

Evaluation of a Medical Career Camp for High School Students: Impact on Career Perception and Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods descriptive evaluation study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of a pioneering fee-based Medical Career Camp organized by Bursa Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine in Türkiye, designed to provide high school students with a realistic preview of medical education and career. The study involved 103 participants across five camp sessions between 2022 and 2024. Data was collected via a post-camp questionnaire featuring both quantitative (Likert-scale items on session efficacy) and qualitative (open-ended questions on career impact) components, analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Results indicated high overall satisfaction (86.5%), with the highest ratings given to hands-on clinical skill sessions, such as suturing (9.32±1.75) and IV techniques (9.47±1.06) on a 1–10 scale. Thematic analysis identified six overarching themes, including clarification of career vision, the value of experiential learning, insight into authentic medical education, and informed career decision-making. The program supported both the consolidation of existing aspirations toward medicine and the reconsideration of this path, functioning as a structured career guidance program rather than solely as a promotional initiative. The program's novel fee-based model within a state university setting, along with its emphasis on transparency and realistic job previews, is highlighted as a distinctive feature. Despite limitations such as sample size and socio-economic homogeneity resulting from the fee structure, the program demonstrates significant potential to shape informed career choices in healthcare. This study provides a replicable model for evidence-based pre-medical career programs.

Keywords: Medical Education. Career Choice. Students. Mentoring. Program Evaluation. Peer Group.

Lise Öğrencilerine Yönelik Bir Tıp Kariyer Kampının Değerlendirilmesi: Kariyer Algısı ve Karar Verme Sürecine Etkisi

ÖZET

Bu karma yöntemli tanımlayıcı değerlendirme çalışması, Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi tarafından Türkiye'de düzenlenen, lise öğrencilerine tıp eğitimi ve kariyerine dair gerçekçi bir önizleme sunmayı amaçlayan, öncü nitelikteki ücretli bir Tıp Kariyer Kampı'nın etkililiğini ve etkisini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Tanımlayıcı nitelikteki araştırma, 2022-2024 yılları arasında beş kamp dönemine katılan 103 öğrenciyi kapsamıştır. Veriler, oturum etkililiğine ilişkin nicel (Likert tipi ölçek maddeleri) ve kariyer etkisine ilişkin nitel (açık uçlu sorular) bileşenleri içeren bir kamp sonrası anket aracılığıyla toplanmış, tanımlayıcı istatistikler ve tematik analiz kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar, genel yüksek memnuniyeti (%86,5) ortaya koymuş olup, en yüksek puanlar 1-10 ölçeğinde sütür atma (9,32±1,75) ve IV teknikler (9,47±1,06) gibi uygulamalı klinik beceri oturumlarına verilmiştir. Tematik analiz sonucunda, kariyer vizyonunun netleşmesi, deneysel öğrenmenin değeri, tıp eğitiminin gerçek yapısına ilişkin içgörü kazanımı ve bilinçli kariyer karar verme süreçleri dâhil olmak üzere altı temel tema belirlenmiştir. Program, katılımcıların tıp yönündeki mevcut hedeflerini pekiştirmelerini desteklediği gibi, bu kariyer yolunu yeniden değerlendirmelerine de olanak sağlamış; böylece yalnızca tanıtım odaklı bir girişim olmanın ötesinde, yapılandırılmış bir kariyer rehberliği programı işlevi görmüştür. Kampın, bir devlet üniversitesi bünyesindeki ücretli modeli ve şeffaflık ile gerçekçi meslek önizlemelerine vurgusu, ayırt edici özellikler olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Örneklem büyüklüğü ve ücret yapısından kaynaklanan sosyo-ekonomik homojenlik gibi kısıtlılıklara rağmen, programın sağlık alanında bilinçli kariyer seçimlerini şekillendirmede önemli bir potansiyel taşıdığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, kanıt dayalı tıp öncesi kariyer müdahaleleri için tekrarlanabilir bir model sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tıp Eğitimi. Kariyer Seçimi. Öğrenciler. Mentorluk. Program Değerlendirme. Akran Grubu.

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Pre-undergraduate career education programs for high school students have gained strategic importance in promoting informed career choices in medicine and healthcare¹. These initiatives, often concentrated in fields such as medicine and pharmacy, aim to provide realistic exposure to professional life and academic pathways². The Mini Medical School (MMS) concept, established in 1989, demonstrates that simulation-based education can significantly enhance participants'

self-efficacy and interest³. Such programs are particularly impactful in reducing perceived barriers to health careers among underrepresented groups⁴, as early exposure is a known determinant in cultivating career aspirations⁵.

Evidence from various contexts supports this approach. For instance, a four-day interactive program in Ireland inspired 82% of participants to pursue a career in medicine⁶. Similarly, most students in a 10-week science program reported increased interest in healthcare professions⁷. The effectiveness of this model extends beyond medicine, with pharmacy summer camps also proving valuable for recruitment and engagement^{8,9}. This underscores the longstanding recognition, noted since the early 1990s, that such programs are essential to counteract declining interest in demanding careers, such as medicine¹⁰. Contemporary systematic reviews further affirm the critical role of hands-on, simulation-based experiences in motivating future health sciences students¹¹. This is increasingly relevant, given current data highlighting a growing global need for a healthcare workforce and the consequent importance of targeted career inspiration^{12,13}.

The theoretical foundation for these programs is robustly supported by Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the central roles of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and social support in career development^{2,14}. During adolescence, a crucial period for identity and career planning, structured programs that build self-efficacy and provide relatable role models can significantly shape future aspirations^{15,16}.

Despite a well-established international body of research, there is a paucity of published studies from Türkiye evaluating structured, pre-medical career programs. Furthermore, while many global programs are free or subsidized, the dynamics and participant expectations of a fee-based model within a state university setting remain unexplored in the local context. This study aims to address this gap. Pioneering a model among Turkish state universities, Bursa Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine (BUÜTF) organized a fee-based "Medical Career Camp for High School Students" five times between 2022 and 2024. This novel program combined interactive clinical skill sessions, didactic experiences, and peer mentoring led by medical students. The present study was therefore designed to evaluate the effectiveness of this innovative program by analyzing participant feedback and assessing its impact on students' motivation to pursue a career in medicine. Specifically, we sought to understand the perceived value of the program's components and its influence on career decision-making within a fee-based framework.

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a mixed-methods descriptive research design to investigate experiences of high school students participating in the "Medical Career Camp for High School Students" program organized by the Department of Medical Education at Bursa Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine (BUÜTF) between 2022 and 2024. The primary aim was to explore how this career-oriented program influenced participants' career decision-making processes and professional perceptions from their own perspectives. The study population consisted of 103 high school students who attended a total of five camp sessions held in different academic terms. Participants applied through the faculty's official website, with an initial quota of 20 participants per session.

Educational Program and Implementation

The five-day camp program was designed around interactive learning methodologies. The program focused on the following core components:

Interactive Sessions: Conducted by experienced faculty members from within and outside the medical school, selected for their ability to convey complex concepts to a young audience.

Clinical Skills Practice: Following theoretical sessions, students engaged in practical clinical skills training. This stage employed a "peer-assisted learning" technique, where senior medical students who had previously served as tutors for their junior peers acted as mentors.

Peer Mentoring and Social Adaptation: Throughout the program, high school students were encouraged to spend informal social time with medical students, with the aim of facilitating their adaptation to university life.

Didactic Experience: To reflect the challenging, realistic nature of medical education, a 2-hour didactic lecture was included in the program. The rationale for this approach was explained to participants during verbal feedback sessions.

Data Collection Instruments

Research data were collected via an online questionnaire administered at the end of each camp. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

Demographic Information: Questions regarding participants' age, gender, and grade level.

Efficacy Assessment: Likert-scale questions (scored 1-10) were used to assess the perceived efficacy of the workshops and training sessions. Participants rated each session on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1

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represented "not at all effective / very dissatisfied" and 10 represented "extremely effective / very satisfied."

Career Planning and Impact: An open-ended question assessing the program's influence on career goals, covering the overall evaluation of activities, perceived alignment with real medical education, and perceived impact on career decisions.

As this study aimed to provide an in-depth, real-time exploration of participants' experiences and subjective assessments immediately following the program, rather than to measure quantifiable changes in knowledge or attitudes over time, a pre-camp survey or a comparator group was not employed. The primary goal was to capture the perceived value and immediate reflective impact of the program on the students' career decision-making processes, a focus best suited to a post-only descriptive design. Consequently, the findings presented herein represent the participants' perceived impact of the program, as reported after its completion, and should not be interpreted as a measured change in skills or career intentions resulting from a controlled program.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two streams, corresponding to the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Quantitative data analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS 29.0.2.0 (IBM Corp. Released 2023. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 29.0.2.0 Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.).

Quantitative Analysis: The data were first summarized using descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics (e.g., frequency, percentage, mean \pm standard deviation) and the program's efficacy, as measured by Likert-scale items (1-10). In line with the study's descriptive design, these quantitative findings are presented as measures of participant satisfaction and perceived session quality, not as objective measures of skill acquisition.

Qualitative Analysis: This study employed a qualitative research approach, using thematic analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of high school students' experiences in a medical career camp and the impact of these experiences on their career-planning processes. Thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within a dataset.

Research data were collected through an open-ended question posed to participants at the end of the camp: "Has participating in this camp been effective in your forward-looking career decision-making? Could you please explain?" The participants' written responses were recorded verbatim, using their own expressions without any guidance or prompting. This question was

intentionally designed to capture the students' subjective reflections and perceived impact, rather than to measure a quantifiable shift in career choice.

An inductive approach was followed for data analysis, and the process consisted of the following stages:

Familiarization with the Data: The student responses were read repeatedly to develop a general understanding of the entire dataset.

Generating Initial Codes: Meaningful units within the dataset (e.g., "confirmation of decision," "moving away from engineering," "recognition of ethical values") were systematically coded. The primary coding was conducted by a single researcher, who coded the entire dataset. To enhance credibility and reduce researcher bias, a second researcher independently coded 20% of the dataset.

Searching for and Identifying Themes: The generated codes were collated based on their similarities and relationships, grouped under potential themes (e.g., Consolidation of Existing Decision and Increased Motivation, Alleviation of Anxiety and Misconceptions).

Reviewing and Defining Themes: The identified themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the raw data. Following independent coding, the two researchers compared the results of their coding and discussed discrepancies until consensus was reached. Revisions were made where necessary to ensure conceptual consistency and clarity. Academic headings were defined to clarify the scope of each theme.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, findings were grounded in the raw data through direct participant quotations. Student responses were thematically framed to encompass various dimensions, including decision consolidation, resolution of informational gaps, change of perspective, and self-assessment.

Data saturation was considered during the analysis. As the dataset consisted of responses from all participating students and no new themes emerged during the later stages of coding, thematic saturation was deemed achieved.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table I presents the demographic composition of the high school students who participated in the fee-based Medical Career Camp organized by Bursa Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine between 2022-2024. Out of the total sample of 103 participants, female students (66.0%) outnumbered male students (34.0%). Most of the research group consisted of high school students aged 15-17. An analysis of participants'

backgrounds revealed that a very low proportion had prior experience with comprehensive medical education simulations or university-level academic programs.

Table I. Participant Demographics.

Variable		n	(%)
Gender	Female	68	66.0
	Male	35	34.0
Grade Level	10th Grade	22	21.4
	11th Grade	76	73.8
	12th Grade	5	4.8
Age	15 Years	12	11.7
	16 Years	64	62.1
	17 Years	27	26.2
Total		103	100.0

Abbreviations: n, number of participants; %, percentage

Evaluation of Training Sessions

Table II details the quantitative evaluation of the 16 distinct training sessions within the Medical Career Camp, as rated by participants on a 1-10 Likert scale (where 10 represents the highest satisfaction). Participants gave the overall program a mean satisfaction rating of 8.65 out of 10, suggesting their expectations were largely met. As shown in Table II, clinical skills sessions received the highest satisfaction scores. Specifically, the IV Blood Draw and Injection (9.47) and Suturing (9.32) sessions achieved a very high mean satisfaction level. Furthermore, the interactive session on Medical School and University Life Experience (9.41) was among the sections that garnered the greatest student interest.

These findings indicate that, from the participants' perspective, students at the high school level exhibit stronger perceived motivation for hands-on, practical applications that they can directly interact with and for firsthand experiences that shape their future vision, compared to purely theoretical knowledge.

Thematic Analysis of Perceived Career Decision-Making Impact

The thematic analysis of data collected from students at the conclusion of the medical career camp summarizes the perceived impact on participants under five primary themes. The analytical process focused on students' reflections on their professional awareness, decision-making processes, and personal suitability assessments.

Table II. Mean Participant Evaluation Scores for Training Sessions.

Training Session	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Clinical Skills & Applied Practice		
IV Blood Draw and Injection	9.47	1.06
Suturing	9.32	1.75
Heart-Lung Sounds and Blood Pressure Measurement	8.26	1.57
Basic Life Support with Virtual Reality Technology	8.46	1.88
Basic Medical Sciences		
Introduction to the Microscope	8.49	1.88
PCR and DNA Sequence Analysis	8.92	1.48
Evolutionary Process from Cell to Human	6.70	1.34
3-D Technology Assisted Anatomy Lesson	8.75	1.42
Public Health & Professional Foundations		
The Physician's Role in Society	7.68	1.49
Chronic Diseases and Healthy Living	8.24	1.98
COVID-19 Pandemic and Public Health	7.85	1.57
Professional Ethics	8.11	1.60
Medical Education & Career Orientation		
Academic Experience Sharing	9.06	1.52
Medical School and University Life (Student Experience)	9.41	1.12
Surgical Experience Sharing	9.15	1.56
Art Therapy in Psychiatry	8.72	1.68
OVERALL PROGRAM	8.65	1.68

Abbreviations: IV, intravenous; PCR, polymerase chain reaction; DNA, deoxyribonucleic acid.

Below are the identified themes, their general descriptions, and direct quotations from the source data (coded as P1, P2... according to participant order):

1. Consolidation of Existing Decision and Increased Motivation

This theme encompasses students who attended the camp with a pre-existing intention to pursue a career in medicine, but whose desire solidified into a concrete decision, or who experienced heightened motivation afterwards. Most participants stated that the camp completely eliminated their prior hesitations.

P4: "Yes, it was. I wanted to study medicine. Now, this desire of mine has increased even more thanks to this camp."

P8: "The idea of studying medicine was largely in my mind; it gained certainty after the camp, and it was also good for self-evaluation."

P31: "It was absolutely effective. My decision was clear, and it became even clearer in my mind now."

P61: "I already wanted to study medicine, but now my thoughts on this matter have become definite. It helped me a lot."

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2. Filling Knowledge Gaps and Developing Professional Awareness

Students reported that the program provided them with a broad perspective by teaching previously unknown aspects of the medical profession, specialty fields, and ethical dimensions. This theme demonstrates how the concept of "being a doctor" was reported to have gained a more realistic grounding in the students' minds.

P11: *"Yes, absolutely. I gained quite extensive and accurate information about what I might encounter if I receive medical education in the future and what paths I could follow."*

P32: *"Yes, it did... I had the chance to learn about branches and aspects of medicine I knew nothing about."*

P41: *"The experience transfer presented to us by experts in the field both eliminated my concerns and increased my awareness of the positive and negative aspects of medicine."*

P68: *"Yes. I understood which specialties I may or may not be interested in."*

3. Perceived Shift in Career Preference and the Elimination Process

For some students, the program initiated a new orientation towards the field of medicine, while for others, it served as an elimination process where they realized medicine was not suitable for them. Indecision between engineering and medicine is particularly prominent within this theme.

P19: *"Yes, I will be an engineer."*

P22: *"Yes, while engineering was on my mind before, now I clearly want to go to medical school."*

P27: *"Of course, it affected my decision; I guess I will not choose medicine."*

P55: *"Yes, I decided I do not want to be a doctor."*

4. Alleviation of Anxieties and Self-Assessment

This theme encompasses students' internal questioning regarding their capacity to perform the profession and the program's self-reported reassuring effect on this matter. Participants weighed the suitability of ethical values and lifestyle to their own personalities during this process.

P1: *"During this camp, I learned that my interest in medicine was greater than I thought."*

P50: *"I came with the question in my mind of 'Can I do it?' and I hadn't had the opportunity to talk to people who practice this profession... The camp was fruitful for me in both respects."*

P52: *"...when people asked me what I wanted to study, I would answer 'medicine,' but I felt this was somewhat to satisfy my surroundings and myself... Now I can say I want to study medicine with peace of mind."*

5. Persistence of Indecision and Ongoing Cognitive Processing

Although not all students reached a definitive conclusion, it is evident that the program initiated a process of awareness and reflection in every participant. Although this group has not yet made a final decision, it is currently evaluating the information provided by the program.

P6: *"Not yet, but it caused me to think about it."*

P24: *"I became confused."*

P35: *"It was a great help, but I need to think about it a bit more."*

P70: *"I got to know the profession of a doctor more closely. I'm still not sure if I will choose medicine, but it was useful."*

The analysis demonstrates that the program's perceived effectiveness was multidimensional. It facilitated a more informed decision-making process, not merely promoting medicine but also enabling a critical evaluation of personal fit, including both commitment and constructive self-selection out. The power of practical application was paramount, as reflected in participants' accounts, directly reducing anxiety and building essential self-efficacy. Ultimately, the program transcended simple promotion and successfully fulfilled a comprehensive career guidance function, empowering students to make more conscious, confident, and realistic choices about their future in healthcare, regardless of the specific direction.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study evaluated the impact of a novel, fee-based Medical Career Camp organized by Bursa Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine. Our findings indicate that the program successfully enhanced participants' understanding of medical education and career, with clinical skills sessions receiving the highest satisfaction ratings and qualitative data revealing a multifaceted impact on career decision-making processes.

Career camps and "Mini Medical School" (MMS) programs serve as critical support tools, enabling high school students to experience the medical world directly and interact with faculty^{1,5}. Since the pioneering work at the University of Colorado in 1990, the prevalence of such programs has grown significantly worldwide¹. Consistent with the literature, the BUÜTF camp appears to have functioned effectively in "filling information gaps" and fostering professional awareness among participants during their career exploration phase.

The quantitative findings, which showed notably high satisfaction and perceived efficacy, particularly hands-

on clinical skills, reinforce evidence that MMS-like programs boost both short- and long-term motivation in youth. As emphasized by Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), such experiential learning supports academic and psychosocial development through "direct mastery experiences," which are fundamental to building self-efficacy². Career guidance is one of the most challenging stages for high school students, and structured programs like this camp provide a healthier, more informed perspective on health disciplines^{3,15}. Our results extend this understanding by demonstrating that practical, peer-assisted skill sessions (e.g., suturing, IV placement) are exceptionally powerful engagement tools for this age group.

The qualitative analysis revealed that the program's impact extended beyond knowledge transfer to facilitate a sense of "liberation" in decision-making. Participants appreciated the program's "transparent" presentation of medicine, highlighting both its rewards and its challenges, rather than romanticizing the profession. This aligns with the literature on realistic job previews, which are known to lead to more sustainable career choices and reduce future attrition^{11,14}. The integration of peer mentoring and interactive sessions with medical students strengthened professional perspectives through role model observation, a key mechanism highlighted by SCCT^{2,6}. The finding that the program solidified intentions for some while enabling a confident decision for others confirms its role as a true guidance tool, not merely a promotional one. This outcome is a significant marker of program quality, as it prevents individuals from pursuing ill-suited career paths. Longitudinal data, such as the 52% medical school orientation rate reported from the Stanford Medical Youth Science Program, support the potential for lasting effects from such structured programs⁷.

In the specific context of Türkiye, where interest in medical education is undergoing shifts due to well-publicized challenges such as workplace violence and demanding working conditions¹⁷, the program also aimed to address latent anxieties. By providing factual knowledge and direct interaction with the system, the program sought to equip students to navigate these concerns. The fact that our results did not show a uniform, statistically significant increase in desire to pursue medicine across all participants is, therefore, not a weakness but a strength. It underscores the program's success in facilitating informed choice, which includes constructive self-selection away from the field, thereby fulfilling a crucial ethical mandate of career counseling^{11,16}.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size (n=103), while adequate for an initial evaluation, is relatively small and derived from a self-selected group of motivated students whose families could afford the program fee. This likely limits the socio-

economic diversity of participants and restricts the generalizability of the findings. Second, the cross-sectional design, relying on post-program surveys, carries a risk of survey fatigue and social desirability bias in responses. The absence of long-term follow-up data means we cannot assess the durability of the reported changes in career intentions or the program's influence on actual university applications. Third, although the daily feedback mechanism for dynamic program revision was a strength, it also means the program was not static, potentially introducing variability across the five camp sessions.

Future studies should aim to include control groups and employ longitudinal designs to track participants' academic and career paths. Expanding access through scholarships or partnerships is crucial for including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, allowing for an evaluation of the program's impact across a broader socio-economic spectrum. Finally, comparative studies examining the differential outcomes of fee-based versus free models in career camps could provide valuable insights for sustainable program design.

Despite its limitations, this study demonstrates that a structured, interactive, and transparent medical career camp can play a vital role in shaping the career decisions of high school students. By combining practical clinical experiences, peer mentorship, and realistic previews of medical education, the BUÜTF program effectively enhanced self-efficacy, clarified professional visions, and supported informed career decision-making. It provides a replicable model for other institutions seeking to bridge the gap between secondary education and professional training in the health sciences.

Researcher Contribution Statement:

Idea and design: M.O.A., E.B.; Data collection and processing: E.B.; Analysis and interpretation of data: H.M.A.; Writing of significant parts of the article: M.O.A., E.B., H.M.A.; Critical revision: M.O.A., H.M.A.

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