



Trends in Health Management Research: An Analysis of Tübitak 2209 Student Projects

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to analyze the distribution of TÜBİTAK 2209-A student research project topics submitted by health management departments and to evaluate the frequency of student projects conducted within these departments.

Methods: In this context, accepted applications from 2020 to 2024 were examined through the TÜBİTAK website, and those originating from health management departments were included in the study. A total of 269 project titles from seven application periods were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: Twelve themes were identified in total. Findings indicated that the most frequently studied topics were public health (72 projects), management and organization (46 projects), Covid-19 (30 projects), and patient-physician communication and patient satisfaction (29 projects). Conversely, accounting-finance (2 projects), health tourism (7 projects), and violence (7 projects) were among the less frequently addressed topics.

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Conclusion: The findings of the study highlight prominent research topics in health management departments and provide potential research directions for future student projects, particularly emphasizing less explored areas such as health policies, sustainability, health financing, and digital health technologies.

Keywords: Health Management, TÜBİTAK 2209, Health Management Education, Thematic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Health management undergraduate education in Turkey began in 1963 with the establishment of the Health Administration Vocational School affiliated with the Ministry of Health, subsequently continuing with undergraduate and graduate programs at Hacettepe University in 1970. Between 1988 and 1996, additional departments opened at Istanbul, Ege, Marmara, Ankara, and Başkent universities, and today nearly all universities offer undergraduate education in this field (Çimen, 2010; Berber, Çandereli & Aslan, 2023).

Health management is a multidisciplinary field within management science involving the planning, organization, direction, coordination, and control of resources to enhance individual and community health. Management of health institutions encompasses technical and social activities within a structured organization to achieve defined objectives (Uğurluoğlu, 2019). The European Health Management Association (EHMA, 2025) outlines the functions of health managers as planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, directing, risk assessment, and decision-making. Health managers ensure their organizations or departments deliver optimal patient care by enhancing efficiency, financial stability, and service quality (EHMA, 2025).

Valiotis et al. (2025) proposed a new approach to defining health management, incorporating principles such as one health, sustainability, and equity. According to this definition: "Health management is defined as the practice of providing guidance and leadership to support and promote health at individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Health management adopts a holistic vision of health that recognizes the impact of behavioral, social, and environmental determinants. In addition to encompassing traditional health management of community, primary, secondary, and tertiary care services, health management extends beyond healthcare settings. Aligned with the 'one health' approach, health management integrates human, animal, digital, and environmental health considerations, promoting synergy with relevant policy and societal areas" (Valiotis et al., 2025).

This new definition highlights that health management should extend beyond traditional management concepts, incorporating sustainability, digitalization, artificial intelligence, health policies, and environmental factors. Current studies in health management increasingly include topics such as environmental sustainability, green hospital practices, remote health services, and digitalization, alongside traditional topics like hospital management, health economics, and patient satisfaction.

As in the rest of the world, digitalization has significantly transformed daily life in Türkiye, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic. Ersoy and Ersoy (2022) emphasized that the healthcare sector was among the most affected by this transformation. With the advancement of technology, individuals have had to adapt to the digitalization process in healthcare services. From a health perspective, newly developed technologies and methods have enhanced the effectiveness of treatment processes, strengthened communication with patients, improved preventive health practices, and contributed substantially to the managerial functioning of healthcare institutions. Moreover, the digitalization of infrastructure and systems used in healthcare services has necessitated the acquisition of new skills by employees and has compelled healthcare institutions to employ personnel equipped to meet these evolving demands (Akalin & Veranyurt, 2020).

TÜBİTAK supports associate and undergraduate students through the 2209 projects, aiming to encourage research and project development culture (BİDEP, 2024). Applications are submitted by an academic advisor, a project leader, and up to four collaborators, with funding available for equipment, supplies, travel, and services if needed. Although projects can be from any field, students are encouraged to align their work with Sustainable Development Goals.

This study aims to evaluate health management students' projects among the student projects accepted by TÜBİTAK, examining aspects such as the number of projects, annual trends, and topic distribution. For this purpose, TÜBİTAK announcement archives were reviewed using the keyword '2209', and announcements related to 2209-A project results were included in the study. This study is the first thematic analysis of TÜBİTAK 2209-A student projects conducted by health management departments in Turkey. By revealing trends in health management education and research, it may serve as an important guide for future student projects, contributing to the field by identifying frequently studied topics and areas attracting students' attention. Although master's theses and academic studies have previously been conducted in the field of health management (Gül et al., 2015; Şahin & Ocak, 2019; Mısırlıoğlu & Doğan, 2025), the

research topic trends of undergraduate students have not been systematically examined. Thus, the study examined which topics health management undergraduate students are working on.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1. Type of Research

This study is based on the analysis of 269 project titles accepted within the scope of TÜBİTAK 2209 "University Students Research Projects Support Program" from health management departments between 2020 and 2024. A qualitative research method, thematic analysis, was employed. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, and report themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

1.2. Research Population and Sample

Project titles were accessed through the official TÜBİTAK website where project results are published. Accepted projects from the health management department during the first and second application periods from 2020 to 2024 were included in the study. Since the results for the first application period of 2020 were not available, seven application periods were included in the analysis. While all other application files were publicly accessible via open links, the results for the first call of 2020 were posted in a restricted area that only applicants could access. Consequently, projects from that period were excluded from the analysis. This may partially limit the representativeness of the data for that year.

1.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethics committee approval was not obtained as no data were collected from participants. Publicly accessible data were used.

1.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The research process included:

Familiarization with Data: Project titles were collected and examined from the official TÜBİTAK results webpage. The researcher thoroughly examined each of the 269 project titles. During the data-collection phase, PDF acceptance lists for each application period of the TÜBİTAK 2209-A programme—containing university, department, and project titles—were downloaded from the agency's official website. These lists were searched using the keyword "health management" to extract projects supported within health management departments. The resulting project titles and university names were transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and

all statistical and thematic analyses were conducted on this dataset. Data extraction was conducted in November 2024.

Generating Initial Codes: An initial individual analysis was conducted to identify core themes of project titles, initially classifying them into 11 main themes.

Searching for Themes: Similarities and differences in coded titles were analyzed, and recurring themes were identified. This stage aimed to reveal prevalent research topics in health management.

Reviewing Themes: The identified themes were rigorously evaluated by two health management academics to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness, resulting in an increase to 12 themes with clearer classifications. The 12th theme, labeled “Other,” was created for titles that did not fit any of the initially defined themes. Project titles that did not belong to the 11 main themes and could not be grouped into a specific category were classified under this 12th “Other” theme.

Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme was further detailed by subdividing into subcategories, clarifying their contents and assigning functional names.

Report Writing: Results of the analysis, including the numerical distribution of project titles within each theme and subcategory, were presented visually and in tabular formats. The report aimed to outline general trends and highlight focus areas of TÜBİTAK 2209 projects in health management.

1.5. Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, strategies such as credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (internal reliability), and confirmability (external reliability) are recommended to ensure validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These strategies were carefully observed in this study. Data were meticulously extracted from a publicly accessible website. Accepted projects in the health management area were verified multiple times for accuracy. The thematic analysis method applied in project title analysis was clearly defined, and the coding process was detailed thoroughly. Two health management experts reviewed and reached consensus during the coding process. Themes were reconsidered for consistency. All research phases were extensively documented and reported, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study.

2. ANALYSIS

In this section, the frequency of TÜBİTAK 2209 student projects during the analyzed years, universities with the highest number of project submissions, and thematic analysis of project titles are presented.

Table 1 shows the yearly distribution of health management projects accepted under TÜBİTAK 2209-A between 2020 and 2024. The highest number of applications was observed in 2023.

Table 1. Distribution of TÜBİTAK 2209-A Health Management Projects by Year

Year	Number of Projects	Percentage (%) of Total Projects
2020 (2nd Period)	11	4,1
2021 (1st Period)	5	1,9
2021 (2nd Period)	38	14,1
2022 (1st Period)	60	22,3
2022 (2nd Period)	38	14,1
2023 (1st Period)	54	20,1
2023 (2nd Period)	63	23,4
Total	269	100



Figure 1. Yearly Increase of TÜBİTAK 2209-A Supported Projects

Figure 1 illustrates the change in the number of health management projects supported by TÜBİTAK 2209-A from 2020 to 2023. An overall increasing trend in project numbers is observed starting from 2020. While there was an increase in the number of projects in 2021, a relatively stable trend was observed in 2022. A notable increase was recorded in 2023.

Table 2 presents the distribution of TÜBİTAK 2209-A supported health management projects by universities between 2020 and 2024. According to the data, Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University (28 projects) and Bayburt University (26 projects) had the highest number of accepted projects, followed by Samsun University (20 projects) and Ankara University (16 projects). Among the top ten universities with the highest accepted project numbers were Sakarya University of Applied Sciences (15 projects), Sakarya University (14 projects), and Karadeniz Technical University (11 projects).

Table 2 was prepared based on application results from the second period of 2020 to 2024. According to available data, the first health management student project supported was from İzmir University of Economics in 2012. Subsequently, in 2013, Süleyman Demirel University had 6 projects accepted. Similarly, in 2015, Süleyman Demirel University's health management department had one project supported.

Table 2. Top 10 Universities with the Highest Number of Accepted Health Management Projects Under TÜBİTAK 2209-A (2020-2024)

University	Number of Projects
Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University	28
Bayburt University	26
Samsun University	20
Ankara University	16
Sakarya University of Applied Sciences	15
Sakarya University	14
Karadeniz Technical University	11
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	11
Hitit University	9
Süleyman Demirel University	8

Table 3 shows the thematic distribution and subcategories of health management projects supported by TÜBİTAK 2209-A between 2020 and 2024. A total of 269 projects were analyzed, classified into 12 main themes. The themes with the highest number of projects were public health (72 projects), management and organization (46 projects), Covid-19 (30 projects), and patient-physician communication and patient satisfaction (29 projects). Subcategories illustrate other variables included within the main themes. For instance, within the public health theme, health literacy was the most frequently studied topic. All variables within each project title were included in the subcategories, therefore, the total number of concepts in the subcategory column may differ from the main theme frequency. Generally, the most recurrent subcategories were health literacy, healthcare workers, rational drug use, patient satisfaction, healthy living, e-health literacy, and health technology.

Table 3. Thematic Distribution and Subcategories of TÜBİTAK 2209-A Health Management Projects

Theme	n	Subcategories (n)
Covid-19	30	Vaccine attitude (5), Healthy living (4), Mental health (4), E-health literacy (3), Health literacy (2), Health anxiety (3), Quality of life (3), Others (14)
Public Health	72	Health literacy (16), Rational drug use (11), Healthy living (9), Environmental health (8), E-health literacy (7), Health information seeking (6), Health risk (5), Women's health (5), Quality of life (4), Healthcare utilization (4), Cancer screenings (4), Substance use (3), Vaccine attitude (3), Blood donation (3), Mental health (3), Students (3), Chronic diseases (3), Cyberchondria (2), Marketing (2), First aid (2), Others (9)
Health Tourism	7	Medical tourism (2), Thermal tourism (2), Quality, Marketing
Accounting and Finance	2	Medical accounting, Financial literacy
Management and Organization	46	Healthcare workers (15), Disaster (9), Stress (5), Quality (4), Nurses (4), Students (4), Health managers (3), Administrative staff (3), Burnout (3), Hospital (3), Self-efficacy (3), Work-life balance (3), Organizational culture (3), Organizational commitment (2), Satisfaction (2), Turnover (2), Cynicism (2), Others (10)
Sustainability, Green Hospitals, and Waste Management	10	Green organization-hospital (5), Climate change (2), Waste management (2), Others (2)
Health Management Education and Career	26	Unemployment anxiety (5), Health management education (5), Entrepreneurship (4), Employment (3), Career awareness (2), Satisfaction (2), Emotional intelligence (3), Others (3)
Innovation, Artificial Intelligence, and Digitalization	24	Health technology (10), Telehealth services (5), E-pulse (2), Artificial intelligence (2), Innovation (2), Others (5)
Violence	7	Violence against healthcare workers (7), Trust in healthcare system (1)
Patient-Physician Communication and Patient Satisfaction	29	Patient satisfaction (13), Patient-physician communication (8), Trust in healthcare system (4), Patient rights (2), Rational drug use (3), Patient loyalty (3), Others (8)
Health Policy	11	Brain drain (5), Physicians (3), Others (6)
Others	5	Online farmers (2), Others (3)

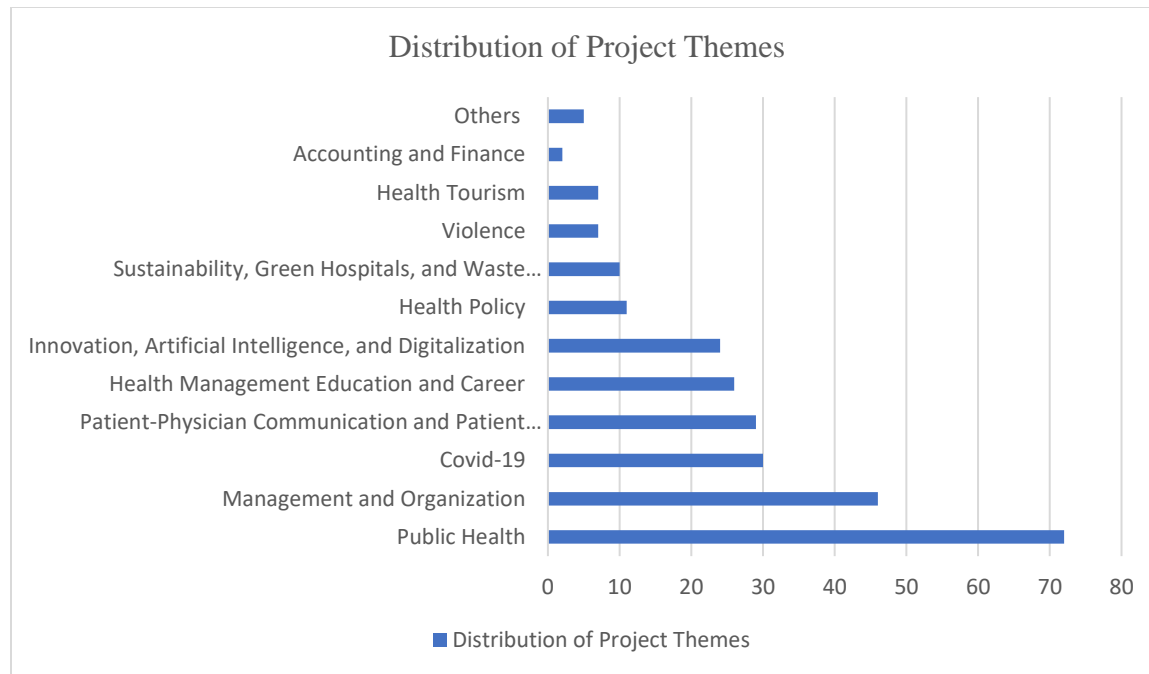


Figure 2. Thematic Distribution of TÜBİTAK 2209-A Health Management Projects (2020-2024)

Between 2020-2024, TÜBİTAK 2209 projects were grouped into 12 themes according to their topics. Figure 2 visually presents the frequency of these themes.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study evaluated health management projects supported by TÜBİTAK 2209-A between 2020 and 2024 through thematic analysis. A total of 269 projects were examined and categorized into 12 main themes. The themes with the highest number of projects were public health (72 projects), management and organization (46 projects), Covid-19 (30 projects), and patient-physician communication and patient satisfaction (29 projects). Conversely, fewer projects were conducted on topics such as health policy (11 projects), health tourism (7 projects), violence in healthcare (7 projects), and accounting-finance (2 projects).

Misirlioglu and Dogan (2025) analyzed studies from the Web of Science database related to health management from 2020 to 2024, identifying the most frequently recurring keywords as Covid-19 (496), public health (154), management (117), pandemic (109), education (89), mental health (88), health policy (77), nursing (75), patient safety (67), and quality of life (67). Compared to our findings, the themes of Covid-19, public health, and management align closely, highlighting that prominent themes in TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects correspond well with international literature, underscoring health management's responsiveness to global health issues.

Valiotis et al. (2025), proposing a new definition for health management, emphasized concepts such as 'One Health', digital health, environmental health, inter-sectoral collaboration, multidisciplinary, varying governance levels, and behavioral, social, and economic determinants of health, along with governance structures. The prominence of these themes in TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects indicates adaptability within the discipline of health management. Although the thematic distribution obtained in this study partially aligns with the holistic “One Health” framework emphasized by Valiotis et al. (2025), notable gaps remain; in particular, the limited attention to environmental sustainability, health financing, cross-sector collaboration, and AI-supported management practices indicates that the interdisciplinary perspective has not yet been fully achieved and underscores the need for future research to focus on these areas.

Management education is critical for health service managers to improve system performance. Davies (2006) argues that management education curricula should enhance understanding of the practice context, foster research awareness, and develop critical evaluation skills. Barati et al. (2016) identified eight essential skill areas for hospital managers, including communication, experience, organizational logistics/sensitivity to infrastructure, managerial skills, motivation, systematic problem-solving, ethics, and financial/legal awareness, emphasizing the greater importance of practical over theoretical skills. Focusing students' research on these skill areas will equip them with practical competencies and prepare them to become effective leaders in healthcare management.

Future research in health management should prioritize interdisciplinary approaches, technological integration, and digital transformation. Kaçak (2023) highlighted that digital health—intersecting digital technologies and healthcare—has gained popularity, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a 47.5% annual increase in scientific research in digital health technology. Zeybek, Zeybek, and Aslan (2023) stressed the importance of increasing health sciences students' awareness of digital health technologies, improving their post-graduation success and workplace adaptation. The limited attention given to health policy, financing, and digitalization in student projects might result from insufficient interest among academic advisors and students or the inadequate emphasis on these topics within curricula. Educational curricula must evolve in response to technological advancements and changing needs, expectations, and requirements.

Health management undergraduate programs prepare professionals for complex healthcare institutions involving multiple disciplines. Berber et al. (2023) noted the substantial growth in health management education from 15 universities in 2010 to 86 in 2022, highlighting the rising demand for professional health managers. Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, and Reenen (2020) advocated that hospitals led by professionally trained managers show improved management practices and enhanced clinical performance. Increasing health management education and the growing need for qualified managers necessitate strengthening educational quality in this field. Yorulmaz (2018) identified three main problems faced by the health management profession: educational issues, health management policies, and lack of professional recognition. Sub-themes included a shortage of qualified academics, substandard education quality, inconsistent standards across institutions, and inadequate practical training. Filiz (2021) noted that only one-third of 440 academics in health management departments had undergraduate degrees specifically in health management, highlighting the need to enhance academic staff qualifications and curriculum effectiveness. In light of these challenges, measures that facilitate graduates' employability are essential for the field of health management. To increase employment and strengthen healthcare delivery with qualified leaders, health management programs must closely follow sectoral developments. Regularly updating curricula and incorporating areas such as artificial intelligence and digitalization are critical steps. Throughout the four-year degree, students should gain not only theoretical knowledge but also enriched practical experience through internships, hands-on training, and projects such as those funded by TÜBİTAK. Given the importance of communication skills in the service sector, participation in such projects will also help students develop effective communication and express themselves confidently.

Karataş and Öztay (2023), in a study examining student and teacher perspectives on eTwinning project implementations, reported that project-based learning enhances social skills such as communication, collaboration, and responsibility among students. Participation in research projects significantly benefits students' personal and academic development, enhancing problem-solving abilities, scientific skills, critical thinking, and confidence. Kurt, Kurt, and Akici (2024) similarly observed positive outcomes, including increased responsibility, improved communication skills, creative thinking, and a sense of personal value from involvement in TÜBİTAK 2204-B research projects.

Student projects emerge as a crucial component in health management education, enabling students to develop teamwork, research, problem-solving, and innovative thinking skills. Acceptance of TÜBİTAK-funded projects boosts students' academic success and confidence and motivates other students to pursue research. Completing projects successfully also encourages students to pursue postgraduate education.

Focusing student projects on contemporary and strategic topics relevant to strengthening the healthcare system contributes to competency development and sectoral problem-solving. Encouraging a project culture among students is vital for equipping future health managers and addressing managerial shortages in the healthcare sector.

The processes of conducting research, interacting with individuals, and completing a research project offer significant theoretical and practical benefits to students. Therefore, encouraging student projects can be considered an important factor for enhancing both the academic and practical quality of education within the discipline of health management. The prominent themes identified in TÜBİTAK 2209-A projects suggest that the health management discipline is expanding beyond its traditional framework, indicating that students should increasingly focus on topics such as innovation, sustainability, and artificial intelligence.

This study was conducted using project titles accepted under the TÜBİTAK program by students in the Health Management Department. Because project summaries are not published in the final reports, detailed information about the projects could not be obtained. The aim of the research is to identify the current topics of study from the students' perspective and to determine which themes the general trends focus on. Future studies could explore the reasons behind these trends by conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions with the students whose projects were accepted.

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