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Perception of Employment among Vocational School of Health Services Students

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It is important to assess the employment perceptions of students from the Vocational School of Health Services to solve the problems observed in the labor market after graduation. In this context, this research aimed to determine the impact of students' perspectives on the profession, sector expectations, and career plans on their employment perceptions. The research utilized the "Attitudes and Thoughts of Vocational School of Health Services Students about Employment Status Scale" as the data collection tool. The study was conducted through an online survey method on students currently enrolled in the Medical Laboratory Techniques, Medical Documentation and Secretarial Services, Medical Imaging Techniques, and First Aid and Emergency Care Programs at Karadeniz Technical University Vocational School of Health Services. Student's t-test and ANOVA test were utilized for comparing groups. The research findings suggest that students' career expectations, perspectives on the profession, sector expectations, and career plans were significantly influenced by demographic variables such as their age and class; as well as the academic program they are enrolled in.

Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu Öğrencilerinin İstihdam Algısı

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ABSTRACT

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Anahtar Kelimeler

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Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin istihdam algılarının değerlendirilmesinin mezuniyet sonrasında işgücü piyasasında gözlemlenen sorunların çözümü açısından önemli olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu bağlamda bu araştırmada öğrencilerin mesleğe bakış açılarının, sektör beklentilerinin ve kariyer planlarının istihdam algılarına etkisinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak "Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu Öğrencilerinin Çalışma Durumuna İlişkin Tutum ve Düşünceleri Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu Tıbbi Laboratuvar Teknikleri, Tıbbi Dokümantasyon ve Sekreterlik Hizmetleri, Tıbbi Görüntüleme Teknikleri ile İlk Yardım ve Acil Bakım programlarında halen öğrenim gören öğrenciler üzerinde çevrimiçi anket yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Grupların karşılaştırılmasında student's t testi ve ANOVA testi kullanıldı. Araştırma sonucunda öğrencilerin kariyer beklentilerini, mesleğe bakış açılarını, sektör beklentilerini ve kariyer planlarını okudukları sınıf ve yaş gibi demografik değişkenler ile ayrıca kayıtlı oldukları program gibi değişkenlerin önemli ölçüde etkilediği tespit edilmiştir.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, where competencies surpass diplomas, having a qualified workforce is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage and creating awareness. Therefore, education is the foundation for achieving sustainable development, globalization, and reaching goals through the use of technology. In terms of employment, education can be defined as the activity of training individuals to participate in production in a field where they can contribute to the country's economic development and acquire knowledge and skills (1).

For Turkey to achieve a competitive advantage by strongly expressing its desire to transition to a production economy, it will be possible through individuals who make the right choices in terms of career planning, have received a good education in vocational and technical fields, and possess the qualifications to meet sector expectations. Vocational education is defined as educational programs designed for learners to acquire specific knowledge, skills, and competencies related to a particular profession, trade, or occupational class (2, 3). In this regard, Higher Education Institutions, specifically the institutions associated with vocational schools play a vital role by providing development opportunities for students' employability, offering vision in obtaining jobs and careers, and increasing awareness and desire for learning and practical application (4).

Although there are differences in expectations regarding employment worldwide, it is generally expressed that skills related to the fundamental key, social transferable, interdisciplinary, and critical process management are important for finding a job (5). Due to the concept, definition, and function of vocational education, vocational schools primarily come to mind. This process was defined as an active process that provides individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills for a profession accepted in the business world, while also using the job as a tool to develop individual abilities (6). Therefore, the number and quality of vocational schools in Turkey are very important. On the other hand, vocational education aims to differentiate and enhance the workforce productivity of individuals who have been qualified by highlighting their knowledge and skills (7). Along with many reasons, the negative impact of the transition system from high school to vocational schools without an exam on the quality of education in vocational schools has also justified the inadequacy of student profiles suitable for the profession in terms of knowledge and educational level (8).

In Türkiye, the number of universities has rapidly increased due to the government's project of establishing a university in every province and promoting private foundation universities since 2006. According to the statistical data published by the Council of Higher Education in 2021, there are 207 universities in which a total of 3,114,623 students are enrolled in vocational schools. It is crucial for vocational school students, who receive theoretical and practical training to prepare for employment, to find jobs that meet their expectations without wasting time. Fluctuations in the labor market, personal characteristics, and methods preferred in career choices are among many factors that influence the employee perceptions of associate degree graduates.

This study aims to examine the impact of the education received in vocational schools, perspectives on the profession, sector expectations, and career plans of vocational school students on their employment perceptions in 2023 in Trabzon, Türkiye.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Purpose and Type of Research

This descriptive survey study was conducted to reveal the perceptions of students at the Vocational Schools of Health Services regarding their profession, expectations related to the

healthcare sector, and the impact of their career plans on employment perception in December 2023, in Trabzon, Türkiye.

Questionnaire Form

Each participant answered a questionnaire form the "Attitudes and Thoughts of Vocational School of Health Services Students Regarding Employment Status Scale" developed by the researchers and this result was used as the data collection tool in the study.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected by using the online survey method. In December 2023, an electronic form was prepared considering environmental responsibility and sent to the students via email or social media platforms for data collection. A total of 403 valid surveys were included in the analysis.

Population and Sample of the Research

The research was conducted with the students of Medical Documentation and Secretarial, Medical Imaging Techniques, Medical Laboratory Techniques, and First Aid and Emergency Assistance Programs currently enrolled in the Vocational School of Health Services (SHMYO) at Karadeniz Technical University (KTU). The population of the study consists of 681 students based on the 2023 data for the Vocational School of Health Services at Karadeniz Technical University. Considering a 5% margin of error with a 95% confidence level, the required sample size was calculated as 254 (<http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>). To develop the research scale, a literature review was conducted, and discussions were held with faculty members, resulting in the creation of a scale consisting of 32 statements.

Ethical Approval

The verification of the treatment of human participants is by the established ethical standard and our article has received ethics committee approval with T.C. Karadeniz Technical University, Health Sciences Scientific Research Ethics Committee, Session date 18.12.2023 13.01, Session number 2023/56.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods and significance tests were used for data analysis. Student t-test and ANOVA test were used to compare the independent variables. The validity of the scale was tested through exploratory factor analysis. Validity refers to the degree to which a test or scale measures what it intends to measure (9). The reliability of the scale was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha method. During the factor analysis, eight statements with inadequate factor loadings or loading onto multiple factors were removed from the research scale. To test the objectives of the study, the SPSS software (Version 20.0) was used. The analyses were conducted with a 95% confidence interval ($p=0.05$). Descriptive statistical methods and correlation analysis were employed in the study. The analysis results of the scale are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Analyses of The Scale

Factor Analysis		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy ($p > 0.5$)		.782
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p=0.00$, $p<0.05$)	Approx. Chi-Square ($p<0.01$)	2975.531
	Df	276
	Sig.	.000
Factor Loading Range	.434	.810
Total Explained Variance	%	45.393
Factors	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.60$)
Vocational Training	3	.702
Perception of Profession	6	.691
Sector Expectations	12	.796
Career Planning	3	.716
Total	24	.757

Approx. Chi-Square: Chi-Square Test, Df: Degrees of Freedom, Sig: Significance

Upon examination of Table 1, it can be seen that the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) sample coefficient of the scale is above 0.70, which is considered sufficient (10). The results of Bartlett's Sphericity test, used to evaluate the appropriateness of the scale for factor analysis, were found to be significant ($p=0.000$). Therefore, the scale was deemed suitable for factor analysis. The factor loadings of the scale were generally good, and the total variance explained was above 0.40, indicating sufficient explanatory power. The overall reliability analysis of the scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient above 0.70, confirming its reliability (Table 1).

The factor statements were scored on a scale of 1-5, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". In evaluating the scores, the level of agreement with the statements was interpreted as low for scores between 1.00-2.33, moderate for scores between 2.34-3.67, and high for scores between 3.68-5.00.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 403 students participated in the study, with 52.1% ($n=210$) being first-year students and 47.9% ($n=193$) being second-year students. In terms of program distribution, it was determined that 22.3% ($n=90$) of students were enrolled in the First Aid and Emergency Assistance Program, 26.3% ($n=106$) in the Medical Documentation and Secretarial Program, 23.1% ($n=93$) in the Medical Imaging Techniques Program, and 28.3% ($n=114$) in the Medical Laboratory Techniques Program. Among the participants, 72.5% ($n=292$) were female, 27.5% ($n=111$) were male, and 97.5% ($n=393$) were single. The demographic and professional characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Variables of Participants

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Class			Gender		
1st Year	210	52.1	Female	292	72.5
2nd Year	193	47.9	Male	111	27.5
Marital Status			Program		
Single	393	97.5	First Aid and Emergency Assistance	90	22.3
Married	9	2.2	Medical Documentation and Secretarial	106	26.3
Age Group			Medical Imaging Techniques	93	23.1
18-20	249	61.8	Medical Laboratory Techniques	114	28.3
21+	154	38.2			

*N: Number

The mean of the vocational education factor, which was created to determine students' employment perceptions, was found to be 3.45. In other words, the evaluation level of students regarding the education they receive was considered to have a moderate effect on their employment perceptions. No differentiation was observed based on the demographic factor of gender, and the averages of age and class variables, evaluated through t-test, as well as the inter-program relationships analyzed through ANOVA test, resulted in the conclusion that vocational education affects employment expectations.

It is observed that the statements reflecting students' perspectives on the profession have an overall moderate level (3.02). On the other hand, when the perspective on the profession factor was evaluated based on class, age, gender, and program, no significant difference was observed. The level of agreement with the scale items by the supporting students is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Attitudes and Thoughts Scale of Health Services Vocational School Students Regarding Employment Status

Factors		X	SD	1*		2*		3*		4*		5*	
				F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Vocational Training	M1	3.40	1.02	27	6.7	42	10.4	111	27.5	185	45.9	38	9.4
	M2	3.51	1.16	37	9.2	36	8.9	86	21.3	170	42.2	74	18.04
	M3	3.44	1.06	25	6.2	49	12.2	102	25.3	174	43.2	53	13.2
	Total	3.45	1.08	89	7.3	127	10.5	299	24.7	529	43.7	165	13.6
Perception of Profession	M4	2.31	1.14	131	32.5	116	28.8	93	23.1	47	11.7	16	4.0
	M6	2.66	1.05	55	13.6	134	33.3	120	29.8	79	19.6	15	3.7
	M27	4.35	0.85	4	1.0	10	2.5	48	11.9	119	29.5	222	55.1
	M30	3.53	0.98	16	4.0	41	10.2	113	28.0	176	43.7	57	14.1
	M31	4.14	0.79	6	1.5	6	1.5	24	6.0	145	36.0	222	55.1
	M32	3.79	1.22	30	7.4	30	7.4	83	20.6	111	27.5	149	37.0
	Total	3.46	1.00	242	10.0	337	13.9	481	19.9	677	28.0	681	28.1
Sector Expectations	M7	2.99	0.97	10	1.9	45	8.6	118	22.5	243	46.4	108	20.6
	M8	3.31	0.70	4	1.0	32	7.9	213	52.9	142	35.2	12	3.0
	M15	3.71	0.88	10	2.5	21	5.2	106	26.3	202	50.1	64	15.9
	M16	2.42	0.99	80	19.9	130	32.3	147	36.5	35	8.7	11	2.7
	M17	2.19	0.98	111	27.5	145	36.0	110	27.3	30	7.4	7	1.7
	M19	2.90	0.88	26	6.5	93	23.1	183	45.4	94	23.3	7	1.7
	M20	3.13	0.79	18	4.5	38	9.4	231	57.3	105	26.1	11	2.7
	M21	4.00	0.75	5	1.2	9	2.2	59	14.6	238	59.1	92	22.8
	M22	3.48	0.72	3	0.7	12	3.0	210	52.1	144	35.7	34	8.4
	M23	3.20	0.83	14	3.5	53	13.2	185	45.9	139	34.5	12	3.0
	M24	3.18	0.80	16	4.0	45	11.2	198	49.1	136	33.7	8	2.0
	M25	3.20	0.95	26	6.5	44	10.9	182	45.2	122	30.3	29	7.2
	Total	3.14	0.85	323	6.6	667	13.5	1942	39.5	1630	32.5	395	7.6
Career Planning	M26	3.18	1.20	47	11.7	54	13.4	149	37.0	84	20.8	69	17.1
	M28	2.87	1.18	60	14.9	84	20.8	149	37.0	65	16.1	45	11.2
	M29	3.04	1.20	51	12.7	73	18.1	141	35.0	82	20.3	56	13.9
	Total	3.03	1.19	158	13.1	211	17.4	439	36.3	231	19.0	170	14.0
Total Overall		3.27	1.03	812	9.2	1342	13.8	3161	30.1	3067	30.0	1411	15.8

*1 Strongly disagree, 2 Agree, 3 Partially agree, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly agree, *(X): Mean; *SD: Standard Deviation and *Freq (F): Frequency

The similarity between the results regarding the perspective on the profession and the values related to sector expectations has been observed, indicating a moderate level of similarity (3.55). The differentiation of both factors based on age, class, gender, and the perception that the programs studied are not perceived as specialization may be attributed to the structural level of vocational schools.

Career planning was found to have a moderate level of influence (3.03) on employee perceptions. Especially the differentiation of post-graduate employment opportunities through the Public Personnel Selection Exam (KPSS) for each program can be considered as a reason for the change in students' employment perceptions. According to the official announcement in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye for the recruitment of contracted healthcare personnel by the Ministry of Health in 2023, 1,098 vacancies were allocated for Emergency Technicians, 421 for Medical Laboratory Technicians, 499 for Medical Imaging Technicians, and 15,537 for Medical Documentation Technicians. According to the data in the Higher

Education Council's Vocational Atlas, for the year 2023, there were 13.445 placements for Emergency and First Aid programs, 7.839 for Medical Imaging programs, 9.797 for Medical Laboratory programs, and 15.950 students were enrolled in Medical Documentation and Secretarial programs, including distance education programs (11).

The impact of demographic variables on employment perceptions was analyzed using ANOVA and t-tests. The results indicate that among the demographic variables, class, age, and the program studied by students significantly influenced vocational training, perspective on the profession, sector expectations, and career plans. However, the gender variable did not show a significant difference across all dimensions of the scale. A similar result was found in the study (12) regarding career expectations of vocational school students, where gender did not create a significant difference. A similar outcome was also observed in terms of employee perceptions and career planning dimensions.

Upon examining Table 4, it can be observed that vocational training differs among the classes. In this regard, it can be stated that first-year students have a higher employment perception through vocational training compared to second-year students. These findings align with a previous study (13). The more negative employment perceptions among second-year students at SHMYO can be attributed to their increased expectations of finding a job and entering the job market as soon as possible, as well as their lack of sufficient knowledge about their professions and the employment opportunities associated with them while continuing their education. They may not have acquired accurate information about both their professions and the employment prospects of those professions (14). Similarly, although the means are close to each other, it can be said that first-year students have a higher employment perception compared to second-year students based on the means of the perspective on the profession dimension. This could be because first-year students, who are still at the beginning of their academic journey, have less anxiety about the future compared to second-year students and have the opportunity to make more relaxed plans for their future (15). The lower level of concern about unemployment and hopelessness related to employability among final-year students and students above the age of 21, compared to first-year students, can be interpreted as the reason for their lower employment perception. In a study (16) with 308 final-year students at vocational schools, it was found that the age of 23 had the highest level of hopelessness behaviors in terms of all sub-dimensions and overall scores. Differences in employment perceptions based on the classes of students are explained in Table 4.

Table 4. Employment Perceptions of Students by Class

Scale Factors	Class	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P
Vocational Training	1st Year	210	3.7714	.71784	48.865	.000
	2nd Year	193	3.1174	1.06937		
Perception of Profession	1st Year	210	3.9151	.55654	8.367	.004
	2nd Year	193	3.8057	.66217		
Sector Expectations	1st Year	210	3.2476	.46272	1.298	.255
	2nd Year	193	3.0376	.49168		
Career Planning	1st Year	210	3.0667	.64296	4.578	.033
	2nd Year	193	2.9378	.76727		

*P: Probability

On the other hand, it was evaluated that there was no significant difference between the first and second-year students in terms of sector expectations and career planning dimensions.

When examining the results based on students' age groups, it can be evaluated that non-vocational dimensions do not create a difference. It was observed that the average vocational education in the formation of employment perception was higher in the age range of 18-20. When considered in the context of the enrolled class, both results support each other.

In a study (17) with 1839 university students, it was stated that the primary expectation of the participants before university education was career preparation with a percentage of 52.5. It was interpreted that universities are considered vocational schools under the shadow of unemployment concerns. The impact of the vocational education dimension on employment perception is similar to the findings mentioned above.

The analysis results conducted to determine the extent of differentiation in employment perceptions based on the programs in which students are enrolled are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Employment Perceptions of Students by Program of Study

	Programs*	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P
Vocational Training	FAEA	90	2.9704	1.12140	21.427	.000
	MDAS	106	3.9560	.62076		
	MIT	93	3.5556	.85315		
	MLT	114	3.3012	.93860		
	Total	403	3.4582	.95972		
Perception of Profession	FAEA	90	3.7796	.67496	.957	.413
	MDAS	106	3.8648	.56349		
	MIT	93	3.9319	.65628		
	MLT	114	3.8699	.56083		
	Total	403	3.8627	.61110		
Sector Expectations	FAEA	90	3.0407	.49754	7.604	.000
	MDAS	106	3.3278	.46764		
	MIT	93	3.0627	.51497		
	MLT	114	3.1316	.43150		
	Total	403	3.1470	.48766		
Career Planning	FAEA	90	3.1630	.71935	5.282	.001
	MDAS	106	2.8396	.63117		
	MIT	93	2.8996	.75146		
	MLT	114	3.1199	.68862		
	Total	403	3.0050	.70728		

*(FAEA: First Aid and Emergency Assistance, MDAS: Medical Documentation and Secretarial Services, MIT: Medical Imaging Techniques, MLT: Medical Laboratory Techniques)

Upon examining the relevant data, it is observed that students' programs differ in terms of vocational education, sector expectations, and career planning dimensions. The comparisons that reveal which group the differentiation originates from are interpreted through Table 7.

Table 7. Relationship Between Dimensions of Employment Perception Scale for Vocational School Students

		Vocational Training	Perception of Profession	Sector Expectations	Career Planning
Vocational Training	Pearson Correlation	1			
Perception of Profession	Pearson Correlation	.157**	1		
Sector Expectations	Pearson Correlation	.379**	.314**	1	
Career Planning	Pearson Correlation	.065*	-.005	.041	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between the factors of the scale created for students' employment perception was measured using Pearson correlation analysis and is provided in Table 7. When examining Table 7, a low-level linear relationship between vocational education and the perception of the profession is evaluated while the relationship with sector expectations is considered to be at a moderate level. A moderate linear relationship was also found between the perception of the profession and sector expectations. However, no significant relationship was found between career planning and other dimensions.

This study was conducted with a 99% confidence level and a significance level of 0.05. In statistical terms, values in a table between $p=0.05$ and 0.01 are considered to represent a "statistically significant/significant difference" while a value of $p=0.01$ is considered to indicate a "very significant/significant difference". The study found a significant difference, at the $p=0.01$ level, in the relationship between the vocational training dimension, perception of profession, and sector expectations when examining the dimensions of the perception of profession scale. A similar interpretation exists between the occupational perception and sector expectations dimensions. Furthermore, the study also considered the relationship between career planning and vocational training significant at the significance level of $p=0.05<0.01$.

CONCLUSION

The research analysis revealed that demographic variables, such as class and age, along with the program the students are enrolled in, had a significant impact on their career expectations, perception of the profession, sector expectations, and career plans. The study also found that gender did not cause any differences among the scale's dimensions.

During the first year of an associate degree program, students mainly focus on adjusting to the school, profession, and environment as they are relatively younger. However, in the second year, their focus shifts to what they will do after graduation and how to take the first steps in their careers. In the second year of their studies, students often experience a high level of anxiety related to employment prospects. This anxiety can have a negative impact on them. Some students may be unprepared for being assigned to public institutions while others may have limited preferences in the private sector. These factors can lead to a negative differentiation between second-year students and older students in terms of employment expectations.

According to data from the Higher Education Council, there are over 200 vocational training programs available for First Aid and Emergency Assistance. However, there is a negative perception among students regarding employment outcomes after completing such programs. This could be due to deficiencies in teaching staff and practical applications. Based on the results, it can be said that the differences in the quality of training among First Aid and Emergency Assistance Program students can be attributed to problems and deficiencies in both theoretical and practical training processes. To address this, a benchmarking study should be conducted to determine whether the vocational training expectations of students are aligned with industry standards or with the practices and content of the SHMYO program at KTU.

Students enrolled in the Medical Documentation and Secretarial Program exhibit a notable difference in their perception of vocational training. This is due to the consistent implementation of practical activities throughout the fall and spring semesters of the second year, which is made possible by the continuous professional experience courses offered by the program. Additionally, the program's graduates are able to directly fulfill the workforce demands that occasionally arise in the Faculty of Medicine. All of these factors contribute to a positive evaluation of the program's priorities and the uninterrupted implementation of vocational practice activities. The appointments made through the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) after graduation are also viewed positively by students.

In terms of sector expectations, the Medical Documentation and Secretarial Program has been evaluated to have a positive differentiation from the First Aid and Emergency Assistance Program and the Medical Imaging Techniques Program. This can be attributed to the increasing need for medical secretaries, which is in parallel with the rise in the number of city hospitals and other healthcare institutions. This is mainly due to significant investments in the healthcare field, especially in Turkey over the last 6-7 years. In a similar study that aimed to reveal the views and career planning of medical secretary students, it was found that the perception of professional status was significantly high among them (18).

Based on recent trends in the popularity of First Aid and Emergency Assistance Programs, along with the opening of various departments by universities, it is believed that the decreasing number of appointments may be the result of an increase in the number of students pursuing this field. This has led to a wider gap between the number of graduates and the number of appointments made each year. Additionally, the success rate of Health Vocational High School students in Mathematics and Turkish-based KPSS exams compared to students from Anatolian or Science High Schools is also considered to have an impact on students throughout their associate degree education. While the number of graduates is higher than in comparison with the other three programs, the most realistic interpretation of the positive differentiation of the career expectation of the Medical Documentation and Secretarial Program students whose KPSS score falls below 70 can be attributed to the fact that the opportunities for appointment in the public sector are quite high compared to the other three programs.

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