

Career Planning Behaviors of Sports Sciences Students: Exploring the Role of Economic Factors in Career Dedication

Muhammet Mavibaş¹ , Yunus Emre Çingöz² 
Murat Turan¹ , Buğra Çağatay Savaş¹ 

Abstract

This study explores the career planning behaviors of Sports Sciences students, focusing on their career dedication levels within the context of economic conditions and demographic variables. The sample consisted of 174 students from Erzurum Technical University. A relational survey model, which is designed to examine the presence and direction of relationships between variables without manipulation, was employed to identify possible associations between demographic factors and career dedication. Data were collected using a personal information form and the 9-item Career Dedication Scale. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and Anova were conducted. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was applied to determine which specific groups differed from each other. Results showed that female students had significantly higher career dedication than males, while no significant differences were found based on department, age, or academic year. Although overall dedication was high, the lowest score was for participation in additional training activities, indicating financial barriers. Economic constraints may limit students' ability to engage in essential career development efforts, especially in fields like sports sciences where job opportunities are limited. These findings highlight the role of financial support in sustaining career commitment. Institutions should offer accessible career services, affordable training programs, and targeted support for economically disadvantaged students. Addressing economic disparities is essential to ensure all students can realize their career goals, regardless of financial background.

Keywords

Career dedication, faculty of sports sciences, student

¹Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Erzurum Technical University, Türkiye.

²Department of Recreation, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Bayburt University, Türkiye.

Corresponding Author: Muhammet Mavibaş

Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Erzurum Technical University, Türkiye.

Email: muhammet.mavibas@erzurum.edu.tr

Introduction

Career refers to a combination of roles undertaken, jobs performed, and achievements obtained by an individual throughout their lifetime. This definition points not to a limited period of life, but to the individual's entire lifespan. The career process is shaped by a series of factors, ranging from life events and the continuity of professional and other roles to the progressions and setbacks experienced during career development (Super, 1980; Kuzgun, 2006; Özyürek, 2013).

Traditional career development theories have been criticized for their limited applicability across diverse cultures and socio-economic classes. However, recent contemporary theories and models offer a more holistic approach by considering the individual's contextual conditions (Bacanlı & Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2022). Furthermore, as emphasized by Bakır and Büyükgöze-Kavas (2021), the family-being the first social institution a child is born into-plays a decisive role in the career development process. Today, individuals actively shape their career paths by either taking advantage of or turning down the opportunities that come their way (Kuzgun, 2000).

The continuously evolving nature of modern career environments has highlighted the importance of proactive career behaviors and career commitment (Muslu & Temur, 2021). Proactivity refers to the initiative individuals take not merely to adapt to their current circumstances, but to change them. This approach, which requires a continuous process of learning and adaptation for personal development and employability, lies within the scope of proactive behaviors (Korkmaz et al., 2020; Muslu & Temur, 2021). Although relatively new in the literature, the term "career commitment" bears similarities to concepts such as career beliefs and career engagement. However, while these concepts represent attitudes, career commitment is more focused on individual behaviors (Akdoğanlı, 2019; Çakmak Otluoğlu & Akdoğanlı, 2019).

The strategic approaches adopted by individuals during their career journey include activities such as career planning, networking, skill development, and career initiative-collectively referred to as proactive career behavior (Hirschi & Freund, 2014). The concept of proactivity implies that individuals not only accept their current situations but strive to improve them by taking initiative (Crant, 2000). Moreover, proactive behavior encompasses actions that are

within the individual's control and aimed at future-oriented goals (Parker, Williams & Turner, 2006). Individuals with proactive personalities actively analyze the ever-changing dynamics of the business world, expand their capacities, gather information about employment opportunities, and aim to acquire the skills necessary for achieving long-term career goals (Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008). In the modern labor market, such proactive approaches are essential (Fay & Kamps, 2006). This suggests that proactivity plays a critical role in career development (Presbitero, 2015).

The term career commitment refers to specific behaviors related to one's career. In this context, it differs from terms such as job engagement, career commitment (in the attitudinal sense), and career motivation, which mostly describe mental and emotional processes. Career commitment encompasses individual career-related behaviors, particularly activities such as career planning, career exploration, and career management strategies, within a single framework (Hirschi, 2014; Jaensch, Hirschi & Spurk, 2016).

The university period enables individuals to make more informed decisions about their careers and also serves as an exploratory phase where potential career paths are evaluated (Martens & Felissa, 1998). The importance of this period is further emphasized by the guidance and support provided to students, as the lack of proper guidance may lead to entering the workforce without clear goals or plans, resulting in a waste of time and resources during the career-shaping process (Leung et al., 2011). Individuals lacking career direction may experience uncertainty when making career decisions (Sangganjanavanich & Magnuson, 2011). These uncertainties may prompt individuals to pursue graduate or doctoral programs, making postgraduate education a frequently chosen path during the early stages of a career (Lopatto, 2004; Gardner & Barnes, 2007).

During career planning, the individual serves as the main agent of the plan; however, organizational support is also necessary in this journey. This indicates that the individual and the organization are not independent from each other in the career planning process, and although they have different roles, they share a mutual responsibility (Uçar, 2010). A detailed examination of the factors influencing career choices and an awareness of the potential impacts of these choices on one's life can help individuals make more informed decisions (Pehlivan, 1994). As noted in the model developed by Meece and colleagues (1982), students base their career choices not only on their perceived abilities

and skills but also on their beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of different career paths (Yılmaz et al., 2012).

Perceived career congruence, positive expectations about career, and information about the job market play a critical role in shaping individuals' career trajectories. However, a review of the current literature reveals that these concepts have not been sufficiently addressed, especially in studies conducted on university students (Duffy, 2010; Siyez & Yusupu, 2015).

In recent years, global economic fluctuations and the employment crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic have had a profound impact on individuals' career planning behaviors and their levels of career dedication. Under conditions of economic uncertainty, students increasingly perceive job security as fragile, which prompts them to engage in more structured, strategic, and proactive career behaviors (Blustein et al., 2020; Rigotti et al., 2020). Within this context, it becomes essential to explore how students' perceptions of the economy influence their motivation to commit to career-related goals and efforts.

Economic factors are particularly salient for students in the field of sports sciences, where job opportunities tend to be more limited and competitive. The financial constraints faced by many students may hinder their participation in career development activities such as training programs, certifications, or internships-all of which are considered important components of proactive career engagement (Schultheiss, 2021). Thus, understanding the economic background and access to resources is key to analyzing the career commitment behaviors of future sports professionals.

Moreover, the perception of job insecurity in times of economic downturn can reshape individuals' long-term motivations and willingness to pursue sustainable career paths. Empirical studies suggest that career dedication is influenced not only by personal interest and ambition but also by contextual variables such as socioeconomic status and perceived market stability (Hoobler et al., 2014; Sora et al., 2013). These findings underscore the importance of examining the link between economic hardship and students' career planning strategies to obtain a more holistic understanding of career development in higher education.

Examining the proactive career commitment levels of students in Faculties of Sport Sciences is critical for understanding how actively individuals take control of their careers and what motivates them. This knowledge can contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of educational programs, personalizing career counseling and guidance services, accurately identifying sectoral needs, and maximizing individuals' professional potential. Such an approach supports both individual career success and societal development in the sports sector. Based on these reasons, this study was conducted to examine the career-related behaviors of students in faculties of sport sciences.

Method

Research Design

In this study, which aimed to investigate the career planning behaviors of sport sciences students, the relational survey model was used. This model aims to determine the presence and degree of relationships between two or more variables through statistical testing and measurement of changes resulting from their comparisons (Karasar, 2011).

Research Group

The population of the research consisted of students from the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Erzurum Technical University. The sample included a total of 174 students, 113 of whom were male and 61 females. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, considering accessibility and voluntary participation.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) active enrollment as an undergraduate student in one of the academic departments within the Faculty of Sports Sciences; (2) voluntary agreement to participate in the study; and (3) provision of complete and valid responses to all items in the measurement instruments. Exclusion criteria included: incomplete or inconsistent responses that rendered the data unusable for analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

To determine the participants' demographic variables, a "Personal Information Form" created by the researcher was used. In addition, the "Career Commitment Scale," a one-dimensional, 9-item, 5-point Likert-type scale developed by Hirschi et. al. (2014) and adapted into Turkish by Korkmaz et al. (2019), was

used to measure students' behaviors related to career planning. In the study, frequency analysis was used to identify the participants' demographic characteristics, and descriptive statistics were used to determine the average scores obtained from the scale. Independent Samples t-Test was conducted to compare students' career commitment levels based on gender and department, while One-Way ANOVA was applied to assess differences based on age and academic year. Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was used to identify specific group differences when overall Anova results were significant.

Findings

In this section, the statistical results regarding participants' demographic characteristics, career commitment levels, and comparisons of career commitment based on gender, department, age, and academic year are presented based on the data obtained in the research.

Table 1. Demographic variables

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	113	64.9%
	Female	61	35.1%
Department	Coaching Education	41	23.6%
	Physical Education and Sport Teaching	133	76.4%
Age	18-19 years	62	35.6%
	20-21 years	57	32.8%
	22-23 years	32	18.4%
	24 years and older	23	13.2%
Academic Year	1st Year	54	31.0%
	2nd Year	35	20.1%
	3rd Year	42	24.1%
	4th Year	43	24.7%
Total		174	100%

Among the 174 participants, 64.9% were male and 35.1% female. In terms of departments, 23.6% were enrolled in Coaching Education, and 76.4% in Physical Education and Sport Teaching. Regarding age, the highest proportion was in the 18-19 age group (35.6%), and the lowest in 24 and above (13.2%). As for academic year, the distribution was relatively even across all four years, with the highest representation in the 1st year (31.0%).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of responses to the career commitment scale

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean (\bar{X})	SD (Ss)
1. I actively work to plan my professional future.	174	1.00	5.00	4.08	0.86
2. I take initiative to achieve my career goals.	174	1.00	5.00	4.01	0.82
3. I am interested in my career development.	174	1.00	5.00	4.02	0.83
4. I develop goals and plans for my future career.	174	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.88
5. I sincerely reflect on my values, interests, skills, and weaknesses.	174	1.00	5.00	4.17	0.75
6. I gather information about employers, opportunities, or the job market.	174	1.00	5.00	3.81	0.89
7. I contact or maintain contact with people who can help me professionally.	174	1.00	5.00	3.92	0.87
8. I voluntarily attend additional training, courses, or events to support my career.	174	1.00	5.00	3.56	0.98
9. I take on responsibilities or tasks that contribute to my professional development.	174	1.00	5.00	3.93	0.92
Overall Career Commitment	174	1.00	5.00	3.95	0.66

The highest mean score was for item 5 ($\bar{X} = 4.17 \pm 0.75$), indicating strong self-reflection among students. The lowest mean was for item 8 ($\bar{X} = 3.56 \pm 0.98$), possibly due to financial constraints. Overall, the general career commitment level was evaluated as "high" ($\bar{X} = 3.95 \pm 0.66$).

Table 3. Independent samples t-test results for career commitment

Variable	Group	N	Mean (\bar{X})	SD	t	p
Gender	Male	113	3.88	0.69	-1.997	.047*
	Female	61	4.08	0.57		
Department	Coaching Education	41	3.97	0.68	0.268	.798
	Physical Education & Sport Teaching	133	3.94	0.65		

*; $p < 0.05$

In the comparison of participants' career commitment levels based on gender, a statistically significant difference was found between groups ($p = .047$, $p < .05$). According to the results, female participants ($\bar{X} = 4.08 \pm 0.57$) demonstrated higher levels of career commitment behavior compared to male participants ($\bar{X} = 3.88 \pm 0.69$). In the comparison of career commitment levels according to department, no statistically significant difference was found between groups ($p = .798$, $p > .05$).

Table 4. One-Way Anova results for participants' overall career commitment scores

Variable	Group	N	Mean (\bar{X})	SD	F	p	Difference
Age	18-19 years	62	4.07	0.57	1.381	.250	-
	20-21 years	57	3.82	0.78			
	22-23 years	32	3.92	0.58			
	24+ years	23	3.98	0.64			
Academic Year	1st Year	54	3.98	0.56	0.488	.691	-
	2nd Year	35	3.87	0.67			
	3rd Year	42	4.02	0.69			
	4th Year	43	3.89	0.73			

*; $p < 0,05$

In the comparison of participants' career commitment levels based on age, no statistically significant difference was found between the groups ($p = .250$, $p > .05$). Similarly, the comparison of career commitment levels based on academic year revealed no significant difference between the groups ($p = .691$, $p > .05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The plans that students in Faculties of Sport Sciences make during their university years regarding their future jobs, professions, and careers-as well as the initiatives they take to improve themselves-are among the key factors that influence their ability to achieve their long-term career goals. It is essential for these students to engage in active self-assessment, to identify and develop their talents and interests, and to address their deficiencies through purposeful effort. Such proactive efforts are expected to enable a smoother and faster transition to predetermined career objectives after graduation. Whether aiming for the private sector or public institutions, today's modern professional landscape expects individuals to be well-developed and competent in their respective fields. In the competitive climate of the contemporary era, self-development is of paramount importance. Based on these premises, this study was conducted to determine the proactive career commitment levels of sport sciences students who are still pursuing their education.

When analyzing responses to the items on the Career Commitment Scale developed for students in sport sciences faculties, the item with the highest average score was: "I sincerely reflect on my personal values, interests, skills, and weaknesses." The high level of agreement with this statement suggests that

students are actively making future-oriented career plans and taking the necessary steps to realize them. In essence, they appear to be conducting a personal SWOT analysis, identifying their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats more effectively in the context of their careers.

On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean score was: “I voluntarily participate in additional training, courses, or other activities to support my career.” This relatively low score may be attributed to the financial burden associated with such activities, which may limit some students' ability to participate. Nevertheless, even this item received a moderately high overall score. When the general career commitment levels were examined, it was determined that students demonstrated “high” levels of career commitment. These findings indicate that the students exhibit a proactive approach toward their careers. According to the results, proactive personality traits have a positive impact on career commitment.

Although this study found that sports sciences students generally demonstrated high levels of career dedication, it is important to consider how economic constraints may indirectly limit their ability to act on their career intentions. For example, the item with the lowest mean score-participation in additional training-may reflect not a lack of motivation but rather a lack of financial means. This aligns with the findings of Rigotti et al. (2020), who emphasized that economic strain during the pandemic significantly reduced students' opportunities for professional growth.

The sustainability of career dedication is closely linked to the presence of financial and institutional support mechanisms. Students from lower-income backgrounds often rely on scholarships, accessible training programs, and structured career services to remain engaged in their career paths. Previous studies have shown that social inequalities and economic disparities can translate into unequal access to leadership roles and professional opportunities later in life, particularly among underrepresented populations (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.org, 2020; Schultheiss, 2021). Hence, institutional strategies to mitigate these effects are critical for fostering long-term engagement.

In conclusion, while students in this study appear to be proactively committed to their careers, this dedication must be viewed through the lens of structural opportunity. Economic hardship may undermine the actualization of even the most motivated individuals' career plans. To ensure equity in career development, universities and policymakers must consider economic vulnerability in the design of support programs. Career guidance should therefore incorporate not only psychological and academic assessments but also socio-economic risk factors that influence students' capacity to act on their career goals.

Our findings support the notion that a proactive personality significantly enhances an individual's career-related commitment, consistent with previous studies conducted by Bateman & Crant (1993), Siebert et al. (1999), Hou et al. (2014), Cai et al. (2015), Li et al. (2015), and Öncel (2014). In light of these findings, we gain a deeper understanding of how proactive personality traits influence an individual's capacity for career adaptability. The processes of self-improvement and personal development serve as a bridge between proactive personality and career adaptability. Studies by Abid et al. (2015) and Jiang (2017) also reinforce our results, highlighting the critical role of personal development in achieving career goals and framing how proactive personality traits contribute to this process.

When comparing the career commitment levels by gender, female students were found to exhibit higher levels of proactive career commitment than male students. This result suggests that female students may place greater emphasis on both their academic success and career planning. The academic literature includes numerous studies on gender differences in career adaptability. For example, research by Coetzee & Harry (2014), O'Connell et al. (2008), and Han & Rojewski (2015) has demonstrated that women may possess higher career adaptability skills than men. Conversely, other studies, such as that by Hou et al. (2014), challenge these findings by suggesting that men may show higher

levels of career adaptability than women. These contrasting results open the door for broader discussion regarding how gender interacts with career adaptability. Cultural, social, and individual factors may all contribute to these variations, emphasizing the need to evaluate such research from a wider perspective.

When comparing participants by academic department, it was found that students from Coaching Education and Physical Education and Sport Teaching demonstrated similar levels of career commitment. This suggests that the department of study does not have a significant influence on career commitment. Similarly, no significant differences were found with regard to age or academic year. The similarity in commitment levels between these two departments may stem from their shared emphasis on sport and physical activity, which can lead to similar career expectations and motivations among students. Additionally, socio-cultural norms and values may also contribute to these similarities. The lack of significant differences in career commitment based on variables such as age and year of study indicates that deeper personal and cultural factors may play a more substantial role.

In conclusion, the proactive career commitment observed among students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences appears to be a result of the faculty's practice-based educational approach, passion-driven learning environment, emphasis on

personal development, and the competitive nature of the field. The faculty's provision of real-world experience through practical training stimulates students' desire for success by leveraging their natural interest in sports and the competitive dynamics of the profession. Additionally, teamwork, communication skills, mentorship, and networking opportunities, which are embedded in the educational process, further support students in taking conscious and proactive steps toward their careers. In summary, the education received at the Faculty of Sport Sciences plays a pivotal role in enabling students to be active, focused, and passionate participants in shaping their professional futures.

In conclusion, the proactive career commitment observed among students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences can be attributed to the faculty's practice-based educational approach, passion-driven learning environment, emphasis on personal development, and the competitive nature of the field. The provision of real-world experience through practical training may stimulate students' motivation for success by activating their natural interest in sports and the profession's competitive dynamics. Furthermore, embedded components such as teamwork, communication skills, mentorship, and networking opportunities may support students in taking deliberate and proactive steps toward their careers.

Universities may consider tailoring career services not only to the academic and psychological needs of students but also to their financial realities by developing inclusive, accessible, and economically sensitive support mechanisms.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research sample consisted of 174 undergraduate students from a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations or other faculties. Second, the use of a convenience sampling method may introduce selection bias and reduce the representativeness of the results. Third, all data were collected through self-report measures, which can be subject to social desirability bias and inaccuracies in self-perception. Lastly, although the study considered economic constraints, it did not include objective measures of participants' socioeconomic status, which could have provided a more nuanced understanding of financial factors affecting career dedication.

Author contributions

The aspects of the study handled by each author are given below: M.M: conception, design, data collection and processing, fundings, materials and process, writing, critical review; Y.E.C.: literature review and materials; M.T.: data collection and writing; B.Ç.S.: data collection, writing and critical review.

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Ethnical statement


This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of University Atatürk (23.11.2023/ No. E-70400699-000-2300375299)

ORCID

¹Muhammet Mavıbaş 

²Yunus Emre Çingöz 

³Murat Turan 

⁴Buğra Çağatay Savaş 

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