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## AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF SPORTS SCIENCE STUDENTS REGARDING THEIR CAREER FUTURES DURING THE PANDEMIC

*Research article*

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# AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF SPORTS SCIENCE STUDENTS REGARDING THEIR CAREER FUTURES DURING THE PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of Sports Science Students regarding their career futures during the pandemic. The data of the study were collected during the full lockdown period, when education was carried out online due to the pandemic process, and it was specifically aimed to reveal the perceptions and views of university students about their career future in this extraordinary period. The sample of the study consisted of 512 students studying at the Faculties of Sport Sciences in Turkey in the 2020-2021 academic year. Personal Information Form and the Career Futures Inventory (CFI) were used as data collection tools. In the analysis of the data, independent samples T-test and ANOVA tests were used. As a result of the analyses, the Career Futures Inventory total score and sub-scale scores of the Faculty of Sport Sciences students did not differ statistically according to the variables of gender, department, and class level. The findings of the study indicated that sports science students were affected by the distance education performed in the pandemic process, and the process had negative effects on their future career expectations. The qualitative findings obtained in the study, on the other hand, included information on the career goals of the Sports Science students, the obstacles they perceive in their career steps, and the things they did regarding their career plans at home in the full lockdown process during the pandemic period. Based on the findings gathered, it is believed that it may be beneficial for sports sciences students to participate in career development courses, seminars, and programs.

*Keywords:* career; covid 19; pandemic; sports sciences; university; student

## 1. Introduction

Covid-19 is the first pandemic caused by corona viruses, which spread rapidly to hundreds of countries in six continents in the world. At the beginning of 2020, the World Health Organization defined Covid-19 disease, which is a new type of corona virus disease, as severe acute respiratory syndrome (World Health Organization, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) office in China was first informed on 31 December 2019 about an unknown disease detected in Wuhan, China. However, this unknown disease, which was not limited to the region where it broke out, continued to spread over time and led WHO to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020. Thousands of people around the world are struggling with this epidemic because of the coronavirus that is experienced in the world, which the World Health Organization also accepts as a pandemic. So, how should it be fed during this period? Many scientists related to coronavirus are working intensively on treatment and healing processes Coronavirus, the immune system is weak and chronic disease people under the influence of more. Because of this epidemic, the importance of strengthening our immune system comes to the fore once again (Gümüşdađ, 2020). As a result of increasingly alarming impacts of Covid-19 on the global



community, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic (epidemic) on March 11, 2020. According to the WHO report, in order to slow or prevent the spread of Covid-19, measures to maintain public health and social preventative precautions must be taken with the participation of all members of society, and the fight with the disease must be at a global level (WHO, 2020).

Epidemics have been a problem for humanity throughout history because they affect not only infected individuals, but the entire society in many ways. As microorganisms, like humans, take advantage of modern transportation facilities, epidemics are much faster and imminent dangers than before. An epidemic is defined as an infectious disease caused by the direct or indirect transmission of a disease-causing infectious agent to a susceptible organism, spreading and causing disease in many living things. The term pandemic (ancient Greek: pan: al + demos: people) is the general name of epidemic diseases that spread and affect a very wide area such as a continent or even the entire world surface. All infectious diseases that spread in the form of epidemics have a typical course (Gümüşdağ et al., 2022). The pandemic, which continued to expand over time, has affected countries highly negatively from many aspects including health, economy, employment and education. Schools at all levels were closed in the countries experiencing the pandemic process. After the first case with the disease was announced on March 11, 2020, in Turkey, face-to-face education was suspended at universities and all schools starting from March 14, 2020. As a consequence of this, the flow of life took on a totally new form, unusual for everyone, and the functioning of the entire sector and system underwent a rapid change. In line with the measures taken, the places where person-to-person contact was possible to occur were closed. In the education sector as well, schools and universities were also closed and involved in this process (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Doghonadze et al., 2020). Education systems took a new form in which teaching and learning activities were performed in an internet-based medium (Eken et al., 2020). It was observed that there were exam measures such as evaluating online applications for special talent exams performed for student admission to Sports Sciences and Sports Schools (İnce et al. 2021). Universities were going on performing distance education at the time of the study. This situation was observed to negatively affect university students, who constitute a significant part of the young population, and especially the students studying at the faculty of sports sciences, who are physically more active, from physical, psychological and sociological aspects. Uncertainty about when the pandemic process would end caused university students to be worried about issues such as education, graduation, and career.

Millions of people from all over the world were confined to their homes, and those who were not able to perform their jobs from home couldn't work and get income. As a result, many people, not only in low-income and middle-income countries but everywhere, began to worry about their jobs (Pakpour and Griffiths, 2020). In this process, the university students who were going on their education and making future career plans, found themselves in the middle of an uncertain process. This study, which was carried out to unearth the plans, views and concerns of university students regarding their careers in this extraordinary period, investigated sports science students' perceptions of career future, career adaptability, career optimism, and perceived knowledge about the job market.

**Perception of Career Future:** It is the expression used for the whole state of being aware of career adaptability, career optimism and career options (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005).

**Career Adaptability:** It is the self-perception of an individual about coping with or benefiting from future changes and the ability to recover himself/herself in the face of unexpected events (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005). Career Adaptability, which is

defined by Savickas (1997) as “the readiness to cope with predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and work conditions” (p. 254), consists of three major components. These are planful attitudes, self and environmental exploration, and informed decision making.

**Career Optimism:** It is the individual's expectation that he/she will always achieve positive results regarding his/her future career development or emphasizing the positive sides of the events and feeling comfortable in the career planning process (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005).

**Perceived Knowledge about the Job Market:** It is the information about how well individuals perceive the job market and the trends regarding employability (Özkan, 2017).

Through this study, it is aimed to reveal the career future perceptions of the Faculty of Sports Sciences students, their ability to cope with future changes as in the pandemic process, to adapt or to benefit from these situations for their career, their levels of optimism about their future career development and their perception of the job market. It was intended to reveal the factors that university students view as obstacles to their careers and the things they did regarding their careers. Starting from the second half of 2021, although the pandemic still continues, the closure was ended and a transition to face-to-face education was initiated. It is believed that this is an up-to-date study that can contribute to the solution of the problems that arose during the distance education period and to career planning of the students by making use of the views and experiences of the sports science students during the full closure period. In this sense, the study will also contribute to the field.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Focus of the Study:

In this study, in order to determine the career future perceptions of the students studying at sports sciences faculties, descriptive research with a one-time measurement was conducted. This study was carried out with the quantitative research method and by using the questionnaire technique.

### 2.2 Data Collection

Personal Information Form and Career Futures Inventory (CFI) were used to collect data. The questionnaire form, which was prepared to carry out the research within the scope of the study, consisted of 2 parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked questions related to demographic characteristics including gender, age, department, class level, whether they previously entered a university and studied in any department, the order of the choice of the current department in the university exam, department satisfaction, the reasons they considered while choosing the department, employment status, the career goals, the obstacles they may encounter in reaching their career goals, what they did during the pandemic process to achieve their goals, and the effect of the pandemic on their career expectations. In the second part, Career Futures Inventory (CFI), which was developed by Rottinghaus, Day and Borgen (2005) and adapted to Turkish and studied for validity and reliability by Kalafat (2012; 2014), was used. The scale, which was developed to evaluate positive career planning attitudes in individuals, consists of 25 items and three sub-scales including career adaptability (CA), career optimism (CO) and perceived knowledge about job

markets (PK). The participants expressed their degree of agreement about the given statements on a five-point Likert-type scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Totally Agree). The items numbered between 1 and 11 measure “career adaptability”. The items numbered 10 and 11 in the scale are reverse coded. High scores obtained after the reversion of the codes indicate a high level of career adaptability. In the scale, the next 11 items numbered between 12 and 22 measure "career optimism". Among these, the items numbered 14, 15, 16, 19 and 20 are reverse-coded. High scores obtained after the reversion of the codes indicate a high level of career optimism. Three items numbered between 23 and 25 measure “Perceived knowledge about the job market”. The item numbered 24 is reverse-coded. The high score obtained after the reversion of the codes indicates the high perception of the job market (Özkan, 2017).

Since the total number of students studying in the Faculties of Sport Sciences, namely the size of the population, could not be known exactly, the sample size was calculated using the sampling calculation method suitable for this situation (Kotrlik et al., 2001). The minimum number for a reasonable sample size was calculated as 384 in order to make statistical estimations with 5% margin of error in the 95% confidence interval (Şimşek & Yarımoğlu, 2019). As a result, the study was conducted with 512 students who met the inclusion criteria in order to increase the possibility that the selected sample represents the population. The research inclusion criteria are as follows: voluntarily accepting to participate in the study, being over the age of 18, and being a student of the Faculty of Sports Sciences.

In this study, in which a web-based questionnaire was applied, the participants were determined by convenience sampling method. The data of the study were collected by reaching students from four different departments at the Faculty of Sports Sciences of 29 universities in Turkey, including 3 private and 26 state universities in the 2020-2021 spring semester through the Google Forms links sent to the students through contact groups. Online surveys or web-based surveys have become common data collection tools during the pandemic and in today's network environment. Web technology provides convenience to researchers in designing and developing surveys and getting users' responses in an easier way (Raju and Harinarayana, 2016). The participants were informed that the forms designed to collect data would only be used for this study, their names and the collected data would be kept confidential, and they would be provided with help for unintelligible parts. After the questionnaire was implemented, it was observed that there were no missing or incorrectly filled forms, and as a result, 512 forms were available to be evaluated.

The data obtained as a result of the study were analysed with the statistical package program. First of all, normality tests were carried out for the tools used, skewness and kurtosis values were checked, descriptive statistics such as percentage and frequency values of demographic variables were calculated, and then analyses related to the perception of career future were started.

Since the skewness and kurtosis coefficients met the necessary conditions for the normal distribution, parametric methods were preferred. In this context, independent samples T-test was used to determine whether the total score and subscale scores of the career future perceptions of the Faculty of Sport Sciences students differ according to the gender variable.

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was used to determine whether the total score and subscale scores of the career future perceptions of the Faculty of Sport Sciences students differ according to the variables of class level and department.

Descriptive statistics were used to reveal data about the Faculty of Sports Sciences students' career goals, career barriers, and what they did for their career goals during the pandemic, and frequency and percentage calculations were performed. According to the effect of the pandemic on the career expectations of the Faculty of Sports Sciences students, the total score and subscale scores of the perceptions of the career future were calculated as frequency and means. Significance was tested at the lowest level of .05, and the findings were presented in tables in accordance with the aims of the study.

### 3. Findings

The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 40, and the average of the ages were 22. The demographic data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Frequency and percentage values regarding the general structure of the group*

Variables		n	%
Gender	Female	249	48.6
	Male	263	51.4
	Total	512	100
Department	Coaching	154	30.1
	Physical Education Teaching	137	26.8
	Recreation	141	27.5
	Sport Management	80	15.6
	Total	512	100.0
Class	1st class	207	40.4
	2nd class	122	23.8
	3rd class	65	12.7
	4th class and above	118	23.0
	Total	512	100.0
Department Satisfaction	Yes	478	93.4
	No	34	6.6
	Total	512	100.0
Reason to study in the relevant department	Love for the job	432	84.4
	Exam score	46	9.0
	Economic return of the profession	15	2.9
	Other	19	3.7
	Total	512	100.0
Working Experience	Part-Time Working	197	38.5
	Full-Time Working	174	34.0
	No working experience	141	27.5
	Total	512	100.0



Table 1 shows the distribution of the students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences, which constitutes the sample group, according to different variables.

Table 2. *T-test results regarding whether the total and sub-scale scores of career future perceptions differ by gender*

	Gender	N	X	S	sd	t	p
Career Adaptability	Female	249	45.24	7.08	510	.197	.844
	Male	263	45.37	7.11			
Career Optimism	Female	249	43.82	7.50	510	1.136	.256
	Male	263	43.04	7.96			
Perceived Knowledge about Job Market	Female	249	9.94	2.51	510	1.696	.091
	Male	263	10.33	2.74			
Career Futures Total Score	Female	249	99.01	14.25	510	.196	.844
	Male	263	98.75	15.54			

\*p<.05

As can be seen in Table 2, considering the career future perceptions of the students studying at the Faculty of Sport Sciences, there is no statistically significant difference in the total score and subscale scores according to gender.

Table 3. *Anova test results regarding whether the total and sub-scale scores of career future perceptions differ by department*

		Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Square	F	p
Career Adaptability	Between Groups	227.742	3	75.914	1.514	.210
	Within Groups	25.468.258	508	50.134		
	Total	25.696.000	511			
Career Optimism	Between Groups	161.077	3	53.692	.896	.443
	Within Groups	30.455.640	508	59.952		
	Total	30.616.717	511			
Perceived Knowledge about Job Market	Between Groups	9.927	3	3.309	.475	.700
	Within Groups	3.542.086	508	6.973		
	Total	3.552.014	511			
Career Futures Total Score	Between Groups	820.953	3	273.651	1.232	.297
	Within Groups	112.829.539	508	222.105		
	Total	113.650.492	511			

p<.05

According to Table 3, no statistically significant difference is observed in the Career Future total scores of the students studying at the Faculty of Sport Sciences and in the sub-scale scores of the scale in terms of department.

Table 4: Anova test results regarding whether the total and sub-scale scores of career future perception differ by class

		Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Square	F	p
Career Adaptability	Between Groups	300.425	3	100.142	2.003	.113
	Within Groups	25.395.575	508	49.991		
	Total	25.696.000	511			
Career Optimism	Between Groups	238.848	3	79.616	1.331	.263
	Within Groups	30.377.869	508	59.799		
	Total	30.616.717	511			
Perceived Knowledge about Job Market	Between Groups	29.738	3	9.913	1.430	.233
	Within Groups	3.522.276	508	6.934		
	Total	3.552.014	511			
Career Futures Total Score	Between Groups	1.197.331	3	399.110	1.803	.146
	Within Groups	112.453.162	508	221.364		
	Total	113.650.492	511			

$p < .05$

According to Table 4, there is no statistically significant difference in the Career Future total scores of the students studying at the Faculty of Sports Sciences and the sub-scale scores in terms of the class level.

Table 5. Frequency and percentage values of the sports science students' views on their careers

Variables	n	%	
Career Goal	Teaching	178	34.8
	Coaching	152	29.7
	Academician	59	11.5
	Sports entrepreneur	26	5.1
	Professional sportsman/athlete	17	3.3
	Sport manager	16	3.1
	Other	51	10.0
	Undecided	13	2.5
	Total	512	100.0
Career Obstacles	Exams (e.g., KPSS)	82	16
	Financial Difficulties	74	14.5
	No obstacle at all	45	8.8
	Limited Appointment	37	7.2
	Favouritism, Inequality of opportunity	33	6.4
	Pandemic	30	5.9
	Family, environment, society	28	5.4
	High level of unemployment but low level of vacancies, limited work areas	26	5.1
	Economic conditions of the country, Circumstances	24	4.7
	Opponents	23	4.5
	Being demotivated, Psychological Problems	19	3.6
	Health Problems-Disability	16	3.1
Incompetency (Lack of professional knowledge, inexperience)	13	2.6	



	Inefficiency of distance education	13	2.5
	Foreign Language Problem	12	2.3
	Other	37	7.4
	Total	512	100
Things done for career goals during the Pandemic process	Nothing at all	107	20,9
	Reading, doing research	105	20,5
	Studying lesson	84	16,4
	Doing sports-Training	47	9,2
	Participating in online seminars and trainings that award certificates	38	7,4
	Preparation for Exams (KPSS, ALES etc.)	35	6,8
	Doing internship, working	26	5,1
	Getting foreign language education	21	4,1
	Personal development	20	3,9
	Watching videos related to the field	10	2
	Giving online education	6	1,2
	Other	13	2,6
	Total	512	100
The effect of the pandemic on career expectations	Negative effect; I have no hope for the future	265	51.8
	No effect; I was already hopeful	154	30.1
	Positive effect; I am hopeful for the future	59	11.5
	No effect; I was hopeless anyway	34	6.6
	Total	512	100.0

Table 5 demonstrates that the career goals of the majority of the students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences, who make up the sample group, are related to teaching and coaching. In addition, factors such as financial difficulties, economic conditions, and exams such as the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS), which provides employment opportunities in public institutions, are viewed as career barriers. It is also seen that the number of students who say that they did not do anything for their career goals during the pandemic, a period spent at home with full closure, is high. Besides, it is revealed that while going on their distant university education, the students tried to gain professional knowledge for their career goal by reading, doing research, participating in online seminars and trainings that award certificates. It can also be said that the students' expectations for their career future are negatively affected by the pandemic process.

Table 6. Total and sub-scale scores of the sports science students' perception of career futures in terms of the effect of the pandemic on career expectation

Variables		N	X
Career Adaptability	Positive effect, I am hopeful for the future	59	47.83
	Negative effect, I have no hope for the future	265	44.14
	No effect, I was already hopeful	154	47.13
	No effect, I was hopeless anyway	34	41.82
	Total	512	45.31
Career Optimism	Positive effect, I am hopeful for the future	59	47.29
	Negative effect, I have no hope for the future	265	41.66
	No effect, I was already hopeful	154	46.20
	No effect, I was hopeless anyway	34	37.85
	Total	512	43.42
Perceived Knowledge	Positive effect, I am hopeful for the future	59	11.29

of Job Market	Negative effect, I have no hope for the future	265	9.71
	No effect, I was already hopeful	154	10.60
	No effect, I was hopeless anyway	34	9.47
	Total	512	10.15
Career Futures Total Score	Positive effect, I am hopeful for the future	59	106.41
	Negative effect, I have no hope for the future	265	95.51
	No effect, I was already hopeful	154	103.94
	No effect, I was hopeless anyway	34	89.15
	Total	512	98.88

According to Table 6, the pandemic has a negative effect on career expectations. It is also seen that the sports science students who do not lose their hopes in terms of career also have high scores in the career future perception, career adaptability, career optimism and perceived knowledge about the job market.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, sports science students' perception of career future as well as their career goals during the full closure period during the pandemic were examined in terms of various variables. Pandemic periods are the times when the majority of individuals in the society can be psychologically affected negatively and experience intense anxiety. It is a process that can also adversely affect career fields in all job markets. Together with the pandemic, it is understood that tertiary level students staying at their homes cannot fully fulfil their physiological, psychological, social and educational needs (Tiryaki et al., 2020). Making use of such findings can help identify possible issues that must be considered in education in case of extraordinary situations such as pandemics that can be faced in the future and solve problems. Besides, specially designed trainings and programs that will help individuals to have preventive behaviours can be prepared.

In this study, the data were collected only on the internet medium due to the pandemic. For this reason, it is one limitation of the study that only the students who can use the internet and study at the Faculty of Sports Sciences filled in the questionnaire.

When the studies conducted during the Covid 19 pandemic process are examined in general, it is seen that there exist studies on teaching and learning processes (Karadağ and Yücel, 2020; Tezer and Cumhuri, 2020; Almanthari et al., 2020), as well as studies on the psychological effects of the Covid 19 process and the physical and cognitive effects of distance education (Yang et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). There are also various studies conducted with the students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences regarding the pandemic period (İnce, 2020; Aktaş, Büyüktaş, Gülle & Yıldız, 2020, Şenel & Karakuş, 2022).

Considering the results obtained from this study, it is seen that career future perception levels of Faculty of Sport Sciences students did not differ according to gender. Career adaptability level of Faculty of Sport Sciences students is equal according to gender. While the level of

career optimism is higher in women, the perceived knowledge level about the job market is higher in men. In a study conducted by Özkan (2017), it is seen that female teacher candidates have higher levels of both career optimism and perceived knowledge about the job market. The finding that the female students' career future perception and career optimism levels are higher in the study can be as a result of a clear reflection of these students' career choice made long ago. The female students might have chosen their field believing that it is the right choice in line with their own interests, abilities and values, and created their expectations accordingly. In the study carried out by Şenel and Karakuş (2017), while sports science students' anxiety levels for finding a job did not show a significant difference according to age and department variables, there was a significant difference according to the gender variable as in this study, and it was determined that women had higher job anxiety than men.

Looking at the findings of the study in terms of department and class level, no difference was found in career future perception total score, career adaptability, career optimism and perceived knowledge level about the job market. In the study conducted by Özkan (2017) with teacher candidates, similar findings were obtained in terms of career future perception.

As a result of the study, the career goals of the majority of the students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences are related to teaching and coaching in the field they are studying. In achieving these goals, they consider exams such as the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS), which provides employment opportunities in public institutions, factors such as limited appointments as a result of these exams, financial problems and the economic conditions of the country as career barriers. In the pandemic, new investments have been suspended, restrictions have been increased and job opportunities have decreased around the world. This has had a negative impact on employment rates. While production and distribution activities still continued in a limited and controlled way in order to avoid economic and social collapse, the increasing trend in unemployment rates also continued. Dönmez Kara and Karaaslan (2022) noted in their study that increasing unemployment increases the anxiety levels of university students, who will join the workforce, in terms of finding a job upon graduation. Şenel and Karakuş (2022), on the other hand, stated that students have less anxiety about finding a job in the online education process compared to face-to-face education and explained the reason behind this situation by stating that they are used to the pandemic process and the system. Looking at the things sports science students did for their career goals during the pandemic, a process spent at home with full closure, it is seen that the number of students who say "I didn't do anything" is at the level of 20%. According to the study carried out by Alnıçık et al. (2021), the pandemic process prevented the acquisition of targeted career-related skills. In this study, on the other hand, it is seen that while students continued their distance university education, they tried to have professional knowledge about their career plans by reading, doing research, participating in online seminars and trainings that award certificates, and watching videos related to the field.

When the findings of the study are examined in terms of the effect of the pandemic on career expectations, it can be said that the career prospects of the Faculty of Sports Sciences students are negatively affected by the pandemic process. Students who stated that the pandemic positively affected their career expectations and were hopeful for the future had higher career future perceptions, career adaptability, career optimism and perceived knowledge about the job market. It can be thought that the strength and patience of individuals who do sports and the way they handle problems will lead them to have ambition and success rather than desperation. It can also be expected that students who get used to overcoming their problems will display a more optimistic approach for possible future

problems. This can lead to optimism and adaptability in their careers. The present study has some limitations, but further studies can be conducted to examine the relationship between university students' career stress and variables such as optimism, future orientation, and career adaptability. Career is the combination of the activities required by all life roles that an individual has at any moment in his life. Since the concept of career includes pre-professional, professional and post-professional duties, longitudinal studies can be conducted to determine the career future perceptions of sports science students while they continue their education face-to-face and after they graduate. In extraordinary situations such as pandemics, psycho-educational programs can be designed to increase the hope and motivation for the career future, and effect of this situation on the perception of the career future can be examined.

Studies can be carried out to increase the perception of career future, career adaptability and career optimism. Seminars on career and professional issues can be given at universities. Conferences can be organized for students and speeches can be made about the job market. Training programs can be planned so that students and employees can better adapt to changing work conditions and develop more realistic expectations.

#### 4.1 Recommendations

Studies can be carried out to increase the perception of career future, career adaptability and career optimism. Seminars on career and professional issues can be given at universities. Conferences can be organized for students and speeches can be made about the job market. Training programs can be planned so that students and employees can better adapt to changing work conditions and develop more realistic expectations.

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