

Factors Influencing University and Health Sciences Programs Choices Among Faculty of Health Sciences Students

Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Öğrencilerinin Üniversite ve Sağlık Bilimleri Programları Tercihlerini Etkileyen Faktörler

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify the factors influencing the preferences of preparatory and first-year students in Health Sciences Faculties at universities in Türkiye regarding their choice of university and health sciences programs. This study was conducted using a descriptive research model, a quantitative research method. In this regard, a total of 820 students (740 female, 80 male), aged 17 to 41, participated in the study. Participants completed an online questionnaire that collected demographic data (age, gender, personality traits, and family-related factors) and factors affecting choices, including location, reputation, campus, facilities, information, and economy. Analysis revealed that academic reputation and university location were the most influential factors in university selection, whereas economic factors had the least impact. In addition to sociodemographic features, personality traits and family health status significantly affected students' decisions to choose a health-related field ($p<0.005$), while parents' education level and high school type did not ($p>0.005$). Gender was also found to be a significant factor, with a higher proportion of women opting for health sciences programs. The conclusions suggest that multiple individual-level factors play a key role in the decision-making process. Although economic considerations had minimal influence—contrary to the literature—this may be attributed to the fact that tuition fees at public universities in Türkiye are state-funded. Furthermore, the relatively lower impact of socioeconomic factors may reflect the broader context of Türkiye as a developing country, where structural limitations are counterbalanced by publicly supported higher education opportunities.

Keywords: Program choice, University choice, Health sciences, Personality traits, Family-related factors

Özet: Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde sağlık bilimleri fakültelerinin hazırlık sınıfı ve birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin üniversite ve sağlık bilimleri bölümlerinin tercih edilmesini etkileyen faktörleri belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Bu çalışma, nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden olan betimsel araştırma modeli kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu doğrultuda çalışmaya sağlık bilimleri fakültesinde öğrenim gören 17-41 yaş aralığında toplam 820 öğrenci (740 kız, 80 erkek) katılmıştır. Katılımcılar, demografik özellikleri (yaş, cinsiyet, kişilik ve aileyle ilgili faktörler) ve seçimleri etkileyen faktörler (konum, itibar, kampüs, tesisler, bilgi ve ekonomi) hakkında veri toplamayı sağlayan çevrimiçi bir anketi doldurmuştur. Verilerin analizi, üniversite seçiminde en etkili faktörlerin akademik itibar ve üniversitenin konumu olduğunu, en az etkili olan ise ekonomik faktör olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Sosyodemografik özelliklere ek olarak, kişilik özellikleri ve ailenin sağlık durumunun öğrencilerin sağlık alanı seçiminde etkili olduğu ($p < 0.005$), ancak ebeveynlerin eğitim düzeyi ve eğitim görülen lisenin etkili olmadığı bulunmuştur ($p > 0.005$). Ayrıca, sağlık bilimleri alanını daha çok kadınların tercih ettiği ve cinsiyetin tercihler üzerinde önemli etkisinin olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu araştırmada, sağlık bilimlerinin tercih edilmesinde karar verme sürecinde birçok bireysel faktörün önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Literatürde belirtilenin aksine, ekonomik faktörlerin etkisi minimum düzeyde olsa da bunun nedeni Türkiye'deki devlet üniversitelerinin öğrenim ücretlerinin devlet tarafından karşılanması olabilir. Ayrıca, sosyoekonomik faktörlerin nispeten daha düşük etkisi, yapısal sınırlamaların kamu destekli yükseköğretim fırsatlarıyla dengelendiği gelişmekte olan bir ülke olan Türkiye'nin statüsü nedeniyle olabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Program tercihi, Üniversite seçimi, Sağlık bilimleri, Kişilik özellikleri, Aile ile ilgili faktörler

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1. Introduction

Universities offer structured education over a fixed period, enabling specialization in specific fields and contributing to the development of qualified professionals and social knowledge (Erkuş et al., 2020). In Türkiye, students typically select universities and programs based on examination scores (Student Selection and Placement Center [ÖSYM], 2025), and this decision is regarded as a critical turning point in an individual's life (Buari et al., 2023; Cui et al., 2021). Given its long-term implications for both professional trajectories and educational quality (Wright, 2018), the university selection process is complex and multifactorial (Briggs, 2006).

The wide variety of professions and differing educational standards necessitate careful evaluation of factors such as program diversity, educational quality, and campus facilities (Bardakçı, 2019; Çatı et al., 2016; Erkuş et al., 2020; Korkut-Owen et al., 2012). Suboptimal university or program selection may be associated with stress and anxiety in academic and professional life (Bardakçı, 2019; Briggs, 2006), highlighting the importance of informed decision-making.

The multifactorial nature of the preference process necessitates a detailed examination of the factors that influence university and program choices. At this point, research on the factors that shape individuals' preferences is noteworthy. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that there are many factors affecting university and program choices. When considering institutional and academic factors that influence university choice, some of the factors that influence the choice process include the university's reputation, academic quality, program diversity, facilities, and post-graduation expectations (Gulluce et al., 2016; Veloutsou et al., 2004; Yusuf, 2019). When it comes to environmental and socioeconomic factors that influence university choice, factors such as the location of the university, campus atmosphere and cost can be mentioned (Sia, 2013; Obermeit, 2012). In addition, experiential factors may influence the university selection decision. For example, campus visits and information obtained about the program can be influential at this point (Filter, 2010; Sia, 2013).

While university selection is a personal decision, some fields become even more important due to their societal impact. Health services, in particular, represent one of the fundamental components of social sustainability (Aslan et al., 2023). To this end, a review of the historical development of healthcare professional training reveals that educational institutions were established since the early years of the Republic to train various healthcare professionals, such as nurses, midwives, and healthcare officers (Kaysılı, 2006). According to data from the

Higher Education Information Management System, Ege University Faculty of Health Sciences was the first faculty of health sciences established in 1968, and today there are a total of 163 active faculties of health sciences, one of which is passive (The Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2025). Of these faculties, 113 are state universities and 50 are foundation universities (The Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2025). The prevalence of health sciences faculties in Türkiye reflects students' interest in this field. There is a need to expand the existing knowledge regarding the dynamics that shape this interest.

Although studies have been conducted on the career choices of students in the health field (e.g., Al Mutair & Redwan, 2016; Huicho et al., 2015), research that includes students from more than one health profession in a single study remains limited (Başer et al., 2021). Studies examining a single health area include their interest, better income expectations, professional and personal recognition, early life experience, and family factors (Al Mutair & Redwan, 2016; Huicho et al., 2015). Although department-based studies are guiding, research covering the entire field of health sciences is needed for a comprehensive perspective. In this regard, as a result of comprehensive research in health sciences, the decision-making process of individuals considering this field can be illuminated. In addition, by revealing the reasons for choices, health sciences programs can be enabled to develop various strategies to increase their future preference. This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining in depth the various factors underlying students' program choices in the health sciences field. In this regard, the following questions were sought within the scope of our research:

1. What are the factors affecting the different health sciences programs and university preferences of students studying in the faculties of health sciences?
2. Do the factors affecting the university preferences of students studying in faculties of health sciences differ according to sociodemographic characteristics?

2. Materials and Method

This study was conducted using a descriptive research model, a quantitative research method. In studies conducted with the descriptive model, answers to research questions are obtained from a large population, and these data are described, and their basic characteristics are presented (Daşdemir, 2016). In this study, since the factors affecting the university and department preferences of the students studying at the Faculty of Health

Sciences will be examined according to the students' opinions, it is thought that the relevant design is appropriate for the research.

2.1. Participants

The study population consisted of preparatory and first-year students enrolled in one of the departments in the field of health sciences (child development, health management, midwifery, nursing, nutrition and dietetics, physiotherapy and rehabilitation, speech and language therapy, audiology, social work) in Türkiye in the 2022-2023 academic year. The research employed a cross-sectional questionnaire design, utilizing a convenience sampling method to recruit participants. For this reason, participants were accessed through posts made through the researchers' professional/individual social media accounts, the questionnaire link sent via e-mail, and announcements made with research permission from universities providing education in the field of health sciences in Türkiye. The population of the study was determined as approximately 45,000 preparatory and first-year students studying at the health sciences faculties in the 2022-2023 academic year (The Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2025). When the sample size is 50,000, the 95% confidence interval requires a sample size of 674 with a sampling error of 0.03 ($p=0.8$, $q=0.2$) (Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan, 2014). To account for potential erroneous data, 10% more of this number was included in the study, aiming to reach a minimum 741 people. A total of 903 individuals were reached during the data collection period. However, of the 903 participants, 83 were excluded from the study either of their own accord or due to data error. Therefore, data obtained from a total of 820 participants were included in the study.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

The data collection tool of the study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part includes a sociodemographic information form prepared by the researchers. The second part includes the items in the Turkish validity and reliability questionnaire form developed by Akar (2012) to determine the factors affecting the participants' university preferences (Akar, 2012).

The sociodemographic information form, which was used as a data collection tool in the study, consisted of ten questions regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, such as age, gender, income status, personality traits, family educational status, personal health problem, health problems in family, presence of healthcare professionals in the family, geographical region of origin, and place of residence. The

questions in the section were added by referencing the findings of previous studies conducted in the health sciences field (Agyapong et al., 2015; Misran et al., 2012; Siddiqui, 2017). The questionnaire form contains 30 items prepared using a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral/uncertain, strongly agree, and agree). The construct validity of the questionnaire was examined with factor analysis, and its reliability with Cronbach's alpha. The results of the factor analysis showed that the questionnaire had 6 factor dimensions; Cronbach alpha values showed that the reliability of the questionnaire and under the headings, ranged from fairly reliable to highly reliable. Under the headings are reputation, location, campus, facilities, information, and economy. Focusing on the sub-items of the factors in the questionnaire, reputation refers to the university's teaching quality, brand name, job opportunities for graduates, and academic reputation. Location refers to the proximity to family, ease of transportation, the overall quality of life in the city where the university is situated, and post-graduation employment opportunities. Concerning the campus factor, it encompasses various aspects such as housing, physical and social facilities, security, and proximity to the city. As for facilities, the sub-items are related to internship opportunities, overseas student exchange programs, internationally recognized diploma supplements, and part-time job opportunities. The information factor focuses on the impact of friends, teachers, family recommendations, news sources, and the university's website. The last factor, economy, concerns the affordability of the city where the university is located, the provision of assistance such as scholarships and food, and the availability of state dormitories in the city (For more information on the questionnaire and its subheadings, see (Akar, 2012)).

2.3. Data Collection Process

Prior to the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Selcuk University Faculty of Health Sciences (approval number: 2022/1087, date: November 3, 2022). At this point, quantitative research and publication ethics principles were adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from participants before data collection, and the purpose, process, and potential risks of the study were clearly explained. In line with the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identity information was not recorded, and the data obtained was used solely for scientific purposes. During the data collection process, a standard measurement tool was used to minimize bias, and the same guidelines were provided to all participants.

Subsequently, in order to facilitate the data collection

process, the consent form, sociodemographic information form, and questionnaire form prepared for research purposes were imported into Google Surveys. The imported forms were distributed to students using online links during the data collection period. The data collection process took seven months in total, from November 2022 to June 2023.

2.4. Analysis of Data

The data obtained from the research were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 software. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to test whether the data followed a normal distribution. The analysis showed that the data followed a normal distribution. The statistical significance level was taken as $p < 0.05$ in all analyses. Descriptive statistical data were used to identify the factors influencing the participants' university choices, and factor analysis was conducted to assess the effects of the related factors. Pearson correlation analysis, regression analysis, the independent sample t-test, and one-way analysis of variance were employed to compare the factors influencing university choices according to sociodemographic variables.

3. Results

3.1. Sociodemographic Information Analysis

The participants of the study consisted of 820 (740 female and 80 male) individuals between the ages of 17-41 (mean, SD: 19.45 ± 0.066) years. Data was collected on the regional differences of the participants who came from Türkiye. According to this data, the individuals participating in the study were mostly from the Central Anatolia region of Türkiye ($n = 304$, 33.7%). The lowest participation rate was from the Aegean ($n = 53$, 5.9%) and Eastern Anatolia ($n = 53$, 5.9%) regions. The other participants were from the Marmara Region ($n = 111$, 12.3%), the Mediterranean Region ($n = 109$, 12.1%), the Black Sea Region ($n = 112$, 12.4%), and the Southeastern Anatolia Region ($n = 78$, 8.6%).

According to the data obtained on the family education status of the participants, the mothers' educational level was most commonly primary education ($n = 460$, 50.9%) and least commonly graduate degree ($n = 7$, 0.8%). Similarly, the most common education level of the fathers was primary education ($n = 296$, 32.8%), and the least common was a graduate degree ($n = 13$, 1.4%). It was also observed that there were more high school graduates ($n = 239$, 26.5%) among the fathers as compared to the mothers. The parents' levels of education did not affect these choices ($p \geq 0.005$) (Table 1).

The participants provided different concise responses to the question about the relationship and compatibility between the field of health and personality traits on program choice, with the most prominent being related to patience ($n = 313$, 38.17%), calmness ($n = 221$, 26.95%), and benevolence ($n = 189$, 23.04%). It was found that benevolence, communication, empathy, loving children, being humane, calmness, understanding, and kindness affected the participants' decision to pursue a career in the healthcare field ($p \leq 0.005$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of regression analysis between the choice of health sciences programs and demographic characteristics

Personality traits	b	SE	β	t score	p-value
constant	0.152	0.035		4.347	0.000*
patience	-0.034	0.017	-0.108	-1.996	0.067
benevolence	0.189	0.068	-0.063	2.769	0.006*
communication	-0.029	0.037	0.160	-0.774	0.014*
empathy	-0.005	0.024	-0.043	0.828	0.001*
loving children	1.567	0.042	-0.169	-1.678	0.032*
compassion	-0.040	0.015	0.103	-2.644	0.008*
justice	3.326	0.094	-0.130	1.657	0.061
being humane	1.832	0.018	0.142	-2.781	0.017*
calmness	1.791	0.049	-0.159	0.742	0.059
understanding	-1.391	0.021	-0.067	-1.881	0.023*
kindness	3.134	0.078	-0.101	1.175	0.009*
responsibility	-2.367	0.016	0.031	-0.917	0.071
Mother's educational status					
constant	1.832	0.018		0.568	0.090
primary school	0.189	0.068	-0.021	-1.254	0.078
secondary school	0.918	0.039	0.189	1.791	0.099
high school	1.897	0.016	0.081	-2.367	0.096
associate degree	3.134	0.027	-0.178	0.791	0.078
bachelor's degree	2.387	0.021	0.171	-1.391	0.063
master's degree	1.099	0.033	0.103	-1.682	0.077
Father's educational status					
constant	3.326	0.024		0.942	0.071
primary school	1.036	0.039	-0.040	-1.678	0.095
secondary school	1.567	0.027	0.075	-2.410	0.063
high school	0.981	0.027	-0.005	0.481	0.084
associate degree	1.678	0.024	0.090	0.832	0.054
bachelor's degree	2.569	0.035	0.152	-0.912	0.076
master's degree	1.234	0.017	-0.029	-1.012	0.051

SE: standard error; *: $p < 0.05$; b: Regression coefficient; β : population regression coefficient; t score: t test statistic.

The effects of health-related factors, income status, and rank of program choice on choosing to pursue a career in the field of health are listed in Table 2. The choice of health field was found to have a weak correlation with the family-related factors and health education or seminars received before choosing the program.

3.2. Factor Analysis for Program Choices

Table 3 shows the results obtained from the questionnaire assessing the factors of reputation, location, campus, facilities, information, and economy. The mean of

Table 2. Correlation analysis between the students' choice of the healthcare field and demographic information

	Choice of health field		
	n	Pearson coefficient	p-value
Their health problems	149	0.248	0.072
Presence of healthcare professionals in the family	591	0.059	0.003*
Health problems in family	148	-0.123	0.030*
Having prior health education before program choice	151	-0.142	0.012*
Income	820	0.049	0.220
Number of choices/rank of program choice	820	0.342	0.091

n: number of participants; *: p<0.05

factors revealed that the most influential factors in the student's choice of program and university were academic prestige and the location of the university, while economic factors were the least influential. The study statistically analyzed the possible influences on the decision-making process.

Table 3. Analysis Results of Factors

Factor	Number of questions	Mean	SD	Range
Reputation	5	3.246	0.791	1.111
Location	5	3.1175	0.542	0.604
Campus	5	2.834	0.451	0.402
Information	5	2.964	0.612	0.463
Economy	4	2.5425	0.903	0.277
Facilities	6	2.956	0.127	0.213

SD: standard deviation

Table 4. Results of factors influencing university choice by gender

Factor	Gender	Number of participants	Mean	T score	p-value
Reputation	Female	740	3.24	-1.622	0.0320*
	Male	80	3.08		
Location	Female	740	3.1325	-2.356	0.0370*
	Male	80	2.99		
Campus	Female	740	2.86	-1.176	0.0214*
	Male	80	2.562		
Information	Female	740	2.986	-0.172	0.0120*
	Male	80	2.774		
Economy	Female	740	2.56	-0.520	0.0013*
	Male	80	2.38		
Facilities	Female	740	3.028	-1.515	0.0392*
	Male	80	2.76		

*: p<0.05

Reputation was found to be the most important factor in the university choices of both female and male par-

ticipants. Focusing on all factors, significant differences were found between male and female participants in terms of six factors. The female participants had higher averages than the male participants in all the differences found (Table 4).

Table 5 shows the mean, median, and standard deviation for each questionnaire item. The most influential factors in students' university preferences were the university's academic reputation, its social image, and the affordability of the city. On the other hand, campus facilities, academic and social opportunities, and general economic factors had less impact. Internship opportunities were the most important factor, while housing costs in the city were the least influential. The influence of the family's recommendation, which is included under the information factor, on the choice process was also found to be important.

Table 5. Mean, median, and standard deviation values of the questionnaire scores

Question	Mean	Median	SD
Economy	1	3.05	4.00
	2	1.75	1.00
	3	2.67	3.00
	4	2.70	3.00
	5	2.78	3.00
Information	6	2.95	3.00
	7	2.98	3.00
	8	2.61	3.00
	9	3.50	4.00
	10	3.65	4.00
Facilities	11	3.14	3.00
	12	3.09	3.00
	13	2.27	1.00
	14	2.86	3.00
	15	2.80	3.00
Campus	16	2.68	3.00
	17	3.05	3.00
	18	2.74	3.00
	19	2.90	3.00
	20	3.18	4.00
Location	21	2.56	1.00
	22	2.76	3.00
	23	3.11	4.00
	24	3.42	4.00
	25	3.33	4.00
Reputation	26	3.60	4.00
	27	3.27	4.00
	28	3.53	4.00
	29	2.73	3.00
	30	2.49	3.00

SD: standard deviation

Upon analyzing the factors influencing the choice of university by geographical region and place of residence, a significant difference was found only between the place of residence and the location of the university (Table 6). The analysis conducted to determine the reason for this difference revealed that the location of the university had a significant effect on the university choice of participants living with their families.

Table 6. Least significant difference results by factor levels

Variable	Factor	Levene's statistic	F-value	p-value
Geographical region	Location	1.772	1.191	0.39
	Reputation	1.245	4.612	0.09
	Campus	1.057	0.618	0.65
	Facilities	1.815	0.345	0.16
	Information	2.345	0.598	0.61
	Economy	1.723	0.678	0.06
Place of residence	Location	1.371	3.454	0.04*
	Reputation	2.250	1.634	0.91
	Campus	0.789	2.320	0.45
	Facilities	0.212	2.686	0.60
	Information	1.923	4.013	0.87
	Economy	1.125	1.547	0.56

*: p<0,05.

4. Discussion

This study investigated the factors that influenced the different health sciences programs and university choices of preparatory and first-year students who were enrolled in the health sciences faculties in Türkiye, over the period between November 2022 and June 2023. It has been determined that sociodemographic characteristics (family-related factors, gender, personality traits) and factors such as economy, campus, information, reputation, and location influence the university and department preferences of students studying in the faculty of health sciences.

Upon analyzing the differences in factors that affected the choice of program in terms of gender, it was determined that the female participants had higher averages than the male participants. This can be attributed to the higher prevalence of women expressing their preference for the health field than men (The Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2025). The influence of gender on program and university choices is also a critical aspect of educational decision-making that warrants thorough exploration. Gameraddin et al. found that different factors influence male and female students' specialty

preferences. Female students, in particular, often cite altruistic motivations to help patients as a primary reason for their program choices, while male students may focus more on prestige and job opportunities (Gameraddin et al., 2022). In addition, Tyszkiewicz-Bandur et al. found that female students demonstrated a higher level of emotional intelligence, which may play a role in their selection of health-related careers, where interpersonal skills are paramount (Tyszkiewicz-Bandur et al., 2017). The social context surrounding health education also plays a significant role. Gendered expectations may push women towards fields like nursing and public health, while men may be more encouraged to pursue engineering or physical sciences (Kannan et al., 2020). The assignment of care responsibilities predominantly to women within society and the family is also reflected in the healthcare sector, resulting in the majority of healthcare workers providing care services being women (Başer et al., 2021). The role of gender in the choice to study health sciences at the university level is a multifaceted issue, encompassing societal expectations, personal interests, familial influences, and educational experiences. Gender contributes significantly to the decision-making processes of prospective students, particularly in health-related fields.

This study investigated whether sociodemographic characteristics, such as personal or familial health problems, the presence of healthcare professionals in the family, prior health education or seminars, and personality traits, influence students' choice of health-related academic programs. The findings indicated that while students' own health problems had no impact, having a family member with a health issue exerted a weak positive influence. Conversely, the presence of healthcare professionals in the family and prior exposure to health education were associated with a weak negative effect on program selection. These results may reflect students' perceptions of the challenges and demands of working in the health sector in Türkiye, which can deter interest in the field, despite a motivating role played by familial illness. In line with these findings, previous studies also present mixed results: some report little to no impact of having physician relatives on career choice (Çetinkaya et al., 2021; Genç et al., 2007), while others suggest that having a physician or pharmacist in the family can influence students' decisions (Kiran & Taşkiran, 2015). Similarly, family or social exposure to mental health issues has been found to shape career preferences in related professions (Agyapong et al., 2015). Another study showed that factors such as family and financial reasons, and the type of high school graduated from (such as vocational high school, Anatolian high school) were less effective than the social benefits of working in the

health field, the profession's reputation, its contribution to personal development, and career aspiration (Gümüş & Şen, 2018).

In addition to contextual and familial influences, this study also highlighted the significant role of personality traits—such as empathy, benevolence, communication skills, compassion, and kindness—in students' decisions to pursue a career in healthcare. These traits are essential for future healthcare professionals who are expected to work closely with individuals in need of care and emotional support. Although the literature on the relationship between personality and occupational choice remains limited, existing studies underscore the prominence of such traits in health-related fields (Humburg, 2012; İlhan-Erkal et al., 2012). A study by Griffin and Wilson highlights the influence of personality characteristics on academic performance, particularly in health sciences where interpersonal skills and emotional stability are critical (Griffin & Wilson, 2011). Despite the greater socioeconomic security and status offered by medical professions (Huicho et al., 2015), the intrinsic motivation to help others appears to contribute to the continued attractiveness of healthcare fields for students, as reflected in the current study's results.

A detailed analysis of the information factor in the questionnaire revealed that family recommendations prominently affected the participants' choice of university and program. It has been determined that the advice and support of the family, which is included in this factor, enables individuals to choose the health field despite the low educational levels of the family, contrary to the literature. Parents with higher levels of education are often more equipped to provide academic support and guidance to their children, which directly impacts their educational aspirations. Research indicates that when parents possess more education, they encourage their children to pursue higher education and higher-status professions such as those found in health sciences (Kilpatrick et al., 2020; Siddiqui, 2017). In addition, parents with extensive academic backgrounds may have better access to information about educational opportunities, thus actively guiding their children towards specific programs or universities that align with health sciences (Siddiqui, 2017). Students whose parents are indecisive tend to make university choices that do not align with their personalities (Jenkins & Jeske, 2017; Misran et al., 2012; Ryu & Jeong, 2021). The influence of families on university and program choices, despite their low educational levels, can be attributed to the cultural structure and the nature of family relationships in Türkiye. In Türkiye, the family plays a decisive role in major life decisions of individuals. Even when their educational

level is low, families provide strong guidance and expectations regarding their children's future; in particular, they may encourage their children toward careers in the health field, which are valued in terms of social prestige.

The results revealed that academic reputation was the most important factor influencing the students' choice of health sciences programs and university, while other factors (economy, campus, information, reputation, and location, etc.) were relatively less important. Reputation has recently emerged as a decisive factor in young people's career decisions (Gameraddin et al., 2022). Sorn highlighted that the qualifications and reputation of universities play a vital role in influencing students' perceptions of health science education and career trajectories (Sorn, 2023). In addition, research indicates that the perceptions and experiences of current students in health sciences programs greatly influence the reputation of these academic offerings. A positive perception of available resources, course quality, and mentor interactions correlates with high levels of student satisfaction, which can attract future students and elevate a university's standing in health education (Kedia et al., 2024; Kuwaiti & Subbarayalu, 2015). To give a more specific instance, it is stated that the prestige and reputation that university education provides to speech and language therapists, one of the fields of health sciences, is a decisive factor in university selection (Goldbart et al., 2005).

The other important factor (as shown in Table 3) in the students' choice of program was the location of the university. In various studies showing the importance of university location, the choice of universities situated in major cities, renowned for their academic excellence, employing English as the primary language of instruction, and conveniently located near social activity areas and family residences reflects the aim of individuals to attain social development while studying in a safe area (Çokgezen, 2014; Erwananda & Usman, 2021; Wee & Goy, 2022). Similar and different aspects in literature, in our study, the location is a key factor for students studying health sciences, as it is closely related to the proximity of the university to the family, transportation options, the livability of the city, and high employment opportunities.

It is surprising that we determined the economic factor to play a relatively minor role in the students' choice of program, considering that Türkiye is a developing country with an upper-middle national income (The World Bank, 2023), high income inequality (OECD, 2023), and high unemployment (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). Contrary to our study, it has been reported that economic factors are effective in individuals' educational

choices (Misran et al., 2012; Olmos-Gómez et al., 2021). In the literature, socioeconomic status significantly influences student selection of academic disciplines and fields, especially in health education. Kumsa et al. highlight that inadequate financial resources significantly limit learning activities among undergraduate health sciences students, particularly during their clinical years when expenses inevitably increase (Kumsa et al., 2019). In another study, financial pressures and socioeconomic factors play crucial roles in many students' decisions to enroll in health sciences programs, and it is stated that influencing factors include tuition fees, cost of living, and the availability of financial aid (Cayetano-Penman et al., 2021). In comparison of economic situations, higher-income students are often better positioned to afford tuition, educational materials, and associated living expenses, while those from lower-income households face significant hurdles that limit their educational choices (Mseleku, 2022). Considering these findings in the literature, the relatively low emphasis placed on economic factors by our participants may be attributed to the mitigating effect of attending public universities, where educational costs are comparatively lower.

4.1. Strengths

A review of the literature reveals several studies conducted with students attending their choice of programs in medicine, dentistry, and other health-related fields, while there is a scarcity of research focusing on students studying in the field of health sciences. The current study was conducted with nearly 1,000 participants by reaching out to preparatory or first-year students who chose to study in the field of health sciences in Türkiye; therefore, it is considered to be of great importance in terms of representing the universe. Thus, it is believed that this study makes an important contribution to the national literature.

A key strength of this study, which explores various factors influencing the preference for the health sector, lies in its examination of how everyday health-related variables—such as personal and familial health problems, presence of healthcare professionals in the family, prior health education, and program choice rank—impact students' decision-making. Finally, this study contributes to the literature by investigating the impact of personality traits on students' choice of the health field.

4.2. Limitations

The use of online questionnaires as a data collection tool in this study is a limitation that may have potentially caused self-reporting and common method bias. In or-

der to eliminate methodological limitations, individuals from different institutions were simultaneously included in the study. Furthermore, the study focused solely on the students' perspectives. It should therefore be noted that the study did not consider the perspective of parents or other key persons influencing students' career decisions (including peers, career counselors, and role models). Although an attempt was made to reach participants from every region in terms of sampling, a sample that could not be distributed equally from all regions was reached due to various reasons (lack of response to the research invitation or receipt of unfavorable feedback, etc.). Also, the sample method is convenience sampling; all of this can be considered a limitation of the study. Lastly, as it is impossible to determine which universities can be accessed in Türkiye, this situation can also be considered a limitation.

5. Conclusion

Various factors influenced students' decisions to pursue a health-related career, with social prestige identified as the most significant. In contrast, economic factors appeared less influential, likely due to Türkiye's developing country status. Personality traits, family health conditions, the presence of healthcare professionals in the family, and prior health education also played a role in program selection.

Future research should explore the roles of parental influence and student personality traits, as well as gather insights from stakeholders such as students, counselors, educators, and policymakers. Examining the relationship between personality types and program preferences may help identify suitable profiles for health careers.

Araştırma Etiği / Research Ethics

Bu çalışma için etik kurul izni Selçuk Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar Etik Kurulu'nun 03/11/2022 tarihli ve 2022/1087 numaralı kararı ile alınmıştır. / *Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Selcuk University Faculty of Health Sciences Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee, with the decision dated 03/11/2022 and numbered 2022/1087.*

Yapay Zeka Kullanımı / Artificial Intelligence Use

Yazarlar, bu çalışmanın hiçbir aşamasında üretici yapay zeka (örneğin ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot vb.) aracı kullanmadıklarını beyan eder. / *The author(s) declare that no generative artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc.) was used in any part of this study.*

Yazar Katkıları / Author Contributions

Yazarlar bu el yazısının tamamından sorumluluğu kabul etmişler ve gönderilmesini onaylamışlardır. / The authors have accepted responsibility for the entire content of this manuscript and approved its submission.

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Ham verilere, ilgili yazarın talebi üzerine erişilebilir. / The raw data can be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

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