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This study was presented as a verbal presentation at the NEU 3. International Dentistry Congress (24-26 May 2024, Selçuklu Congress Center, Konya, Türkiye).

Geliş Tarihi/Received 09.07.2024  
Revizyon Talebi/Revision Requested 12.07.2024  
Son Revizyon/Last Revision 09.08.2024  
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted 14.08.2024  
Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date 24.07.2025

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Cite this article: Tosun B, Uysal N. Evaluation of Dentistry Students' Reasons for Choosing the Faculty of Dentistry and Perspectives on Specialization Education. *Curr Res Dent Sci* 2025;35 (3): 227-231.



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# Evaluation of Dentistry Students' Reasons for Choosing the Faculty of Dentistry and Perspectives on Specialization Education

## *Diş Hekimliği Öğrencilerinin Fakülte Tercih Nedenleri ve Uzmanlık Eğitimine Bakış Açılarının Değerlendirilmesi*

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to determine the factors affecting students' decision to choose the faculty of dentistry, which departments are preferred in post-graduate specialization education, and the factors that affect their decision on the field of specialization.

**Methods:** A total of 18 questions were asked in three basic sections to 288 dentistry students in 1st and 2nd year of the Faculty of Dentistry. The form was created online via the Google Forms website. Multiple Chi-Square analysis was used in the analysis of multiple-choice categorical variables.

**Results:** A statistically significant difference was found between the father's education level and the reasons for choosing the faculty because of the binary analysis ( $P < .05$ ). It was observed that students whose fathers were literate tended to choose the dentistry faculty more due to the good financial income, while those whose fathers had university education tended to choose it more for personal interest and enjoyment. As for the specialization, Orthodontics ranked first (39.4%), followed by Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (29.1%), and Oral Diagnosis and Radiology was the least preferred option (2.4%).

**Conclusion:** The fear of not finding a job after graduation dominates and affects students' choices of faculty and specialization. In addition to its high financial returns and job guarantee, the Faculty of Dentistry is preferred by many who focus on the spiritual aspect of the profession, as it benefits society. The specialization exam may need modification to include theory and practical application.

**Keywords:** Career choice, dentistry students, specialization

### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Bu çalışmanın amacı, öğrencilerin diş hekimliği fakültesini tercih etme nedenlerini, lisansüstü uzmanlık eğitiminde hangi bölümlerin tercih edildiğini ve uzmanlık alan seçimini etkileyen faktörleri belirlemektir.

**Yöntem:** Diş Hekimliği Fakültesi 1. ve 2. sınıfta öğrenim gören 288 öğrenciye üç temel bölümde toplam 18 soru soruldu. Form, Google Forms web sitesi aracılığıyla çevrimiçi olarak oluşturuldu. Çoktan seçmeli kategorik değişkenlerin analizinde Çoklu Ki-Kare testi kullanıldı.

**Bulgular:** İstatistiksel analiz sonucunda babanın eğitim düzeyi ile fakülteyi seçme nedenleri arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark bulunmuştur ( $P < .05$ ). Babası okuryazar olan öğrencilerin, diş hekimliği fakültesini daha çok gelir potansiyelinin yüksek olması nedeniyle tercih ettikleri, babası üniversite eğitimi almış olanların ise diş hekimliği fakültesini daha çok kişisel ilgi ve zevk duydukları için tercih ettikleri görülmüştür. Uzmanlık alanı olarak ise Ortodonti ilk sırada yer alırken (%39,4), ikinci sırada Ağız, Diş ve Çene Cerrahisi bölümü seçilmiş olup (%29,1), en az tercih edilen bölüm ise Oral Tanı ve Radyoloji olmuştur (%2,4).

**Sonuç:** Mezuniyet sonrası iş bulamama korkusu, öğrencilerin fakülte ve uzmanlık seçimlerini etkilemektedir. Yüksek maddi getirisi ve iş garantisinin yanı sıra, Diş Hekimliği Fakültesi, mesleğin manevi yönüne odaklanan ve topluma faydalı olmayı amaçlayan birçok kişi tarafından tercih edilmektedir. Uzmanlık sınavının teoriye ek olarak pratik uygulamayı da içerecek şekilde değiştirilmesi gerekebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Diş hekimliği öğrencileri, meslek seçimi, uzmanlık

### INTRODUCTION

Many factors can be effective in deciding on a career choice. These include working conditions, financial expectations, security, status, the nature of the profession, working with people, the use of personal manual skills, and interest in science and research.<sup>1,2</sup> If a person does not make the right choice,

they may have to pursue a profession that does not match their abilities and expectations, and this may cause unhappiness in the person. In this respect, choosing a profession in a field that appeals to the person's interests will increase the likelihood of being successful and productive in the profession.

In Turkey, university admissions are based on an exam system. Among these faculties, the Faculty of Dentistry is quite frequently preferred. Dentistry, as an undergraduate program, encompasses a 5-year education period in which theoretical and practical education is provided concurrently in our country. There is a need for specialized dentists to ensure that dental services are delivered at a higher quality.

Although many studies show that most dentistry students who receive undergraduate education also prefer to receive postgraduate education,<sup>3, 4</sup> a study investigating the career development of dentists found that dentistry students did not make their career choices in terms of post-graduation specialization until they graduated from the faculty.<sup>5</sup> In the same study, it was reported that not only graduate dentists but also first-year undergraduate dentistry students had positive or negative preferences in some specialties.<sup>5</sup> Among the reasons for preferring postgraduate education, there is a desire for better financial income as well as a strong desire to progress in a specific area of dentistry.<sup>6, 7</sup>

In Turkey, the dentistry specialization exam was first conducted in 2012. Through this exam, dentists have the opportunity to pursue a master's degree in one of eight specialization areas, namely Restorative Dentistry, Prosthetic Dentistry, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Endodontics, Pediatric Dentistry, Periodontology, Oral Diagnosis and Radiology, and Orthodontics. The training period for Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, and Orthodontics are 4 years, while the other departments consist of a 3-year program. Dentists who complete their master's degree and graduate receive the title of specialist dentist. People who provide education in the field of dentistry play an important role in dentists' post-graduation preferences and in determining their future goals.<sup>8</sup> It is recommended that the student be at the center of the education system, and therefore the quality of undergraduate and graduate education content should be increased. If the ideal academic environment is prepared, students will be provided with an environment where they can best provide both their individual development and socioeconomic conditions in their future professional lives.<sup>9, 10</sup>

When the literature is reviewed, there are not enough studies evaluating the reasons why students choose the faculty of dentistry and their perspectives on specialization training. In this study, the relationship between factors such as age, gender, academic year, parental education level, parental occupation, and the type of high school the student graduated from were questioned by the students studying in the 1st and 2nd grades of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Faculty of Dentistry. The first hypothesis of the study is that there will be no relationship between these factors and the reasons for choosing the faculty and specialization department. At the same time, the factors that are effective in choosing the Faculty of Dentistry and the students' perspectives on specialization training in dentistry were evaluated. The second hypothesis of the study is that students will make these choices with the idea of good financial income. The study aims to understand the factors that motivate students to choose the Faculty of Dentistry and direct them to specialization training and guide them in this regard.

## METHODS

288 students studying in the 1st and 2nd grades of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Faculty of Dentistry were included in this study. The research was initiated with the approval of the ethics committee at Bolu

Abant İzzet Baysal University (Date: March 11, 2022, Decision no: 2022/25) and conducted according to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The survey was administered to the students to whom the survey would be administered by a single researcher. The first part of the survey investigates the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (age, gender, period of education, parents' education level, parents' profession, and the type of high school the student graduated from), the second part investigates their reasons for choosing the faculty of dentistry, and the last part investigates their perspectives on specialty education. The first part consists of 8 questions, the second part consists of 2 questions, and the last part consists of 8 questions. A total of 18 questions were asked to the participants in 3 basic sections. (Table 1. Questionnaire Form). The form was created online via the Google Forms site and sent to the participants.

## Statistical Analysis

In examining the relationships between categorical variables, Pearson Chi-Square analysis was used when the sample size assumption was met ( $n \geq 5$ ), and Fisher's Exact test was applied when it was not met ( $n < 5$ ). Multiple Chi-Square analysis was used in the analysis of multiple-choice categorical variables. Analyses were carried out in the IBM SPSS 25 (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) program.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire form

|                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Age                                                                                 |
| 2. Gender                                                                              |
| 3. Academic Year                                                                       |
| 4. Father's education level                                                            |
| 5. Mother's education level                                                            |
| 6. Father's occupation                                                                 |
| 7. Mother's occupation                                                                 |
| 8. Type of high school the student graduated from                                      |
| 9. Did you choose the faculty of dentistry willingly?                                  |
| 10. What are your reasons for choosing the faculty of dentistry?                       |
| 11. Which specialization area would you most like to pursue?                           |
| 12. Which specialization area do you think would provide greater financial gain?       |
| 13. Which specialization area do you consider most important in terms of patient care? |
| 14. Do you think specialization training in dentistry is necessary?                    |
| 15. What would be your reason for choosing specialization training?                    |
| 16. Are you aware of the Dentistry Specialization Exam?                                |
| 17. Do you think Dentistry Specialization Exam is necessary?                           |
| 18. What is your opinion about the examination system?                                 |

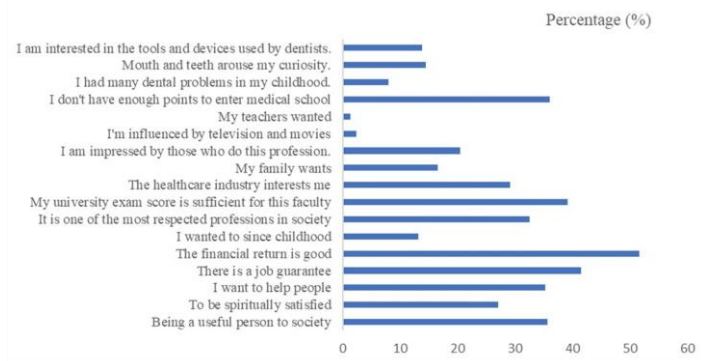
## RESULTS

Considering the distribution of the participants according to their answers to the survey questions; It was observed that the majority were female students (62.3%). Most of the participants were first-year students (65.4%). While the father's education level was mostly at the university level (37.4%), the mother's education level was mostly at the primary school level (36.7%). The most common father's occupation was civil servant (28.7%), and the mother's occupation was unemployed/housewife (72.3%). While the highest percentage of students graduated from Anatolian High School (48.1%) and Science High School (35.3%), the lowest percentage graduated from regular high school (5.5%) (Table 2).

It was observed that most of the students (77.5%) chose the faculty of dentistry willingly, and they preferred the faculty of dentistry mostly because of the good financial gain (51.6%) and the job guarantee (41.5%). Being a useful person to society (35.6%), wanting to help people (35.3%), and being spiritually satisfied (27.0%) were the majority of the reasons why students chose the faculty. The number of participants who chose the faculty of dentistry because their families wanted them to be in the minority. (16.6%) (Figure 1).

**Table 2.** Distribution of participants according to their answers to the questions

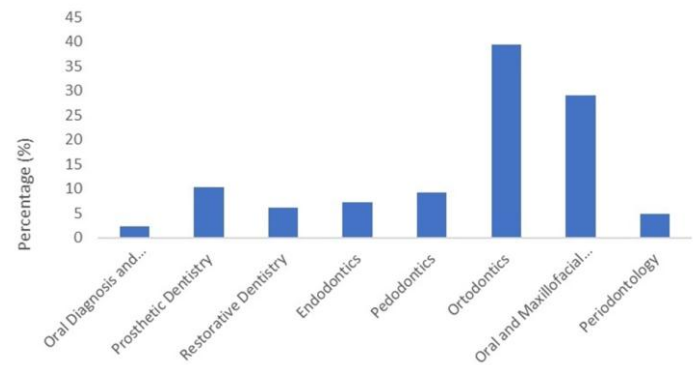
|                                        |                       | N   | %    |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|------|
| Gender                                 | Male                  | 108 | 37.7 |
|                                        | Female                | 180 | 62.3 |
| Period                                 | Grade 1               | 188 | 65.4 |
|                                        | Grade 2               | 98  | 33.9 |
| Father's Education Level               | Literate              | 7   | 2.4  |
|                                        | Primary               | 69  | 23.9 |
|                                        | High school           | 80  | 27.7 |
|                                        | University            | 108 | 37.4 |
|                                        | Master                | 24  | 8.3  |
| Mother's Education Level               | Literate              | 27  | 9.3  |
|                                        | Primary               | 106 | 36.7 |
|                                        | High school           | 81  | 28.0 |
|                                        | University            | 59  | 20.4 |
|                                        | Master                | 12  | 4.2  |
| Father's Occupation                    | Civil servant         | 83  | 28.7 |
|                                        | Retired               | 53  | 18.3 |
|                                        | Worker                | 37  | 12.8 |
|                                        | Trades                | 45  | 15.6 |
|                                        | Nonoperating          | 8   | 2.8  |
|                                        | Other                 | 63  | 21.8 |
| Mother's Occupation                    | Civil servant         | 39  | 13.5 |
|                                        | Retired               | 8   | 2.8  |
|                                        | Worker                | 12  | 4.2  |
|                                        | Housewife             | 209 | 72.3 |
|                                        | Other                 | 20  | 6.9  |
| High school the student graduated from | Straight high school  | 16  | 5.5  |
|                                        | Anatolian high School | 139 | 48.1 |
|                                        | Science high School   | 102 | 35.3 |
|                                        | Private school        | 31  | 10.7 |

**Figure 1.** Distribution of answers according to the reasons for choosing the faculty of dentistry of the participants

In terms of specialization training, the most preferred department as the first choice was orthodontics (39.4%), followed by oral and maxillofacial surgery (29.1%). The least preferred department was the Oral Diagnosis and Radiology department (2.4%) (Figure 2).

The students believed that they can achieve the highest financial gain in orthodontic specialization (54%), followed by oral and maxillofacial surgery specialization (22.8%). They considered oral and maxillofacial surgery to be the most important specialization area in terms of patient care (37%). A significant majority of students (81%) considered specialization training in dentistry to be necessary, with many preferring it mainly for professional satisfaction (67.8%) and financial expectations (54.3%).

Most of the students were aware of the specialization exam in dentistry (96.5%) and considered that this is an exam necessary (82%). While 47.4% stated that the current exam structure should be preserved, a large majority also stated that this exam should be changed to be a practice exam (35.6%) (Table 3).

**Figure 2.** Percentage of answers given according to the department they want to do the most specialization training**Table 3.** Distribution of students' answers to questions about residency training

|                                                                              |                                                                 | N   | %    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Which specialization area do you think would provide greater financial gain? | Oral Diagnosis and Radiology                                    | 1   | 0.3  |
|                                                                              | Prosthetic Dentistry                                            | 34  | 11.8 |
|                                                                              | Restorative Dentistry                                           | 9   | 3.1  |
|                                                                              | Endodontics                                                     | 6   | 2.1  |
|                                                                              | Pedodontics                                                     | 5   | 1.7  |
|                                                                              | Orthodontics                                                    | 156 | 54.0 |
|                                                                              | Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery                                  | 66  | 22.8 |
|                                                                              | Periodontology                                                  | 7   | 2.4  |
|                                                                              |                                                                 |     |      |
| Which specialty do you think is most important in terms of patient care?     | Oral Diagnosis and Radiology                                    | 11  | 3.8  |
|                                                                              | Prosthetic Dentistry                                            | 35  | 12.1 |
|                                                                              | Restorative Dentistry                                           | 28  | 9.7  |
|                                                                              | Endodontics                                                     | 35  | 12.1 |
|                                                                              | Pedodontics                                                     | 20  | 6.9  |
|                                                                              | Orthodontics                                                    | 36  | 12.5 |
|                                                                              | Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery                                  | 107 | 37.0 |
| Do you think specialization training in dentistry is necessary?              | Yes                                                             | 234 | 81.0 |
|                                                                              | No                                                              | 20  | 6.9  |
|                                                                              | I have no idea                                                  | 33  | 11.4 |
| What would be your reason for choosing specialized training?                 | Good financial income                                           | 157 | 54.3 |
|                                                                              | Personal attention                                              | 91  | 31.5 |
|                                                                              | Enjoyable                                                       | 42  | 14.5 |
|                                                                              | Professional satisfaction                                       | 196 | 67.8 |
|                                                                              |                                                                 |     |      |
|                                                                              | Inadequate undergraduate education                              | 69  | 23.9 |
|                                                                              | Family pressure                                                 | 4   | 1.4  |
| Are you aware of the Dental Specialization Exam?                             | Yes                                                             | 279 | 96.5 |
|                                                                              | No                                                              | 9   | 3.1  |
| Do you think Dental Specialization Exam is necessary?                        | Yes                                                             | 237 | 82.0 |
|                                                                              | No                                                              | 51  | 17.6 |
| What is your opinion about the examination system?                           | Maintain the current exam structure                             | 137 | 47.4 |
|                                                                              | The structure of the exam should change to include an interview | 11  | 3.8  |
|                                                                              | The exam should change to be a practice exam                    | 103 | 35.6 |
|                                                                              | The exam should be completely abolished                         | 27  | 9.3  |
|                                                                              |                                                                 |     |      |

The analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between gender and the responses to the question "Which specialization area do you think would provide greater financial gain?" ( $P < .05$ ). It was determined that individuals who chose Restorative Dentistry, Prosthetic Dentistry, Endodontics, Pediatric Dentistry, and Orthodontics were mostly female, while those who chose Oral Diagnosis and Radiology, Periodontology, and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery were mostly male (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Investigation of the relationship between gender and the answers given to the question " Which specialization area do you think would provide greater financial gain?"

|                                |   | Gender |        | Test Statistics | P     |
|--------------------------------|---|--------|--------|-----------------|-------|
|                                |   | Male   | Female |                 |       |
| Oral Diagnosis and Radiology   | n | 1      | 0      | 15.486**        | .018* |
|                                | % | 100    | 0      |                 |       |
| Prosthetic Dentistry           | n | 13     | 21     |                 |       |
|                                | % | 38.2   | 61.8   |                 |       |
| Restorative Dentistry          | n | 4      | 5      |                 |       |
|                                | % | 44.4   | 55.6   |                 |       |
| Endodontics                    | n | 2      | 4      |                 |       |
|                                | % | 33.3   | 66.7   |                 |       |
| Pedodontics                    | n | 1      | 4      |                 |       |
|                                | % | 20     | 80     |                 |       |
| Orthodontics                   | n | 46     | 110    |                 |       |
|                                | % | 29.5   | 70.5   |                 |       |
| Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery | n | 34     | 32     |                 |       |
|                                | % | 51.5   | 48.5   |                 |       |
| Periodontology                 | n | 5      | 2      |                 |       |
|                                | % | 71.4   | 28.6   |                 |       |

There was a statistically significant relationship between the father's education level and the reasons for choosing specialization training ( $P < .05$ ). It was found that when the father's education level was at the literate level, students were more likely to respond with financial expectations, while when the father's education level was university graduate, they were more likely to respond with personal interest and enjoyment.

## DISCUSSION

When the literature is reviewed, only a few studies have evaluated the perspective of dentistry students on specialization training in Turkey and compared the motivational factors of students towards specialization training with sociodemographic data.<sup>11,12</sup> The aim of this study is to understand the factors motivating students to choose the faculty of dentistry and pursue specialization training, thereby guiding students in this regard.

In the study, it is observed that the fathers of the students generally have a university-level education, while the mothers' education level is lower. Based on this finding, the first hypothesis of the study was rejected. According to a study conducted by Scarbecz et al.<sup>1</sup> in the United States, approximately 82% of fathers and 71% of mothers have at least a university education. This difference in findings may arise from variations in the educated population across countries. Indeed, according to the 2022 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK),<sup>13</sup> 53% of the population aged 25 and above in Turkey have completed middle school or lower education, whereas the high school graduation rate for individuals aged 25 and above in the United States was 91.1% in 2021.<sup>14</sup>

The father's occupation of the participants is usually a civil servant, while the mother's occupation is usually a housewife. A study conducted by Al-Bitar and colleagues also found that mothers are mostly housewives, and the most frequently mentioned father's professions in the same study are doctor and engineer.<sup>15</sup>

In the study of Köşker et al.<sup>11</sup> which investigated the reasons why students at Ege University chose the faculty of dentistry, the highest number of students graduated from Anatolian High School and Science High School, while the lowest rate was made up of students graduating from regular high school. These findings are consistent with our study.

In the current study, students mostly preferred the faculty of dentistry because of its good financial income and job guarantee.

Therefore, the second hypothesis of the study was accepted. In a study investigating the reasons why Irish dental students chose dentistry, most of the participants chose dentistry as their first career choice, while the remaining majority chose medical school as their first choice.<sup>16</sup> In the current study, the majority of the students chose dentistry because they did not score high enough for admission to medical school. Küçükeşmen et al.<sup>17</sup> investigated the factors influencing career choice among dentistry students and found that the majority of participants chose dentistry faculty after medical school, consistent with the findings of the current study. Furthermore, in this study, many students considered specialization training necessary, which aligns with the findings of the current study.

The study of Kashif et al.<sup>8</sup> which investigated the reasons for choosing postgraduate dental programs in Pakistan, found that the most preferred areas by participants were Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and Orthodontics. Similarly, in the current study, the most preferred specialties for specialization training were Orthodontics and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery.

In the study of Karibe et al.<sup>18</sup> which they investigated the perspectives of dentistry students in Japan and Sweden regarding their career choices and dental education, the most common reason why students chose dentistry was "to help others". In the current study, 'helping people' was one of the most preferred reasons. These findings coincide with previous studies conducted in the USA, England, and Scandinavian countries.<sup>19,20</sup>

One of the limitations of this study is that it was carried out in a single center. Additionally, the answers obtained by asking students about their plans may not always match the choices they will make.

## CONCLUSION

The expectation of financial gain had an undeniable effect on career choice, and dentistry was seen as a department that guarantees employment. In the reasons for choosing specialization education, in addition to financial expectations, the desire for professional satisfaction was also important. The educational background of parents affected students' preference for specialization training. Students with parents with lower education levels were more inclined towards specialization for financial reasons, whereas those with university-educated parents considered specialization based on personal interests. The study results highlight the financial concerns of both students and parents.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was obtained from Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Local Ethics Committee (Date: 11.03.2022, Number: 2022/25).

**Informed Consent:** Written consent was obtained from all participants participating in this study.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Author Contributions:** Concept – B.T., Supervision – B.T.; Resources – B.T., N.U.; Materials – B.T., N.U.; Data Collection and/or Processing – N.U.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – N.U.; Literature Search – B.T., N.U.; Writing Manuscript – B.T., N.U.; Critical Review – B.T.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Financial Disclosure:** The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Etik Komite Onayı:** Etik kurul onayı Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Yerel Etik Komitesi'nden alınmıştır (Tarih: 11.03.2022, Sayı: 2022/25)

**Hasta Onamı:** Bu çalışmaya katılan tüm katılımcılardan yazılı onam alınmıştır.



**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

**Yazar Katkıları:** Fikir – B.T., Denetleme – B.T.; Kaynaklar – B.T., N.U.; Malzemeler- B.T., N.U.; Veri Toplama ve/veya İşleme- N.U.; Analiz ve/veya Yorumlama- N.U.; Literatür Taraması- B.T., N.U.; Makale Yazımı – B.T., N.U.; Eleştirel İnceleme – B.T.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Yazarlar arasında çıkar çatışması yoktur.

**Finansal Destek:** Çalışmada finansal kaynak kullanılmamıştır.

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