a way that is beneficial to both our students and their potential employers. Finally, meetings with course instructors have guided us in finalizing the process and helped tailor the course content for the needs of students from different academic backgrounds.

The curriculum involves an e-book as required reading (Öztemel, 2021), which provides a comprehensive overview of career planning processes, personal development, and professional growth strategies. It focuses on helping individuals understand themselves, the world of work, and how to make informed career decisions. The book includes updated content relevant to today's dynamic labour market and is widely used in Turkish higher education settings.

A reading recommendation is offered to the students (Pattern et al., 2021), which offers a creative and reflective approach to career development. Using metaphors like the telescope, it encourages readers to explore career paths with vision and purpose. The book emphasizes self-awareness, motivation, and adaptability, making it a valuable guide for students and professionals alike. Supplementary web platforms are:

- *İŞKUR:* A government institution that supports employment and workforce development in Turkey. It offers job matching services, vocational training programs, unemployment benefits, and labour market information.
- *BTK Akademi:* A digital learning platform providing free online courses in areas like information technologies, software, cybersecurity, and personal development. It aims to increase digital literacy and support lifelong learning.
- *YTNKTV:* A digital media platform focused on career development and youth skills. It shares educational videos, interviews with professionals, and guidance content related to career planning, entrepreneurship, and labour market trends.

The course begins with an introduction to professional life, covering the structure of the career planning course, the CBİKO Talent Gate platform, İŞKUR's role, and the KARMER

website. In the second week, students begin exploring themselves by learning about basic career aspects in terms of intelligence, personality, and personal characteristics. The third week continues this self-exploration with a focus on identifying personal talents and technical skills. Week four introduces the concept of a career and the importance of career planning, with guidance from İŞKUR on the overall process. In week five, students begin to set their own career goals using digital tools and content.

Week six focuses on career preparation, featuring a series of modules and a session by the Ankara University ERASMUS Office that explains how students can benefit from Erasmus+ mobility opportunities. The seventh week is dedicated to writing effective CVs, with video content from İŞKUR's Job Club. In week eight, students undergo a midterm evaluation, which consists of submitting their CV for assessment. The students are asked to register their CVs and encouraged to utilize individual career counselling services for its preparation. Week nine covers job search techniques, including how to register with İŞKUR and how to build a professional LinkedIn profile. Week ten is devoted to interview preparation, where students learn techniques for succeeding in job interviews through content provided by İŞKUR.

In week eleven, the course introduces students to different sectors, starting with academia and non-governmental organisations. The content includes overviews of academic career paths, national NGOs, and international NGOs, helping students understand the diversity of opportunities in these areas. Week twelve focuses on the public sector, providing insights into careers in government and public service through the related CBIKO training module on YTNKTV. In week thirteen, attention shifts to the private sector with a session dedicated to understanding employment opportunities in business and industry via the related CBIKO training module.

Week fourteen is dedicated to student feedback and course review. Students are asked to evaluate the course through a link provided in the system and are encouraged to catch up on any missed readings or videos in preparation for the final assessment. In the fifteenth and final week, students take the end-of-semester exam, which consists of 20 multiple-choice questions based on the required reading and course material in order to assess students understanding of the provided educational material. A make-up exam is also available for those who need it, featuring the same format and point value.

All CBİKO videos can be accessed by registering on YTNKTV. After opening the “Kariyer Planlama Dersi” videos on YTNKTV, for the specific video under the relevant topic, “English” option can be selected in the subtitle settings. İŞKUR videos can be accesed on YouTube.

The desired subtitle language (e.g., English) can be selected in YouTube’s subtitle settings to watch these videos with preferred subtitles. BTK videos can be accessed on the BTK AKADEMİ website.

The program aims to enhance students' self-awareness regarding their interests, abilities, personality traits, and career values, enabling them to connect these attributes with informed career decisions. It emphasizes the significance of career planning as a crucial lifelong pursuit, guiding students to establish both long- and short-term career goals along with actionable plans to achieve them. Students will explore the benefits of national and international exchange programs for personal and professional development, develop essential employment skills such as writing effective CVs and succeeding in job interviews. The importance of internships for career exploration and job opportunities will be highlighted, alongside the value of extracurricular activities that enrich their university experience.

3 The Course Assessment

In order to systematically assess the course's impact on students' self-awareness and career planning competencies, the quantitative evaluation of the course is conveyed through entrance and exit surveys. A pre-application survey in the beginning of the term and a post-application survey upon completion of the course is administered to students. The survey questions are based on a scale developed by Turkish academics (Ulaş & Yıldırım, 2016), aimed to develop and validate a Turkish version of a Career Decision-Making Competence Scale (Betz & Luzzo, 2000) tailored for Turkish university students. The Career Decision-Making Self Efficacy Scale (CDSS) is designed in order to support the development of career counselling programs and the career development of students in their final year of university, aimed at measuring the career decision-making competency levels of final-year university students in Turkey. CDSS has five factors: Job/Vocational Information, Self-Recognition, Career Preference, Ways to Create a Career Plan, Following Occupational Updates. CDSS Cronbach Alpha was .97. CDSS and its factors proved applicable and reliable scales to assess career decision-making self-efficacy levels of college students.

The pre-application and post-application surveys of the Adaptation to Professional Life course consist of 30 questions assigned to these factors, in addition to student demographics. The questionnaire explores students' feelings, awareness, and attitudes toward their career paths. It examines whether they feel excited or anxious about their future careers and whether they believe in their ability to succeed. It also looks at the influence of family and others on their career choices, including cases where students chose a career due to external pressure or confusion. The questions probe students' self-awareness regarding their interests, personality traits, and talents, as well as their knowledge about career requirements and planning. Some items focus on adaptability to the changing job market, the impact of internships on career decisions, and whether students feel they made informed choices. Ultimately, the questionnaire evaluates how clear and confident students are about their career goals, how much planning they have done, and whether they believe their current path suits them.

Student demographics to be collected via survey include: Age, Gender, Use of KARMER services, Course Related Expectations and Course Related Suggestions.

4 Future Research

Data obtained from the entrance and exit surveys will be used in the coming years as part of a longitudinal study for assesing career needs and progression of our students throughout their academic life.

Our trajectory is to continue collaborations while maintaining and expanding cooperative efforts with academic units, administrative departments, and relevant industry partners to enhance the impact and sustainability of the course. The Adaptation to Professional Life course provides a powerful tool grounded in theory and research in order for us to strengthen ties with internal and external stakeholders, fostering deeper engagement with both internal stakeholders (such as faculty members, academic advisors, and university management) and external stakeholders (including employers, NGOs, and alumni) to ensure the course remains responsive to evolving expectations and career trends. With the help of the course surveys we will be able to collect and analyze student feedback on a yearly basis to evaluate the course's effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and support data-driven revisions that align with student needs and educational goals.

For the future it is our aim to establish stronger ties with our internal stakeholders by creating a cross functional working environment which involves launching student career clubs in each faculty. This is also advised by the government authority (CBİKO) to university career centers. By creating the ecosystem for dialogue between our students, the governing body and the public employment initiative, we are hoping to support other universities and the industry as our external stakeholders.

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Abbreviations

BTK: Information and Communication Technologies Authority / *CBİKO:* Turkiye Presidential Human Resources Office / *CDSS:* The Career Decision-Making Self Efficacy Scale / *İŞKUR:* The Turkish Employment Agency / *KARMER:* Ankara University Career Planning and Human Resources Application and Research Center / *YTNKTV:* Youth Talent TV