BUSINESS STUDENTS’ CAREER INTEREST IN ACCOUNTING PROFESSION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT
Accounting is a very important profession in today’s contemporary business environment. On the other hand, it is also becoming more difficult to find qualified graduates specialized in accounting. Therefore, in order to foster students to be interested in accounting, it is of utmost importance to identify the factors that determine students’ interest in this field. This study identifies and investigates the factors (i.e., career outcome expectation, career challenge, social influence, and academic performance in accounting) that are likely to influence students’ career interests in the field of accounting. A structured survey was administered to university students located in a province in Turkey. The findings of this research study reveal that students that aim to pursue a challenging career; that are influenced by other people related to their career decisions; and that have greater academic performance in accounting will be interested in pursuing a career in the field of accounting.

Indexing terms/Keywords
Accounting, career interest, career outcome expectation, career challenge, social influence, academic performance

Academic Discipline And Sub-Disciplines
Business Administration; Accounting

SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION
Social Science

TYPE (METHOD/APPROACH)
Empirical research; Survey/Interview
INTRODUCTION

Accounting profession is of great importance in today’s contemporary business environment. The need for the qualified people specialized in this field is on the increase as well. However, the quality and/or quantity of students that major or willing to major in accounting and pursue a career in this field has been an important concern for decades (Tan and Laswad, 2006; Jackling et al., 2012). The challenging nature of the accounting practices (e.g., client environment, technology, financial instruments, globalization, etc.) (Byrne and Willis, 2005), challenging requirements to complete a degree in accounting or to become an accountant (Allen, 2004) make it difficult to appeal high quality students to pursue a career and to be interested in the accounting field. Therefore, in order to foster students to be interested in accounting, it is of utmost importance to identify the factors that determine students’ interest in this field.

There are a number of studies with respect to the accounting profession in the literature; and these studies investigate the subject from different perspectives. Literature on this subject can be categorized into three themes: career choice, career intention, and career interest in accounting. Literature reveals that several factors, such as interest (Bolhan et al., 2007; Heiat et al., 2007), parental influence (Auyeung and Sands, 1997; Bolhan et al., 2007), peer influence (Auyeung and Sands, 1997), teacher influence (Auyeung and Sands, 1997), and financial factors (Ahmed et al., 1997; Heiat et al., 2007), positively influence the career choice of students towards accounting. Another theme of research on accounting profession focused on students’ career intentions. Studies found that positive attitudes and subjective norms (Churchman, 2013), personal perception and important referents (Tan and Laswad, 2006), and accounting educators (Jackling and Calero, 2006) have positive impact on students’ career intentions with respect to the accounting profession. Finally, studies in the literature also put emphasis on the career interest in accounting profession. These studies investigated how attitudes (Jackling et al., 2012), image (Mc Dowall et al., 2012), race (Yang et al., 2012), other factors (e.g., job opportunities and income) (Hutaibat, 2012) influence students’ career interest in accounting. Table 1 summarizes the studies in the literature that focused on the accounting profession.

| Author(s)          | Theme              | Location  | Findings                                                                 |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Churchman (2013)   | Career intention   | United States | undergraduate students’ positive attitudes toward the accounting profession and subjective norms (referents) are the important factors that affect the students’ intention to enter the profession. |
| Hutaibat (2012)    | Career interest    | Jordan    | Job opportunities and income play important roles for students to prefer public accounting rather than management accounting. |
| Jackling et al. (2012) | Career interest | Australia | Students have positive attitudes towards the accounting profession. |
| Mc Dowall et al. (2012) | Career interest | Australia | There is a negative image on accountants; and students find accounting profession boring and precise. |
| Yang et al. (2012) | Career interest    | United States | African American students have greater accounting career interests than Caucasian students, before and after controlling for the impact of math performance and gender. |
| Bolhan et al. (2007) | Career choice    | Malaysia  | Self interest, parents’ advice, and friends/peers affect students’ choice in accounting profession. |
| Heiat et al. (2007) | Career choice     | United States | Genuine interest in the subject, availability of employment, and starting pay are the factors impacting the choice. |
| Jackling and Calero (2006) | Career intention | Australia | Accounting educators have an important role in determining students’ intention to become an accountant. |
| Tan and Laswad (2006) | Career intention | New Zealand | The following factors affect students’ intention to major in accounting and non-accounting disciplines: personal perception about the accounting profession, important referents, interest in accounting, required workload, and job opportunities. |
HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In this study, we are examining the impact of several factors (i.e., career outcome expectation, career challenge, social influence, and academic performance in accounting) on the career interests of business administration students in the field of accounting. Figure 1 illustrates the research model and hypotheses developed for this study.

One of the most important factors that is likely to influence students’ interest in a certain career field is their outcome expectation. Outcome expectation is defined by Bandura (1997) as the belief that a certain behavior will lead to a particular outcome that is observed in physical, social, and self-evaluative forms. Bandura (1986) stresses that people form enduring interest in an activity, if they perceive that they are competent in it and if they expect that it will produce
valuable outcomes. This is also true in career context. If a student expects that a career field is promising and likely to provide opportunities in the future, s/he will be likely to be interested in that specific field.

The prior research also provide evidence to support this. The findings of Lent et al. (1996) reveal that students’ academic and career interests are strongly related to career outcome expectation. In line with this argument, we suggest that students with greater expectations from their career field, they will be more likely to pursue a career in accounting. That is, if a student would like to have broader exposure to business, more job opportunities, and higher future earnings and advancement potential, s/he will be more likely to be interested in a career in the field of accounting. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Career outcome expectation is positively related to career interest in accounting.

Another factor that may enable students to pursue a career in accounting is the challenge that it possesses (Felton et al., 1994; Ahmed et al., 1997). Put another way, if a student likes to work in challenging conditions, it is greatly likely that the student become interested in accounting. The findings of the previous research studies indicate that workload and number oriented nature of the accounting field negatively influences students’ career decisions in accounting (Cohen and Hanno, 1993; Saemann and Crooker, 1999; Allen, 2004). We argue that opposite of this argument is legitimate as well, as students preferring challenging working conditions, including working with a lot of numbers and heavy workload, will have tendency to pursue a career in the field of accounting. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: Career challenge is positively related to career interest in accounting.

Social influence is proposed as another factor that have an impact on career interest of students. We define social influence as the perceived social pressure with respect to perform or not to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). People usually behave in a certain way due to the suggestions by important others. This is same in career context, as students may become interested in a certain field based on the influence of other people.

The prior research also states that career related decisions of students are influenced by important others (Silverstone and Williams, 1979; Paolillo and Estes, 1982; Inman et al., 1989; Lowe and Simons, 1997; Mauldin et al., 2000). In parallel with the prior literature, we argue that students’ career interest in the field of accounting is affected by other people including parents, relatives, peers, teachers, and business people. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Social influence is positively related to career interest in accounting.

Finally, we propose that students receiving higher grades in accounting course will have higher motivation to pursue a career in accounting. The prior studies also mention that students’ career decisions in accounting field is impacted by their performance in accounting courses they took in the university (Felton et al., 1994; Ahmed et al., 1997). Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Academic performance in accounting is positively related to career interest in accounting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Variables and Measures
The research model presented in this study includes four independent variables (career outcome expectation, career challenge, social influence, academic performance in accounting) and one dependent variable (career interest in accounting). The survey method was used to measure the variables in the research model. The measurement items used in the present research were adapted or created based on the prior literature. Table 2 shows the research variables, their definitions, and the literature sources used to develop the measurement items.
Data Collection
To test the research hypotheses, a structured survey was administered in Spring 2013 to business administration students in a state university in Turkey. The survey was composed of two sections: (1) questions measuring the research constructs and (2) demographic questions (gender, year of the education, type of the education). Two hundred and fifty students participated in the survey and all of the surveys were used in the final data analysis.

56% (N=141) of the survey responders were female (N=141), whereas 44% percent (N=109) were male. The majority of the sample (56%) was composed of freshmen students (N=140), while 36.8% was sophomore (N=92), 6.8% was junior (N=17), and 0.4% was senior (N=1) students. In addition, 45% of the students (N=113) participated in the survey were attending normal education program and 55% of the students (N=137) were attending evening education program.

Data Analysis
Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the measurement and structural models. To evaluate the psychometric properties of the measurement scales and to test the research hypotheses presented in Figure 1, the component-based partial least squares (PLS) approach was used. The SmartPLS software package (Version 2.0.M3) was used to estimate the parameters of the research model (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005).

The analysis of the measurement model indicates that AVE (average variance extracted) and Cronbach’s alpha values for each variable are at the acceptable level. This indicates that our constructs have adequate reliability assessment. Table 3 reports the results of testing the discriminant validity of the measure scales. Discriminant validity of the scales is supported because the bolded elements (square roots of AVEs) in the matrix diagonals are greater in all cases than the off-diagonal elements in their corresponding row and column.

| Table 3. Discriminant validity and construct correlations |
|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Construct | CE | CC | SI | AP | CI |
| Career Outcome Expectation (COE) | 0.75 |
| Career Challenge (CC) | 0.31 | 0.69 |
| Social Influence (SI) | 0.12 | 0.18 | 0.71 |
| Academic Performance in Accounting (AP) | -0.07 | 0.19 | 0.01 | 1.00 |
| Career Interest in Accounting (CI) | 0.11 | 0.44 | 0.26 | 0.34 | 0.81 |

The results of testing the convergent validity of the measurement scales are reported in Table 4. Convergent validity was tested using SmartPLS by extracting the factor loadings and cross loadings of all the measurement items to their respective constructs. The results reveal that all of the measurement item loadings on the intended constructs are at the acceptable level. In addition, each item’s factor loading on its respective construct is highly significant (p < 0.001). Therefore, the loadings presented in Table 4 confirm the convergent validity of the measures for research constructs.

| Table 4. Item loadings, cross-loadings, means, and standard deviations |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Construct | CE | CC | SI | AP | CI | Mean | St. Dev. |
| CAREER OUTCOME EXPECTATION (CE) | | | | | | |
| I would like to pursue a career with… | | | | | | |
| …broad exposure to business. | 0.95 | 0.33 | 0.13 | -0.07 | 0.13 | 4.24 | 0.89 |
| …high future earnings potential. | 0.78 | 0.20 | 0.07 | -0.07 | 0.05 | 4.30 | 0.87 |
| …more job opportunities. | 0.59 | 0.13 | 0.06 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 4.28 | 0.95 |
| …high advancement potential. | 0.62 | 0.17 | 0.06 | -0.06 | 0.01 | 4.46 | 0.81 |
| CAREER CHALLENGE (CC) | | | | | | |
| I would like to pursue a career that… | | | | | | |
| …is closely related to numbers. | 0.21 | 0.85 | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.44 | 3.19 | 1.22 |
| …is challenging. | 0.35 | 0.57 | 0.12 | 0.04 | 0.19 | 3.38 | 1.15 |
| …demands a heavy workload. | 0.16 | 0.63 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.20 | 2.92 | 1.12 |
| SOCIAL INFLUENCE (SI) | | | | | | |
| Regarding my career, I am influenced by… | | | | | | |
| …my relatives. | -0.09 | 0.08 | 0.55 | 0.03 | 0.10 | 2.14 | 1.31 |
| …my friends. | -0.02 | 0.05 | 0.60 | -0.03 | 0.07 | 2.30 | 1.29 |
| …faculty members in my department. | 0.14 | 0.10 | 0.81 | 0.01 | 0.21 | 3.06 | 1.37 |
| …business people. | 0.15 | 0.21 | 0.84 | 0.01 | 0.26 | 3.20 | 1.35 |
| ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ACCOUNTING (AP) | | | | | | |
| I think that accounting is very interesting. | 0.17 | 0.43 | 0.22 | 0.29 | 0.84 | 3.48 | 1.33 |
I have an interest in establishing my career in accounting. | 0.07 | 0.42 | 0.22 | 0.34 | 0.91 | 3.20 | 1.36
I have an interest to pursue my career in accounting as my lifetime career. | 0.09 | 0.39 | 0.23 | 0.29 | 0.90 | 3.06 | 1.34
An accounting career is my first preference. | -0.01 | 0.38 | 0.21 | 0.33 | 0.88 | 2.90 | 1.33
I have an interest in enrolling in a graduate degree related to accounting. | -0.06 | 0.39 | 0.23 | 0.31 | 0.80 | 2.79 | 1.26
I have an interest in attending seminars, workshops, and/or certification programs on accounting. | 0.17 | 0.33 | 0.22 | 0.27 | 0.85 | 3.34 | 1.27
I have an interest in learning emerging trends and challenges in accounting. | 0.11 | 0.34 | 0.22 | 0.26 | 0.79 | 3.12 | 1.25
I have an interest in learning new career paths and opportunities in accounting. | 0.14 | 0.34 | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.81 | 3.25 | 1.27
I have an interest in awareness about competencies in accounting profession. | 0.08 | 0.22 | 0.14 | 0.19 | 0.61 | 3.86 | 1.12
I have an interest in acquisition of a more positive attitude towards accounting profession. | 0.15 | 0.31 | 0.19 | 0.16 | 0.68 | 3.74 | 1.22

**FINDINGS**

The results from the structural model reported in Figure 2 show that no statistically significant relationship exists between Career Outcome Expectation and Career Interest in Accounting ($\beta = -0.01$, $p > 0.05$). We also found that Career Challenge ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), Social Influence ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), and Academic Performance in Accounting ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$) is positively related to Career Interest in Accounting. $R^2$ value is also at an acceptable level (see Figure 2). Therefore, we conclude that Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, and Hypothesis 4 are supported, but Hypothesis 1 is rejected.

![Figure 2. Results from the Structural Model](image)

* $p < 0.05$

**CONCLUSION**

In this study, the factors that affect the business administration students' career interests in accounting profession were surveyed. A survey was conducted in a total of 250 business administration students who took the Introduction to Accounting course during the Spring 2013 semester at a state university in Turkey. Results of the study indicated that three of the proposed factors affect the career interests of the students in accounting in a positive way. These factors are career challenge, social influence and academic performance in accounting.

Accounting is a profession that requires to work with a lot of numbers and that contains a heavy workload. In addition, the field of accounting is very dynamic due to the impacts of globalization and interconnectedness of the economies, which in turn increases the complexity of the profession. Our findings show that students who like working in such challenging conditions have more interest in the accounting profession. Therefore, a suggestion would be that students and graduates having these qualifications and characteristics should be fostered to arouse an interest in this field.

The prior research findings show that students with higher performance in accounting courses they took influence their career decisions in the accounting field. In line with these findings, we found that students who have higher academic performance in accounting have more interest in accounting profession. Thus, students and graduates who are successful...
in their accounting courses should be explained the critical importance of the accounting profession and encouraged to pursue a career in this field.

Finally, our findings reveal that social influence has a positive impact on determining if the students have career interests in accounting. This finding confirm the prior research findings as well. However, this should be interpreted with caution, since we have conducted this study in Turkey which possess a collectivistic culture. In collectivistic cultures, there is a tight social framework and the behavior of individuals are influenced and regulated by others (Kongsompong et al., 2009). We would expect that it is likely for people in Turkey (or in any other collectivistic nation) to be influenced by others in their decisions, including the career decisions. Therefore, a new research study with this focus may be conducted to see the global implications of this finding.

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