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Reasons for Department Preference of Faculty of Sport Sciences Students with Classification Judgment Based Scaling Method*

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Abstract

This study was conducted using the scaling method based on classification judgments in order to determine the reasons for the department preference among students at the Faculty of Sport Sciences. The study was conducted at Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, during the 2022-2023 academic year and was completed with the participation of 297 students from the departments of Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Coaching Education, and Sport Management. Within the scope of the research, data were collected through a questionnaire that was revised based on expert opinions and comprised 37 statements. The data obtained were analyzed using Excel and R statistical programs. The results showed that individual factors played a primary role in students' reasons for choosing their department. The results indicate that individual factors are the most significant determinants of students' departmental preferences, with "my aptitude for the profession" and "my interest in the profession" cited most frequently. These were followed by environmental factors, particularly job opportunities and institutional infrastructure. In contrast, social influences, such as advice from family and peers, played a less prominent role. Notable differences emerged between departments: Coaching Education students prioritized career aptitude, while those in Physical Education and Sports Teaching emphasized alignment with future goals and job prospects. Sport Management students, on the other hand, focused more on the enjoyment derived from participation in sporting activities. Overall, while personal interests and career objectives were central to students' choices, departmental characteristics also contributed to shaping their preferences.

Keywords: Faculty of sport sciences, Reasons for department preference, Classification and ranking scaling, Motivational factors in university choice

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INTRODUCTION

Choosing a university and a field of study is one of the most significant decision-making processes with long-lasting effects throughout an individual's life. These choices not only determine one's career direction but also directly affect many aspects such as lifestyle, way of thinking, personal development, and contribution to society (Yavuz et al., 2018). A well-considered decision plays a shaping role in the opportunities, challenges, and successes a person may encounter in both professional and social life. Moreover, it is instrumental in the formation of identity, values, and social roles (Şeker & Çapri, 2020). University and department preference is the process of deciding which university and academic field students will study during their university life (Filter, 2010). This process shapes an individual's career orientation and determines their future professional life (Huffman et al., 2016; Öztürk & Ilıman, 2015). In this context, Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice (RIASEC) offers a significant framework for understanding individuals' decision-making processes regarding career preferences (Holland, 1996). According to this theory, individuals tend to choose careers that align with their personality types, and such congruence enhances both academic and occupational satisfaction. Similarly, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) highlights the role of psychological mechanisms, such as self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, in shaping students' preferences (Lent et al., 1994). These theories collectively emphasize that university and program preferences cannot be fully explained by external environmental factors alone. Instead, internal psychological dynamics play a critical role in the formation of these choices. However, recent studies show that external elements, such as economic security, employment prospects, and family influence, can become more dominant in students' decision-making processes (Mwinkume et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023). While the university preference determines the institution where the student will receive their education, the department preference shows discipline in which the student will specialise and the field in which they will pursue their career (Kallio, 1995). These decisions are made in accordance with the individual's interests, abilities and career goals and have a direct impact on their professional success (Savickas, 1991).

Choosing the right university and the right field of study increases professional satisfaction and brings success in business. Working in a field that interests one strengthens their motivation and commitment to their work. In this context, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) underscores the significance of intrinsic motivation in individual decision-making processes. The theory posits that when the fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, individuals are more likely to make meaningful, volitional, and fulfilling choices. The selection of a university and academic department is, therefore, directly associated with the fulfillment of these basic psychological needs. This in turn helps to develop talents and maximise potential. At the same time, it helps to increase personal satisfaction and happiness (Bardakçı, 2019). On the other hand, making wrong choices can have negative effects on personal and professional life (Konak & Özhasar, 2019). Studying a subject that does not match one's interests and abilities can lead to academic failure and loss of motivation. In addition, studying a subject that they do not like or are not interested in may lose interest in their classes, which can reduce their academic performance. Furthermore, this

process can lead to a prolonged university graduation and an interruption in the educational process. Making the wrong choices can also lead to economic and time losses. While the years spent in the wrong department drain an individual's financial resources, a delayed start to a career can also lead to a loss of competitive advantage in the business world. On the other hand, wrong decisions regarding the choice of university and department can have negative consequences not only on a personal level but also in social and economic terms (Bardakçı, 2019; Şeker & Çapri, 2020). The inefficient use of educational resources slows down social development and has a negative impact on economic growth. A decline in the skilled workforce can lead to imbalances in the labour market and cause a decline in overall economic productivity. It is therefore very important for individuals to consider both their personal goals and their contribution to society when choosing a university and a field of study.

There are many studies in the literature that deal with the process of university and subject choice from various dimensions. These studies offer different approaches to understand the decision-making processes of students by analysing various factors related to the (Bardakçı, 2019; Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Çatı et al., 2016; Popp et al., 2011). Chapman's (1981) model is considered one of the first comprehensive and original studies on university choice processes. This model divides the factors that influence students' university choice into two categories: Intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic factors include socioeconomic status, ability/expectations, and academic achievement, while extrinsic factors include family, friends, university staff, university location, academic staff, cost, and financial aid (Briggs, 2006; Chapman, 1981; Kallio, 1995; McManus et al., 2017; Şeker & Çapri, 2020; Wut et al., 2022). It is also found that factors such as university reputation, financial support, accommodation facilities and the academic environment play an important role in students' choice of university (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002; Maringe, 2006; Veloutsou et al., 2004). Factors such as educational expectations, academic reputation, the cost of education, the geographic location of the campus, the influence of university counsellors, and job prospects are among the other crucial factors that influence this process (Donnellan, 2002; Fernandez, 2010; Filter, 2010; Somers et al., 2006; Soutar & Turner, 2002). The socio-economic status of the family also plays an important role in students' choice of university and subject. Studies have shown that students who prefer education faculties generally have a medium socioeconomic status (Akbayır, 2002). Students' preferences are shaped by their parents' perceptions, and it has been reported that mothers' educational level has a significant impact on children's decision-making processes (McManus et al., 2017). In addition, the type of high school completed is also one of the important factors that influence preferences (Ulaş-Kılıç et al., 2020). Students who graduate from science high schools or Anatolian high schools generally tend to pursue prestigious fields such as medicine, engineering, and law, while students who graduate from vocational high schools tend to pursue applied sciences and technical fields (Ayık et al., 2010). In addition, it has been observed that students who graduated from physical education high schools tend to prefer Faculties of Sport Sciences (FSS) and Schools of Physical Education and Sports (SPES). Other factors that affect preferences include the population of the university location, its distance from home, one’s circle of friends and the opportunities that the city offers to students (Coşar, 2016; Fletcher, 2012; McManus et al., 2017). On the other hand, universities located in regions where socio-political tensions prevail have been found to have low preference rates

(Çokgezen, 2014; Erol et al., 2012). In addition to the socio-economic and environmental factors that shape students' preferences, evolving sectors also significantly influence career trajectories. In recent years, driven by technological advancements and globalization, the sports industry has rapidly expanded and has become an attractive field offering promising career opportunities for individuals with professional aspirations (Turgut et al., 2004). This growth has increased the demand for a qualified workforce in the sports industry, thereby elevating the role of Faculties of Sports Sciences (FSS) and Schools of Physical Education and Sports (SPES) in training field-specific professionals. The rising demand and institutionalization within the sports sector have expanded employment and career opportunities for FSS and SPES graduates, consequently increasing the attractiveness of these faculties in university and program selection processes (Yıldız et al., 2020; Yurtsızoğlu & Gül, 2023).

FSS and SPES provide qualified individuals to the sports industry by offering training in areas such as coaching education, physical education and sports teaching, sports management and recreation. These institutions offer students the opportunity to work in different areas of the sports industry by providing both theoretical knowledge and practical skills (Atalay, 2020; Şaşmaz-Ataçocuğu & Zelyurt, 2017). Although the increasing number of FSS and SPES in Turkey provides more opportunities for students, the quality of education and opportunities offered by each faculty varies. Therefore, factors such as the variety of sports in which specialization is offered, the equipment the facilities and the competence of the academic staff are important factors to consider when choosing a university. Since the demand for each sport varies in the job market, it is important for students to prioritize departments that offer specialization in sports with high employment potential. The training and postgraduate courses offered by the faculties help to shape students' careers at a higher level. Some faculties create different opportunities by offering specialization courses in areas such as extreme sports. The areas of specialization offered by each faculty and the expertise of the academic staff play an important role in these preferences.

Another important factor affecting the chances of finding a job after graduation is the personnel needs of the relevant institutions (Şeker & Çapri, 2020). The limited employment capacity of institutions such as the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, municipalities and private enterprises makes it difficult for graduates to find a job. The decrease in the number of appointments and the increase in the number of graduates have made this process more complicated. This is also confirmed in the study by McManus, Haddock-Fraser and Rands (2017). The study highlighted that students consider long-term factors such as the possibility of finding a job after graduation, the appropriateness of academic programs and the career opportunities offered by institutions. Therefore, it is important for students to carefully evaluate the job opportunities after graduation, the personnel needs of the relevant institutions and the appointment policies while choosing these departments (Korkut-Owen et al., 2012; Magnusen et al., 2014). While choosing the branches suitable for their interests, they should also consider the current situation and future demand of these branches in the labor market. When the considerations affecting university and department preferences are analyzed with scientific methods, more transparent results are obtained. This process, supported by numerical data, objectively reveals the dynamics behind preferences.

In educational research, it is important to determine the relationship between different variables and the characteristics intended to be measured, in order to establish a link between their actual and assumed magnitudes. The numerical expression of this relationship is referred to as scaling (Crocker & Algina, 1986; Öncü et al., 2022). In this study, a scaling technique based on classification judgments was used to identify the reasons behind the departmental preferences of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences. This method is grounded in Thurstone's Law of Comparative Judgment in the field of psychometrics and enables individuals to indicate their relative preferences among given options. Thus, preferences can be ranked on a psychological scale according to individuals' mental judgments, allowing the indirect measurement of latent attitudes or value judgments (Thurstone, 2017). This approach enables the understanding and ranking of the relative importance of factors that influence students' choices during the decision-making process. Particularly in multi-criteria decision environments, it allows for the mathematical modeling of individual judgments (Torgerson, 1958; 1961). In this way, the primary factors influencing preferences can be quantified, and their relative significance can be clearly demonstrated. Such scaling studies provide valuable insights for university administrations and education policymakers in better understanding students' needs and expectations and in improving educational programs. Additionally, they offer important contributions to institutions providing education in sport sciences by guiding program development and shedding light on the perceived importance of various preference factors. The purpose of this research is to determine the reasons for the preference of sport science faculty students in order of importance using a scaling technique based on classification judgments. The research will seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the factors that influence the preferences of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences?
2. Are there differences between departments (coaching, physical education and sport teaching, sport management) in the reasons for preference?

METHOD

Research Model

This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically analyze the reasons behind students' departmental preferences in the Faculty of Sports Sciences. The classification-based scaling method was used, which enables participants to rank various options in terms of importance (Turgut & Baykul, 1992). Rooted in Thurstone's comparative judgment theory, this technique offers a statistically grounded ranking of individual mental preferences (Thurstone, 2017; Torgerson, 1958). Unlike traditional multiple-choice surveys, this method not only identifies preferred factors but also reveals the cognitive priority order among them. It was deemed appropriate for this study as it more accurately captures students' relative judgments in complex decision-making processes.

Research Groups

The population of the study consists of all students studying at the Faculty of Sport Sciences. The sample consists of 297 students (176 males, 121 females) studying at the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Sivas Cumhuriyet University in the 2022-2023 academic year who volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were 1st-4th grade students studying in different fields such as physical education, coaching education and sports management. The random sampling method was used to select the sample. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables		Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	176	59.3
	Female	121	40.7
Study Department	Coaching education	103	34.7
	Physical education teaching	98	33.0
	Sport management	96	32.3
University degree type	Sports high school	54	18.2
	Other high school graduates	243	81.8
Place of residence	Sivas	208	70.0
	Other	89	30.0
Total		297	100.0

Data Collection Tools

The study employed a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of four demographic and 37 preference-related multiple-choice items. The instrument was based on the scale originally developed by Korkut-Owen et al. (2012) and revised by Bardakçı (2019), adapted through a comprehensive literature review to fit the study's objectives. Expert feedback from sport sciences academics was incorporated during its finalization. A pilot test with 20 students was conducted to evaluate clarity and applicability. Based on the feedback, ambiguous items were revised, enhancing the form's content validity and usability.

Ethics Approval

All phases of the study were conducted in accordance with ethical principles. The required ethics committee approvals for this study were obtained from the Sivas Cumhuriyet University Educational Sciences Research Proposal Ethics Evaluation Board on 30/04/2023 with document number 290527 and decision number E-50704946-100-290527. Participants were informed about the research, and it was emphasised that their participation was voluntary. An 'Informed Voluntary Consent of Participants' was obtained from the students who agreed to participate in the study.

Collection of Data

Data collection began after the necessary approvals had been obtained from the ethics committee and the institution. The students who agreed to participate in the study were informed about the research verbally and in writing, and an Informed Voluntary Participant Consent Form was obtained. The questionnaire was completed online and face-to-face via the Google Forms platform. A total of 297 students (176 males, 121 females) were reached. The questionnaires were sent to students from different disciplines such as physical education, coaching education and sport management.

Analysis of Data

The collected data were transferred to the Excel package program. The statistical program R (4.2.2) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency (f) and percentage (%) were used for data analysis. The analysis results were presented by applying relevant statistical methods. In this direction, the data obtained were analyzed using the scaling technique based on classification judgments. As a result of this analysis, the reasons for choosing a department were determined and ranked from the most important reason to the least important reason.

FINDINGS

In this part of the study, the importance levels assigned by students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences to various reasons for their departmental preferences were analyzed. To this end, frequency, cumulative frequency, cumulative proportion, and unit normal deviation matrices were generated, followed by the computation of scale scores for each reason. Due to the multi-step nature of the scaling technique based on classification judgments, Tables 2 and 3 present the technical stages of the procedure, while Table 4 displays the final interpretable results. The findings indicate that preference reasons were ranked both at the faculty level and across departments, revealing notable differences between them.

Table 2. Frequency matrix (F), Cumulative frequency matrix, Matrix of cumulative ratios (P)

	Frequency Matrix (F)					**Cumulative Frequency Matrix**					**Cumulative Ratios Matrix**			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Q1	3	3	10	103	178	3	6	16	119	297	0.010	0.020	0.054	0.401
Q2	27	14	28	139	89	27	41	69	208	297	0.091	0.138	0.232	0.700
Q3	9	5	18	100	165	9	14	32	132	297	0.030	0.047	0.108	0.444
Q4	11	9	33	98	146	11	20	53	151	297	0.037	0.067	0.178	0.508
Q5	4	3	13	98	179	4	7	20	118	297	0.013	0.024	0.067	0.397
Q6	25	20	57	86	109	25	45	102	188	297	0.084	0.152	0.343	0.633
Q7	17	13	56	102	109	17	30	86	188	297	0.057	0.101	0.290	0.633
Q8	7	8	48	123	111	7	15	63	186	297	0.024	0.051	0.212	0.626
Q9	54	41	63	73	66	54	95	158	231	297	0.182	0.320	0.532	0.778
Q10	2	2	13	98	182	2	4	17	115	297	0.007	0.013	0.057	0.387
Q11	65	20	44	87	81	65	85	129	216	297	0.219	0.286	0.434	0.727
Q12	4	2	15	106	170	4	6	21	127	297	0.013	0.020	0.071	0.428
Q13	52	40	71	62	72	52	92	163	225	297	0.175	0.310	0.549	0.758
Q14	44	34	59	82	78	44	78	137	219	297	0.148	0.263	0.461	0.737
Q15	61	48	51	71	66	61	109	160	231	297	0.205	0.367	0.539	0.778
Q16	28	25	42	99	103	28	53	95	194	297	0.094	0.178	0.320	0.653
Q17	67	25	47	74	84	67	92	139	213	297	0.226	0.310	0.468	0.717
Q18	14	21	36	97	129	14	35	71	168	297	0.047	0.118	0.239	0.566
Q19	92	51	51	52	51	92	143	194	246	297	0.310	0.481	0.653	0.828
Q20	80	33	60	66	58	80	113	173	239	297	0.269	0.380	0.582	0.805

Table 2 (Continue). Frequency matrix (F), Cumulative frequency matrix, Matrix of cumulative ratios (P)

	Frequency Matrix (F)					**Cumulative Frequency Matrix**					**Cumulative Ratios Matrix**			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Q21	141	53	44	32	27	141	194	238	270	297	0.475	0.653	0.801	0.909
Q22	82	46	78	54	37	82	128	206	260	297	0.276	0.431	0.694	0.875
Q23	12	15	46	108	116	12	27	73	181	297	0.040	0.091	0.246	0.609
Q24	24	20	85	99	69	24	44	129	228	297	0.081	0.148	0.434	0.768
Q25	14	17	28	116	122	14	31	59	175	297	0.047	0.104	0.199	0.589
Q26	9	11	18	91	168	9	20	38	129	297	0.030	0.067	0.128	0.434
Q27	61	43	63	73	57	61	104	167	240	297	0.205	0.350	0.562	0.808
Q28	78	36	49	82	52	78	114	163	245	297	0.263	0.384	0.549	0.825
Q29	40	15	35	80	127	40	55	90	170	297	0.135	0.185	0.303	0.572
Q30	137	25	39	42	54	137	162	201	243	297	0.461	0.545	0.677	0.818
Q31	7	5	32	81	172	7	12	44	125	297	0.024	0.040	0.148	0.421
Q32	11	10	35	97	144	11	21	56	153	297	0.037	0.071	0.189	0.515
Q33	14	4	43	104	132	14	18	61	165	297	0.047	0.061	0.205	0.556
Q34	69	22	37	76	93	69	91	128	204	297	0.232	0.306	0.431	0.687
Q35	103	51	35	57	51	103	154	189	246	297	0.347	0.519	0.636	0.828
Q36	14	16	36	103	128	14	30	66	169	297	0.047	0.101	0.222	0.569
Q37	65	35	46	66	85	65	100	146	212	297	0.219	0.337	0.492	0.714

Table 2 presents the integrated results of the frequency distribution (F), cumulative frequency (Φ), and cumulative proportion (P) of the importance levels assigned by students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences to various reasons for choosing their academic department. Each row corresponds to a specific preference reason (Q1–Q37), and the columns represent importance levels ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). The first segment of the table (F) shows how frequently each importance level was selected, allowing direct comparison of student priorities. The second segment (Φ) displays the row-wise cumulative totals, illustrating how the importance of each reason aggregates across levels. The final segment (P) shows the cumulative proportions derived by dividing each cumulative frequency by the total number of respondents (n=297), thus providing a comparative metric of relative significance. For instance, Q10 (aptitude for the profession) received the highest score (level 5) from 182 students, highlighting its salience. Conversely, Q21 (influence of other relatives) was most frequently rated at the lowest level (1), suggesting it is relatively unimportant in students' decision-making. These combined matrices allow a comprehensive analysis of how different preference factors are valued, both absolutely and proportionally, supporting deeper interpretation of cognitive patterns in departmental choices.

Table 3. Unit normal deviations matrix (Z) and Weighting and Scaling (Condition B)

	Unit normal deviations matrix (Z)						a_j and Sc Calculation – Condition B					
Reasons	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**totZjg**	**Zj**	**ssZj**	**aj**	**zj**	**ajzj**	**Sj**	**Sc**
Q1	-2.323	-2.050	-1.608	-0.252	-6.232	-1.558	0.919	0.807	-1.591	-1.284	0.57	1.802
Q2	-1.335	-1.089	-0.731	0.525	-2.630	-0.658	0.827	0.898	-0.806	-0.724	0.01	1.242
Q3	-1.876	-1.673	-1.239	-0.14	-4.928	-1.232	0.775	0.957	-1.096	-1.049	0.335	1.567
Q4	-1.786	-1.496	-0.921	0.021	-4.182	-1.046	0.797	0.931	-1.255	-1.169	0.455	1.687
Q5	-2.212	-1.985	-1.496	-0.26	-5.954	-1.488	0.872	0.851	-1.456	-1.240	0.525	1.758
Q6	-1.378	-1.030	-0.403	0.34	-2.471	-0.618	0.755	0.983	-0.693	-0.681	-0.033	1.200
Q7	-1.578	-1.276	-0.555	0.34	-3.069	-0.767	0.854	0.869	-0.823	-0.715	0.001	1.233
Q8	-1.985	-1.640	-0.799	0.322	-4.102	-1.026	1.027	0.722	-1.133	-0.818	0.104	1.337
Q9	-0.908	-0.468	0.08	0.765	-0.532	-0.133	0.722	1.027	-0.39	-0.401	-0.313	0.919
Q10	-2.471	-2.212	-1.578	-0.287	-6.549	-1.637	0.975	0.761	-1.754	-1.335	0.621	1.853
Q11	-0.776	-0.565	-0.165	0.605	-0.901	-0.225	0.608	1.219	-0.367	-0.448	-0.266	0.966
Q12	-2.212	-2.050	-1.471	-0.182	-5.915	-1.479	0.921	0.806	-1.341	-1.080	0.366	1.598
Q13	-0.934	-0.497	0.123	0.699	-0.61	-0.152	0.714	1.039	-0.47	-0.488	-0.226	1.006
Q14	-1.044	-0.635	-0.097	0.635	-1.142	-0.285	0.726	1.022	-0.551	-0.563	-0.151	1.081
Q15	-0.823	-0.34	0.097	0.765	-0.3	-0.075	0.674	1.101	-0.352	-0.388	-0.326	0.906
Q16	-1.315	-0.921	-0.468	0.394	-2.310	-0.578	0.734	1.010	-0.853	-0.862	0.148	1.380
Q17	-0.753	-0.497	-0.08	0.574	-0.756	-0.189	0.58	1.280	-0.335	-0.429	-0.285	0.948
Q18	-1.673	-1.186	-0.709	0.165	-3.403	-0.851	0.783	0.947	-0.98	-0.928	0.214	1.446
Q19	-0.497	-0.046	0.394	0.947	0.798	0.2	0.617	1.203	-0.04	-0.049	-0.665	0.567
Q20	-0.615	-0.304	0.208	0.859	0.148	0.037	0.644	1.152	-0.193	-0.223	-0.491	0.741
Q21	-0.063	0.394	0.846	1.335	2.512	0.628	0.6	1.236	0.419	0.518	-1.232	0.000
Q22	-0.594	-0.174	0.506	1.152	0.89	0.223	0.768	0.966	-0.003	-0.003	-0.711	0.522
Q23	-1.746	-1.335	-0.688	0.278	-3.491	-0.873	0.882	0.841	-1.009	-0.848	0.134	1.367
Q24	-1.400	-1.044	-0.165	0.731	-1.878	-0.47	0.954	0.778	-0.602	-0.468	-0.246	0.986
Q25	-1.673	-1.257	-0.846	0.226	-3.551	-0.888	0.815	0.91	-1.150	-1.047	0.333	1.565
Q26	-1.876	-1.496	-1.136	-0.165	-4.674	-1.168	0.734	1.011	-1.198	-1.212	0.498	1.730
Q27	-0.823	-0.385	0.157	0.871	-0.18	-0.045	0.73	1.016	-0.22	-0.223	-0.491	0.741
Q28	-0.635	-0.295	0.123	0.934	0.126	0.032	0.677	1.096	-0.111	-0.121	-0.593	0.64
Q29	-1.105	-0.896	-0.516	0.182	-2.334	-0.583	0.566	1.311	-0.851	-1.116	0.402	1.634
Q30	-0.097	0.114	0.459	0.908	1.384	0.346	0.439	1.689	0.053	0.09	-0.804	0.429
Q31	-1.985	-1.746	-1.044	-0.2	-4.975	-1.244	0.802	0.925	-1.311	-1.212	0.498	1.730
Q32	-1.786	-1.471	-0.883	0.038	-4.102	-1.025	0.802	0.926	-1.179	-1.091	0.377	1.610
Q33	-1.673	-1.550	-0.823	0.14	-3.906	-0.976	0.833	0.89	-1.143	-1.018	0.303	1.536
Q34	-0.731	-0.506	-0.174	0.487	-0.924	-0.231	0.531	1.398	-0.497	-0.695	-0.019	1.214
Q35	-0.394	0.046	0.349	0.947	0.949	0.237	0.563	1.317	0.112	0.147	-0.861	0.371
Q36	-1.673	-1.276	-0.765	0.174	-3.540	-0.885	0.798	0.93	-1.040	-0.967	0.253	1.485
Q37	-0.776	-0.421	-0.021	0.565	-0.654	-0.164	0.575	1.290	-0.212	-0.273	-0.441	0.791
TotZjg	-47.528	-35.257	-16.041	15.439	-83.387	Totav	Sst					
Av,Zjg	-1.285	-0.953	-0.434	0.417	-2.254	-0.563	0.742					

Table 3 presents the combined output of unit normal deviations (Z) and the weighting and scaling process under Condition B for the reasons behind students' departmental preferences in the Faculty of Sport Sciences. This integrated format enables both a diagnostic view of standardized deviations in response patterns and a final interpretative ranking based on statistical scaling. The first section of the table (Z-scores across columns 1–4) quantifies how

much each preference reason deviates from the overall average at different importance levels. Negative Z-values indicate lower perceived importance, whereas positive Z-values reflect reasons concentrated at higher importance levels. For instance, Q21 (influence of other relatives) had the strongest positive deviation at level 4 (Z = 1.335), while Q10 (aptitude for the profession) had the lowest deviation at level 1 (Z = -2.471), underscoring contrasting levels of perceived relevance. The summary statistics—total deviation (totZjg), mean deviation (Zj), and standard deviation (ssZj)—offer further insights into variability and central tendency for each reason across all levels. These are then used to calculate weight coefficients (aj) and the weighted deviations (ajzj), forming the basis for raw scale values (Sj). These were finally normalized to a 0-based index (Sc) to facilitate ranking. As a result, Q10 emerged with the highest Sc value (1.853), confirming its dominance as the most influential reason, while Q21 received the lowest score (Sc = 0.000), suggesting minimal effect on student decisions. This unified table therefore offers a comprehensive and quantifiable picture of how students prioritize different factors in selecting their academic department.

Table 4. Scaling of reasons for preference according to faculties and departments

Reasons	Generalsc	Reasons	CE_{sc}	Reasons	$PEST_{sc}$	Reasons	SM_{sc}
Q 10	1.853	Q 10	1.969	Q 5	1.898	Q 31	2.039
Q 1	1.802	Q 1	1.948	Q 4	1.860	Q 10	2.034
Q 5	1.758	Q 5	1.820	Q 10	1.860	Q 1	1.868
Q 31	1.730	Q 26	1.775	Q 1	1.814	Q 5	1.717
Q 26	1.730	Q 12	1.773	Q 29	1.752	Q 26	1.689
Q 4	1.687	Q 32	1.745	Q 26	1.714	Q 12	1.629
Q 29	1.634	Q 4	1.734	Q 31	1.701	Q 25	1.590
Q 32	1.610	Q 3	1.616	Q 25	1.619	Q 32	1.590
Q 12	1.598	Q 36	1.563	Q 33	1.590	Q 29	1.564
Q 3	1.567	Q 33	1.563	Q 16	1.569	Q 3	1.501
Q 25	1.565	Q 31	1.561	Q 32	1.560	Q 4	1.469
Q 33	1.536	Q 29	1.490	Q 12	1.555	Q 33	1.437
Q 36	1.485	Q 18	1.454	Q 36	1.531	Q 18	1.376
Q 18	1.446	Q 25	1.416	Q 3	1.526	Q 23	1.360
Q 16	1.380	Q 23	1.346	Q 2	1.499	Q 7	1.300
Q 23	1.367	Q 8	1.300	Q 18	1.475	Q 8	1.294
Q 8	1.337	Q 16	1.260	Q 8	1.398	Q 36	1.269
Q 2	1.242	Q 6	1.258	Q 23	1.392	Q 16	1.237
Q 7	1.233	Q 7	1.238	Q 34	1.334	Q 34	1.131
Q 34	1.214	Q 2	1.181	Q 6	1.252	Q 6	1.111
Q 6	1.200	Q 34	1.148	Q 7	1.206	Q 2	1.103
Q 14	1.081	Q 14	1.013	Q 14	1.160	Q 14	1.079
Q 13	1.006	Q 24	0.996	Q 17	1.105	Q 13	0.962
Q 24	0.986	Q 13	0.989	Q 11	1.065	Q 24	0.926
Q 11	0.966	Q 11	0.985	Q 13	1.048	Q 11	0.868
Q 17	0.948	Q 9	0.938	Q 24	1.024	Q 9	0.862
Q 9	0.919	Q 15	0.911	Q 15	0.956	Q 17	0.861
Q 15	0.906	Q 17	0.903	Q 9	0.935	Q 15	0.842
Q 37	0.791	Q 37	0.792	Q 37	0.874	Q 37	0.719
Q 27	0.741	Q 20	0.738	Q 27	0.825	Q 20	0.687
Q 20	0.741	Q 27	0.722	Q 20	0.796	Q 27	0.683
Q 28	0.640	Q 28	0.631	Q 28	0.710	Q 28	0.585
Q 19	0.567	Q 19	0.564	Q 19	0.635	Q 19	0.505
Q 22	0.522	Q 22	0.521	Q 22	0.583	Q 22	0.464
Q 30	0.429	Q 30	0.421	Q 30	0.507	Q 30	0.372
Q 35	0.371	Q 35	0.363	Q 35	0.438	Q 35	0.316
Q 21	0.000	Q 21	0.000	Q 21	1.898	Q 21	0.000

Table 4 presents the zero-based scale values (Sc) that indicate the relative importance students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences assign to various reasons for choosing their departments. These values are reported across the general faculty (GeneralSc) and by department: Coaching Education (CEsc), Physical Education and Sports Teaching (PESTsc), and Sport Management (SMsc), allowing for both overall and department-specific comparisons. Across the entire faculty, "My professional aptitude" (Q10) emerged as the most important reason (Sc = 1.853), followed by "My interest in the profession" (Q1, Sc = 1.802) and "It is suitable for my future goals" (Q5, Sc = 1.758). This trend indicates that students prioritize career-related fit and interest across disciplines. In Coaching Education, the same top three reasons were observed in similar order, with "My professional aptitude" (Q10) scoring highest (Sc = 1.969), reinforcing the emphasis on skill alignment and professional orientation. For Physical Education and Sports Teaching students, "Suitable for my future goals" (Q5, Sc = 1.898) ranked first, followed by "High probability of finding a job in this department" (Q4, Sc = 1.860) and "My professional aptitude" (Q10, Sc = 1.860), showing a stronger concern for employability and professional match. In the Sport Management department, "Because I enjoy participating in sporting activities" (Q31, Sc = 2.039) was most influential, indicating that personal interest in sports plays a critical role in students' decisions, followed by Q10 (Sc = 2.034) and Q1 (Sc = 1.868). Across all departments, "Guidance from other relatives" (Q21, Sc = 0.000) consistently received the lowest importance rating, suggesting that external familial influence is minimal. Similarly, "Just to have a Bachelor's degree" (Q35) was ranked low, implying that most students prioritize intrinsic and career-focused motivations over instrumental ones. This table not only highlights the common factors valued by all students but also reveals department-specific tendencies, offering a deeper understanding of student motivations and informing program development in sport sciences education.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study examined the reasons for students' departmental preferences at the Faculty of Sports Sciences, identifying their relative importance and variation across departments using scaling matrices. While shared trends were observed faculty-wide, department-specific dynamics also shaped preference patterns. Across the faculty, "My aptitude for the profession" (Q10; Sc = 1.853) emerged as the most influential reason, followed by "My interest in the profession" (Q1) and "High probability of finding a job" (Q5). The least important factor was "Advice from other relatives" (Q21; Sc = 0.000), highlighting students' reliance on personal goals rather than external influence. In Coaching, students emphasized professional aptitude and personal interest, reflecting self-driven decision-making. Similarly, in Physical Education and Sports Teaching (PEST), job prospects (Q5) and personality compatibility (Q4) were prioritized. Conversely, "I enjoy sports" (Q31) was a key driver for Sport Management (SM) students, underlining intrinsic motivation. Again, Q21 consistently ranked lowest across all departments. These findings highlight how student preferences are shaped by a combination of internal motivations, career goals, and discipline-specific priorities. However, this study is limited to a sample group from the Faculty of Sports Sciences at Sivas Cumhuriyet University, which

restricts the generalizability of its findings. Broader studies involving multiple institutions and larger participant groups are needed to validate the results. Despite this limitation, the study contributes significantly to the literature by clarifying the factors behind major selection in sport sciences. While similar determinants are seen across disciplines—such as personal interest, ability, social influence, and structural conditions—this study also identifies field-specific patterns unique to exercise sciences.

In the study, “interest in the profession” stands out as one of the most important factors in students' reasons for preference. This result is in line with the study by Korkut-Owen et al. (2012), who found that professional interest is the most effective factor in faculty preferences. In addition, Turgut et al. (2004) emphasized that personal skills and interest in sports departments are crucial. Öztürk and Ilıman (2015) stated in their study with health management students that professional skills and interest ranked first among preference reasons and highlighted that individual skills are of general importance. Doğan and Türkmen (2019) emphasized that personal factors play a central role in career choice, and Bardakçı (2019) showed the importance of job search anxiety in career choice. Similarly, the study by Cárdenas et al. (2021) found that, in addition to individual abilities and career interest, support from family and teachers is also an important factor in students' career choices. This study shows that the interplay of personal and social factors supports the process of making an informed decision. However, some studies have shown that not only intrinsic motivations, but also extrinsic factors can be decisive in career choices. For example, in a study conducted in Ghana, Mwinkume et al. (2024) found that economic reasons, family influence, and job security were more prominent than vocational interest in students’ preferences for technical and vocational education. This finding partially diverges from the "interest in the profession" factor emphasized in our study and highlights the significance of contextual conditions in career decision-making.

Statements such as “It is suitable for my future goals” (question 5 - 1.758), “This department I have chosen will give me more advantages in obtaining a profession” (question 32 - 1.610), “The field allows me to improve myself” (question 12 - 1.598) and “There are more opportunities for career advancement” (question 18 - 1.446) show that students tend to choose departments not only for short-term educational gains but also for long-term career goals. Popp et al. (2011) emphasised that there are significant differences in the selection processes of domestic and international student athletes. Domestic sport students considered the possibility of finding a good job as one of the most important factors when choosing their university. Gürdoğan (2016) emphasises that the possibility of finding a job after graduation, personal development opportunities and career advancement opportunities are crucial for the choice of university. Similarly, Savickas (1991) found that alignment of interest, skills and long-term values play a role in an individual's career choice. These findings are consistent with Chapman's (1981) university choice model. In this model, an individual's abilities, interests and goals are considered important factors in career choice and major preferences. In addition, Lin (1997) stated that individuals consider not only present conditions but also future possibilities when making decisions, so it is of great importance for students to consider their career goals when making decisions. Similarly, McManus et al. (2017) found that factors such as academic

reputation, post-graduation employment opportunities and personal career goals are crucial to students' preference processes. Price et al. (2003) found that areas with high employment opportunities are attractive to students. Hooley and Lynch (1981) also found that the association of career opportunities with professional positions is crucial for students. However, some studies have shown that, contrary to the current research findings, students' preferences are shaped more by environmental and structural conditions. For example, Nguyen et al. (2023) found that in the post-COVID-19 period, economics students in Vietnam prioritized factors such as employment security, income potential, and resilience to economic fluctuations in their career choices. Similarly, Baharun et al. (2011) identified that, in addition to educational quality, factors such as family influence, cost, social life, and the physical location of the university played a significant role in international students' higher education preferences in Malaysia. These divergent findings indicate that academic and career preferences are shaped not only by individual orientations but also by varying economic and social conditions.

Another important factor influencing students' preferences is the expectation of personal development, which is reflected in the statement "The subject enables me to improve myself". While Korkut- Owen et al. (2012) stated that personal development goals play a crucial role in career choice, Erkuş et al. (2020) stated that individuals consider the possibilities of finding a job and advancing in the profession. This shows that students not only care about their employability, but also about their long-term professional development. In addition, the study found that students prefer the Faculty of Sport Sciences because they "enjoy engaging in sporting activities" (Question 31 - 1.730). This shows that individuals make their choices not only by considering tangible benefits or logical considerations such as future career opportunities but are also influenced by intrinsic and emotional factors such as personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Similarly, Strasser et al. (2002) found that the "fun and enjoyment" factor is one of the decisive factors in students' choice of university. Turgut et al. (2004) found that 34.5% of students preferred sports-related departments because they found them "active and enjoyable". Similarly, Özkurt et al. (2022) stated that one of the most important factors guiding individuals' behavior is 'pleasure" and that this feeling has a significant impact on the decisions and behaviors people make in daily life. Although this study did not focus directly on this main preference, it shows that the feeling of 'pleasure' occupies an important place in various decision-making and preference processes of individuals in daily life. This can be seen as one of the foundations on which the findings of the current study are based. Yavuz-Söyler (2022) stated that the fact that SPES is seen as a 'fun and enjoyable school' is an important factor in students' preference for this faculty. In another study by Saylan-Kırmızıgül and Kızılay (2020), it was emphasized that the expectation of a "fun field" is important for career preferences. These results show that students prefer not only job opportunities but also fields that fit their lifestyle and provide emotional satisfaction. At this point, some international studies also indicate that students' choices are influenced not only by career goals but also by factors such as personal satisfaction, compatibility with the social environment, and alignment with their lifestyle. For example, Simoes and Soares (2010) reported that students attach great importance to lifestyle-related aspects such as campus life and social facilities in their university selection. Similarly, Maringe (2006) emphasized that individuals tend to choose

environments in which they feel comfortable and happy, highlighting a direct link between this preference and personal satisfaction.

The statement “The probability of finding a job in this field is high” (question 5 - 1.758) shows that employment opportunities are an important factor for students. This result is in line with the findings of Doğan and Türkmen (2019) and Soutar and Turner (2002), who emphasize that the possibility of finding a job is a decisive factor in choosing a field of study. In addition, Şeker and Çapri (2020) stated that job opportunities are a primary criterion in students' educational and career choices. Similarly, Popp et al. (2011) emphasized that the employment potential of the degree and the academic reputation are decisive for the university preferences of domestic sport students. The study by Erkuş et al. (2020) shows that employment opportunities play an important role in students' subject preferences. In this context, the fact that sport sciences students see employment opportunities as the main reason why economic security after graduation is important to them. On the other hand, Tomlinson (2008) argues that students’ actions driven by post-graduation employment pressure may sometimes lead to the marginalization of personal interests, curiosity, and the sense of satisfaction, potentially reducing their overall contentment with the educational experience. This perspective suggests that employment prospects alone may not constitute a sufficient criterion for choice, and that some students place greater value on making more holistic and satisfaction-oriented decisions.

The findings of the study show that family and environmental factors have a minor influence on the preference processes of students in the Faculty of Sports Science. In particular, factors such as “advice/instructions from my parents” (1.006) and “advice/instructions from other relatives” (0.000) have very low significance, suggesting that these factors are less influential in students' preference decisions. The current findings suggest that students largely base their preferences on their personal interests, abilities and career goals. In the literature, these findings on exercise sciences students differ from some other studies. Şeker and Çapri (2019), for example, found that family support has a significant influence on the career choice process. Similarly, Özyürek and Kılıç-Atıcı (2002) found that guidance from family members is effective in students' career choices. Bardakçı (2019) emphasized that proximity to family is a crucial factor in university choice and that students generally prefer to live in the same city as their family. Donnellan (2002), Soutar and Turner (2002) also found that family recommendations play a role in the choice of degree programs. However, Chard and Potwarka's (2017) study of student athletes in Canada found that recommendations from family members and relatives played only a relatively minor role in the decision to participate in a particular sport; personal interests, suitability for an academic programme and athletic opportunities were highlighted as more decisive factors. This difference could be due to the unique structure of the sport sciences field. The fact that students in the Department of Exercise Sciences are more inclined to make independent decisions, as opposed to other majors, could be related to the fact that this field of study is directly related to an individual's personal interests and abilities. In this field, students tend to make decisions based on their own desires and abilities, rather than being guided by family. Individual achievement and motivation may play a more crucial role than family support or environmental factors, especially in a field where aptitude tests based on athletic background are effective.

In the study, the high significance of the statement “Because I have a sporting background” (question 29 - 1.634) clearly shows the influence that students' individual experiences have on their career choice. However, the low scale value of the statement “Because I am a national sportsman” (question 30 - 0.429) indicates while a sporting background is generally important, national or international achievements only play a limited role in the choice of a field of study. This result indicates that individuals make decisions based on their broader general sporting experiences when choosing a sport sciences Faculty and that national athlete status is not a primary consideration. Pope and Pope (2009) showed that athletic achievement increases student applications, but applications come from both low and high achieving students. This suggests that the impact of athletic achievement on university preferences is based on a general perception of success, while specific and high-level athletic achievements are less decisive. These findings partially overlap with the study by Doğan and Türkmen (2019) in the case of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. In the aforementioned study, it was found that sporting achievements (e.g. being a national athlete, Olympic degrees) play a role in university preferences. However, the low importance of the "national athlete" factor in the current study could indicate that the study group consists of a limited number of individuals with this characteristic. Furthermore, this result also shows that the effect of a general sporting background is more dominant in the preference process than the effect of international performance. Krumboltz's (1976) learning theory explains how previous experiences and environmental factors influence people's career choices (Krumboltz et al., 1976). According to this theory, previous experiences related to sport can be a source of motivation that encourages the choice of sport-related occupations. The fact that athletic background is highly effective in the preference process of sport sciences students is consistent with this theoretical framework. At the same time, this finding points to the crucial role of the connections that individuals build with sporting activities in their career choice processes. In summary, the study shows that an athletic background is an influential factor in students' preferences, but more specific factors such as national-level athleticism are less determinative in this process. The research shows that the physical and academic facilities of the university influence students' preferences. “The adequacy of the university's facilities (field, hall, etc.)” (question 26; scale score: 1.730) stands out as one of the factors with the highest importance for students. In contrast, the “competence of academic staff” (question 25; scale score: 1.565) and the “educational, social and cultural facilities of the university” (question 23; scale score: 1.367) had a relatively lower, but still significant influence. The “popularity of the university” (question 24; scale score: 0.986) was rated as a relatively less important reason for preference.

Adequacy of facilities is a crucial factor, especially in fields that require practical training, such as sport sciences. In the study, the high scale value of this factor (1.730) emphasizes the importance of the physical infrastructure that students need for their education. In the study conducted by Doğan and Türkmen (2019) at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, similar results were obtained and it was found that the sports infrastructure of universities is crucial for students' preferences. Similarly, Magnusen et al. (2014) reported that sports facilities are one of the important factors influencing student-athletes' preferences for a university. In particular, it was emphasized that modern and large athletic facilities are a strong decision factor in the preference process of both student-athletes and coaches and that these facilities play a crucial

role in the recruitment process. Kramer (2023) found in his study of student athletes that the quality of athletic facilities and physical infrastructure are the most important preference factors, especially for student transfer athletes. All of these findings show that the adequacy of fields, halls and other practice areas in sport sciences faculties plays a fundamental role in meeting students' expectations for the quality of education. However, there are also studies that present contrasting findings on this issue. James et al. (1999), in their research conducted with university applicants in Australia, found that physical infrastructure and campus facilities were not as influential as commonly assumed in university preferences. Instead, the study revealed that students tended to base their choices more on factors such as the quality of academic programs, the qualifications of academic staff, and post-graduation employment opportunities.

The ‘competence of academic staff’ (1.565) is an important factor in students’ preferences for a university or department. In the study by Erkuş et al. (2020), it was found that the knowledge and expertise of academics are among the most important factors influencing students' preferences. The quality of academic staff plays a crucial role in meeting students' expectations of the educational process by helping them to acquire professional knowledge and skills. Similarly, Magnusen et al. (2014) emphasized that the competence and personal characteristics of coaches are critical to the preference processes of physical education students. In particular, the head coach's leadership style, technical knowledge, and the relationship he or she establishes with the athlete are among the important factors that influence student decisions in sports-based programs. In addition, Kramer (2023) found that coaches' personal characteristics and coaching abilities have an impact on the university preferences of student transfer athletes. Based on their previous experiences, transfer athletes place more importance on the communication style and professional skills of coaches. These findings suggest that the competence of both academic staff and coaches are important factors that increase student satisfaction not only during the preference stage but also throughout the educational process. On the other hand, some studies suggest that this situation may not apply uniformly across all student groups. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), in their review, indicate that certain groups of students prioritize factors such as institutional reputation, social opportunities, scholarship availability, and post-graduation employment potential over the qualifications of academic staff when making university choices. Although the "educational, social and cultural facilities of the university" (1.367) is an important factor in students' preferences, they are not as crucial as the physical infrastructure for sport sciences students. In Altaş's (2006) study, it was found that university students rate social and cultural facilities as a factor that enriches university life. However, the fact that sport sciences students focus intensely on applied courses and athletic activities may cause such opportunities being ranked second in their preferences. Similarly, in James-MacEachern and Yun's (2017) study of international students in Canada, physical environment and recreational facilities were ranked among the least important factors.

The physical environment and recreational facilities were among the least important factors influencing the university preferences of sport sciences students. the “popularity of the university” (0.986) also had a relatively minor influence. Veloutsou et al. (2004), Maringe (2006) and Cosser and Du Toit (2002) emphasized that university reputation was an influential factor in students' preferences. Similarly, Zhai et al. (2019) found in their systematic review

that the general reputation and rankings of universities are crucial for international students' preferences. Çatı et al. (2016) found that female students in particular attach more importance to university reputation, campus facilities and social factors. However, the results of this study show that sport sciences students attach more importance to tangible factors such as physical facilities and academic factors rather than abstract factors such as popularity.

The study found that systemic factors such as “My departmental preference in high school” (0.919), “The exam was difficult in the year I took the university exam” (0.741), “Because my central placement grade was sufficient for this department” (0.640), and “Just to have a bachelor's degree” (0.371) had relatively low significance for the departmental preferences of students in the Faculty of Physical Education. This finding suggests that professional interest, personal skills and career goals are more crucial to students' choices. Similarly, Dube et al. (2022) found that personal and economic factors (location, financial accessibility) were more important in the university choice process, while admission requirements and financial aid opportunities were more important in the choice of a degree program. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that the factors influencing students’ academic major and career choices are not solely limited to current conditions, but are also shaped by individual interest in technology and labor market expectations. For instance, Chen et al. (2016), in their study on preferences in the field of system development, found that variables such as outcome expectations, job opportunities, and individual innovativeness in information technologies significantly influenced students’ field selection. This research revealed a direct relationship between academic major preference and career orientation, indicating that students’ vocational tendencies are shaped by both available opportunities and their perceived self-efficacy.

According to the current study, the influence of systemic factors is limited. However, there are various findings in the literature that the type of school can have an influence on major subject preferences. For example, Ayık et al. (2010) reported that graduates of science and general secondary schools based their university preferences largely dependent on their exam results. Korkut-Owen et al. (2012) also found that the specializations chosen by vocational high school graduates during high school influenced their university preferences. In particular, it was found that Anatolian and science high school graduates often attached importance to factors such as “The score obtained in the university entrance examination is sufficient for this field” and “It is a prestigious profession”. In Telli-Yamamoto's (2006) study, it was found that the grades obtained in the central examination system in Turkey are one of the important factors influencing students' university preferences. However, in the current study, it was found that the effect of the examination system at the Faculty of Sports Sciences was limited. For example, the low scale scores of the statements “The exam was difficult in the year I took the university exam” and “Because my central placement grade was sufficient for this school” indicate that students' preferences are based on factors such as athletic background, individual ability and career interest. In the literature, studies on the examination system come to different conclusions. For example, the study by Tataroğlu et al. (2011) indicates that the preferences of prospective mathematics teachers are largely influenced by examination results, while the current study shows that individual factors are more important for students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences. Finally, the low scale value of the statement “Just to have a bachelor's degree”

(0.371) shows that students do not consider sport sciences faculties as an obligation or alternative, but rather consciously prefer them. This is in line with Erkuş et al. (2020) finding that a Bachelor's degree is not just a formality, but also a tool for personal and professional development. As a result, the study shows that systemic factors such as the examination system have a limited influence on the preferences of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences and that individual factors and career goals are more dominant.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the factors that influence the departmental preferences of physical education students and evaluated the importance of these factors across the entire faculty and departments. The results indicate that individual interests, abilities, and professional goals rank highest in student preferences, while environmental and systemic factors had a relatively low influence. The factors with the highest importance across the faculty were "My aptitude for the profession" and "My interest in the profession". This result clearly shows that students make their career choices based on their personal skills and motivation. Employment opportunities and personal development opportunities were also among the important factors influencing students' choices. On the other hand, factors such as "advice/instructions from other relatives" and "just to have an undergraduate degree" were of minor importance as reasons. This finding shows that students adopt a more independent attitude in their career choice and make their decisions based on individual goals rather than external factors. The comparison between departments revealed that the reasons for students' preferences vary according to the specific dynamics of each department. It was found that coaching students prioritized personal skills and professional interest, while physical education and sports teaching students considered job opportunities and professional compatibility to be more crucial. Sports management students, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on emotional factors such as the enjoyment of sporting activities. In summary, the study shows that personal factors play a central role in the career choices of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences, while the influence of systemic and environmental factors is limited. This situation shows that students make their career choices consciously and are guided by their individual goals and career plans.

Recommendations

This study was conducted on the students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Sivas Cumhuriyet University. It is recommended that similar studies be conducted at sports science faculties in other regions in order to generalize the results. In this context, examining regional differences with larger sample groups covering Turkey as a whole can help to obtain more comprehensive data on this area. A scaling method based on classification judgments was used in the study. In the future, qualitative or mixed methods may be preferred to investigate the reasons for students' preferences in more depth, and the current findings may be supported by using other data collection tools. Also, in addition to the reasons for preference discussed in this study, new variables or factors can be added to conduct more comprehensive analyses. In particular, it is suggested that the reasons for preference can be diversified and that students can be given the opportunity to express their opinions in more detailed formulations. Furthermore, in order to guide practitioners, it is recommended that school counselors, academic advisors, and career planning professionals take students' preference tendencies into account when providing

individualized guidance. In addition, to enhance the generalizability of the research, multi-center studies conducted across different institutions and long-term (longitudinal) research may be employed to analyze how students' decision-making processes evolve over time.

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