

Investigation of the Reasons Behind Preferring Faculty of Dentistry Atatürk University Among the Enrolled Students

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Atatürk Üniversitesi Diş Hekimliği Fakültesini Kazanan Öğrencilerin Meslek ve Fakülte Tercih Nedenlerinin İncelenmesi

ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the reasons behind choosing Atatürk University Faculty of Dentistry among the enrolled students in the academic terms of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Methods: The study was conducted by survey data collection method. The surveys were applied to a total of 202 students whom are enrolled in the faculty of dentistry for 2019-2020 academic year and a total of 168 students for 2020-2021 academic year. Descriptive, frequency analysis, and cross tables were used in statistical analysis of the data obtained.

Results: As a result of the analysis, it was found that the preference order of Atatürk University Faculty of Dentistry was 8.6 ± 5.5 for the students of the 2019-2020 academic term and 9.7 ± 6.1 for the students of the 2020-2021 academic term.

Conclusion: As a result of the answers to the questionnaire questions, it was found that the students whom are enrolled in our faculty in both terms preferred the dentistry profession and our faculty with prior knowledge, and that the pandemic period did not have a significant effect on their preferences such as profession, city, university.

Keywords: Choice of profession, Covid-19, Dentistry, Education

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmada, Atatürk Üniversitesi Diş Hekimliği Fakültesi'ni 2019-2020 ve 2020-2021 akademik dönemlerinde kazanan öğrencilerin meslek ve fakülte tercih nedenlerinin değerlendirilmesi amaçlandı.

Yöntemler: Çalışma anket ile veri toplama yöntemi ile gerçekleştirildi. Anketler 2019-2020 akademik döneminde diş hekimliği fakültesini kazanan toplam 202 öğrenciye, 2020-2021 akademik döneminde ise toplam 168 öğrenciye uygulandı. Elde edilen verilerin istatistiksel analizinde deskriptif, frekans analizi ve çapraz tablolardan yararlanıldı.

Bulgular: Yapılan analizler sonucunda Atatürk Üniversitesi Diş Hekimliği Fakültesi'nin tercih sıralamasının 2019-2020 akademik dönem öğrencileri için 8.6 ± 5.5 , 2020-2021 akademik dönem öğrencileri için ise 9.7 ± 6.1 olduğu görüldü.

Sonuç: Anket sorularına verilen cevaplar neticesinde her iki dönemde de fakültemizi kazanan öğrencilerin diş hekimliği mesleğini ve fakültemizi önceden bilgi sahibi olarak tercih ettikleri; pandemi döneminin meslek, şehir, üniversite gibi tercihler üzerinde önemli bir etkisinin olmadığı sonucuna varıldı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Covid-19, Diş hekimliği, Meslek seçimi, Öğrenci



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INTRODUCTION

Human life is a complex cycle dominated by many periods and turning points. In these periods, the transition from secondary education to higher education is one of the most crucial steps. As during this period, the individual is involved in a different education phase toward his lifetime profession. One's occupation is very critical for everyone as it is affecting his social life greatly and helping him to gain his identity and prove his existence.¹ Therefore, choosing the right profession is one of the key points of a person's life. Also, it is very important as it helps to a great extent in society survive. That's why; developed countries restructure their education systems to be in line with today's needs, and maximizing the number of qualified people and their efficiency. Their plans are guided by primary school students' interests and abilities.² Insufficient profession knowledge and unmatched abilities may hinder one's to be successful in his future career. Many factors may contribute in career choice including; working conditions, financial rewards, security and status, the nature of the profession, the ability to work with people, the use of personal or manual skills, and the interest in science and research.^{3,4} In addition, our family, friends, role models and our environment, also have an impact. Dentists are playing such an important role in society as professional health workers.⁵ Dental education has a very challenging, complex, stressful, and long-lasting university education process.⁶ Due to the nature of the profession, dental education is considered to be very stressful because of the need for human communication, clinical practice and theoretical knowledge.⁷⁻⁹ In addition, since this education process is a period in which theoretical and practical education continues together for 5 years, so accurate choice for the profession is very critical. It is an undeniable fact that the students who choose their profession will be highly motivated which will affect the education process positively. The aim of this survey study was to comparatively investigate the reasons for choosing the faculty of dentistry among the enrolled students in different academic terms, the factors that were effective in choosing the profession, and the knowledge about the dentistry profession. The hypothesis of the study was that the Covid-19 pandemic would negatively affect the career, city and university preferences of the students who were enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic term.

METHODS

This study was carried out with participation of a total of 370 students who were enrolled in Faculty of Dentistry Atatürk University in the academic terms of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 and started their education life. 202 students from the 2019-2020 academic year (A) and 168 students from the 2020-2021 academic year (B) participated in the study. Repetitive and mid-term students were excluded from this study.

The study was carried out in 2 stages and with data collection method by questionnaire. In the 2019-2020 academic year, the questionnaires were administered by 2 researchers at the same time, dividing the students into 2 groups. The questionnaire consisted of 44 questions in total. The first 5 questions of the questionnaire consisted of questions about demographic information and the order of preference of the faculty of dentistry. The following 37 question section consisted of questions to determine the effective factors in the selection of the dentistry profession, prepared according to the Likert scale, and the last 2 questions were questions containing thoughts about the future. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the surveys were administered to students online through a single platform. In the survey applied in this period, in addition to the survey questions of the previous period, a section of 10 questions for the Covid-19 pandemic was added.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 20 program (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) was used to evaluate the obtained data. Descriptive, frequency analysis, and cross tables were used to evaluate the data.

RESULTS

As a result of the statistical analysis, it was observed that the mean age of the population participating in the study was 19.16 ± 1.59 years, and the distribution by gender was 59.5% female and 40.5% male. It was noticed that the preference order of Atatürk University Faculty of Dentistry was 8.6 ± 5.5 for the group (A) and 9.7 ± 6.1 for the group (B). In group (A) 54% of the student choose medical faculty as the first choice, while 39.6% of the student preferred dentistry faculty. While in group (B), 68.5% chose faculty of medicine and 28.6% chose faculty of dentistry. The second choice for the students if they wouldn't get accepted in the faculty of dentistry for group (A) were as the following; 30.2% pharmacy, 25.2% engineering, 19.8% medicine faculties. While for group (B) were as the following; 31.5% pharmacy, 23.2% medicine and 17.9% engineering. At the end of the questionnaire, there were 2 questions about the future expectations and the most challenging point in this profession. 39.6% from group (A) reported that it was the difficult education process, while 35.1% of group (B) students answered with job opportunities. To the question of what will make you happiest, both group (A) (37.1%) and group (B) (46.4%) students gave the answer to be beneficial to human health. The highest percentage of answers given by group (A) and group (B) students to the questions prepared according to the Likert scale of the questionnaire are shown in Table 1 comparatively, and the answers given to the questions examining the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the preferences of group (B) students are shown in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Within the scope of the study, it was aimed to comparatively investigate the factors affecting the choice of profession and the reasons for choosing the faculty for the students who were enrolled in Faculty of Dentistry Atatürk University in different academic terms. According to the results of the study, it was observed that Covid-19 pandemic did not adversely affect students' career, city and university preference so the suggested hypothesis was initially rejected.

The family factor is one of the most important determinants of students' choice of city, department and university, especially due to their socio-economic status.¹⁰ The socioeconomic and cultural level of the family is considered to be an important factor affecting the choice of the profession. Young family members with high economic and cultural level are supported in line with their abilities and interests, while those in families with unfavorable economic and cultural opportunities are directed to fashionable professions that will bring great profit or reputation in a short time.¹¹ In cases where family pressure is dominant and where the tradition of passing the profession from father to son is maintained, it is seen that there is pressure putted on the young member to continue his father's profession. It has been observed that the young member who has been always directed to a certain profession is going either to his father's profession or is trying to have his ideal profession by opposing his family. In the research, it has been shown that the socioeconomic level of the family and the educational status of the parents are effective in the choice of profession. On the other hand, Filter¹² concluded in his/her study on academically talented students that the family standard is not affecting their faculty choice. In the studies conducted to investigate the effectiveness of family guidance when choosing a profession, Köşker and Kaya¹³ found that 58.4% of them were affected by family guidance; while this rate was 54.3% in

Table 1. Distribution of the highest percentage of responses to survey questions

No	Question	2019-2020 (A) Term		2020-2021 (B) Term	
		Rate (%)	Answer	Rate (%)	Answer
1	My family's guidance affected my choice for dentistry.	33.2	I agree	28.6	I'm undecided
2	The guidance of my close friends affected my choice for dentistry.	37.1	I do not agree	42.9	I strongly disagree
3	My family members influenced my profession choice.	33.7	I strongly disagree	23.2	I'm undecided
4	I think dentistry will meet my future expectations.	37.6	I agree	42.9	I agree
5	When choosing dentistry, I thought about future job opportunities.	42.6	I agree	45.2	Absolutely I agree
6	Financial income influenced my choice for dentistry.	40.1	I agree	32.7	I agree
7	I knew that manual dexterity have an important role in dental education.	55	I strongly disagree	66.1	Absolutely I agree
8	I considered my abilities while choosing dentistry.	29.7	I agree	29.8	Absolutely I agree
9	I think dentistry is a prestigious profession.	50	Absolutely I agree	54.2	Absolutely I agree
10	I think that dentistry is having its deserved value in society.	34.2	I'm undecided	35.1	I'm undecided
11	My score in the university exam affected my choice.	38.1	Absolutely I agree	58.9	Absolutely I agree
12	The university I will enroll in affected my choice.	27.2	I agree	48.2	Absolutely I agree
13	I searched a lot before choosing my future profession.	32.7	I agree	32.7	I'm undecided
14	The city factor played a role in my preference.	28.7	I strongly disagree	23.8	Absolutely I agree
15	My interest in the healthcare sector affected my choices.	37.6	Absolutely I agree	60.7	Absolutely I agree
16	I evaluated the working environment and conditions of the dentist.	48.5	I agree	35.1	I agree
17	I find that dentistry profession is sufficient for my future career goals.	37.6	I agree	33.9	I agree
18	My interest from the past was effective in my choice of dentistry.	22.8	I do not agree	26.8	I'm undecided
19	My past dental treatments affected my choice for dentistry.	43.1	I strongly disagree	58.3	I strongly disagree
20	The fact that the field of work is related to human health itself affected my choice.	29.7	I agree	39.3	Absolutely I agree
21	The moral value of the profession affected my choice.	35.6	I agree	26.8	Absolutely I agree
22	I think that my personality traits are compatible with the requirements of the profession.	35.6	I agree	36.9	I agree
23	I think that dentistry will satisfy me professionally.	39.1	I agree	36.3	I agree
24	The popularity of dentistry affected my choice.	37.6	I agree	39.3	I agree
25	I think that my success in my education life affected my choice.	47.5	I agree	43.5	I agree
26	I think that I am aware of the responsibilities required by dentistry profession.	54.5	I agree	50	I agree
27	I was aware that dental education is more costly than others in terms of finance.	50.5	I strongly disagree	70.8	Absolutely I agree
28	The technological tools used in dentistry had a positive effect on my choice for dentistry.	31.2	I agree	36.9	I'm undecided
29	I think that hours set for theoretical courses are sufficient.	35.6	I agree	35.1	I'm undecided
30	I think that hours set for practical courses hours are sufficient.	40.1	I agree	33.9	I'm undecided
31	I think practical courses in dentistry are beneficial.	42.6	Absolutely I agree	59.5	Absolutely I agree
32	I think dental learning is stressful.	37.1	Absolutely I agree	62.5	Absolutely I agree
33	I think dental education is stressful.	50.1	Absolutely I agree	40.5	Absolutely I agree
34	I think that dentistry education period is sufficient.	41.1	I agree	55.4	Absolutely I agree
35	I would like to have specialization or doctoral education after my undergraduate education.	60.4	Absolutely I agree	61.3	Absolutely I agree
36	I am happy that I chose dentistry.	34.2	Absolutely I agree	41.1	Absolutely I agree
37	If I had the opportunity to choose again, I would choose the faculty of dentistry again.	34.7	Absolutely I agree	41.1	Absolutely I agree

Table 2. Distribution of the answers given by the highest rate of 2020-2021 (B) term students to the questions about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on career choice and university preferences

No	Question	Rate (%)	Answer
1	The pandemic process has been effective in my career choice.	48.8	I strongly disagree
2	My perspective on dentistry has changed during the pandemic process, and this has had an impact on my choices.	57.1	I strongly disagree
3	During the pandemic period, the dedication of health workers and the responsibilities they took were instrumental in my choice of profession.	27.4	I strongly disagree
4	During the pandemic period, seeing how important the health is and the sanctity of helping people has been effective in choosing the health field.	26.2	Absolutely I agree
5	From the assignments given to dentists during the pandemic process (filiation, etc.) I was aware, and this was effective in my choice.	36.3	I strongly disagree
6	I was aware of the precautions dentists took in the working environment during the pandemic process, and this had an impact on my choices.	28	I strongly disagree
7	During the pandemic process, the case rates in the cities were effective in my choices.	66.7	I strongly disagree
8	The pandemic process will negatively affect education life.	72.6	I strongly disagree
9	I think that online education for dentistry will be effective and sufficient for theoretical lessons during the pandemic.	28	I am undecided
10	I think that online education for dentistry will be effective and sufficient for practical lessons during the pandemic.	66.1	I strongly disagree

Aydemir's¹⁴ study. According to the results of the current study, 51% of group (A) and 26.8% in group (B) answered that family guidance was affecting their choice. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the socioeconomic level, educational status and current living conditions of the family is affecting the students in this process. Another factor that might affect the profession choice is the surrounding environment. In the current study, 55.5% of group (A) students and 74% of group (B) students were against the fact that the surrounding environment affected their choice for the faculty of dentistry. In contradiction with Köşker and Kaya,¹³ the results of this study showed that the effect of close/familiar dentists on the profession choice is relatively less. The difference between the results of the 2 studies was related to the difference in the region of residence or the seasonal differences in which the study was conducted.

The fact that there are many job opportunities for professions in the field of health sciences and the value shown by the society to that profession have had a great impact on career choices. According to the studies, it has been shown that guarantying vacancy in these professions affects the students' choice.¹⁵ According to the results of the survey study, the fact that dentistry profession is economically very advantageous, availability of job opportunities, being a future-oriented profession and following the technology were effective in choosing this profession. 68.8% of group (A) students answered that the profession is with good economic return that was in line with the result of the previous study; on the other hand, only 19 % of group (B) reported that. The fact that 46.4% of group (B) students which was the highest rate of answer given to the same question about "benefiting human health" suggests that the devoted work of health workers during the pandemic period was appreciated by the society, and this affect the students' choice toward the health sector. Also, the prestige of dentistry was

questioned and most of the participants (group A: 81.7%, group B: 84.2%) gave a positive answer, this result was in accordance with Z. B Al-Bitar et al.¹⁶ It showed parallelism with his work on Jordan University students.¹⁶ The high rate of positive response reveals the effectiveness of prestige and future career goals in choosing dentistry. Considering all these answers, it was thought that dentistry profession still maintains its popularity in the society and is among the most preferred occupations. It was found that reasons such as the interest in the health sector (group A: 69.3%, group B: 79.7%) and the fact that the field of study was human health (group A: 54%, group B: 60.1%) were among the reasons that affects the students' choice. Also, the fact that the healthcare field was preferred by the students with high scores in the university exams was in parallel with the results that showed that healthcare profession was on the top of their preference lists. But, it was thought that although group (B) students' answers weren't highly positive, the importance of healthcare profession increased highly during the pandemic period and great responsibilities taken by healthcare professionals to set an example for new generations.

Evaluation of the answers given by the participants showed that; I learned about the profession before the choice (group A: 56%, group B: 53.6%), I took my abilities into consideration while choosing (group A: 54%, group B: 56%), I evaluated the working environment and conditions (group A: 70.8%, group B: 68.4%), my past interest was affecting my choice (group A: 35.7%, group B: 32.8%), I am aware of the responsibilities required by the profession (group A: 76.8%, group B: 76.8%), I am aware that dental education is more costly than others (group A: 83.7%, group B: 94.6%). Highly positive answers were given to the questions that was about whether the students have obtained the necessary information about dentistry profession before choosing it and if they made a conscious choice or not. In addition, the fact that group (A) and group (B) answers were very close is supporting the idea.

Although the students responded positively to the question "I would choose the faculty of dentistry if I had the opportunity to choose again," (group A: 54.5%, group B: 70%) it was thought that the difference between them may be due to the differences between face-to-face and long-distance education, especially when considering that the rate of answers to the question that was evaluating the stress of the education term was (group A: 79.3%, group B: 73.2%). In this survey study, when the participants were asked about the necessity of doctoral and post-graduate studies the showed results were; positive for (group A: 77.7%, group B: 84.5%) and strongly agree for (group A: 60.4%, group B: 84.5%), which is similar to the study implemented by Küçükeşmen and Kırzioğlu.¹⁷ So, that was an evidence that the interest in postgraduate education in our country is increasing day by day, and that also showed that the number of qualified personnel will increase.

The opinions of the students about their current educational status were also included in the study. In which the results were found as the following: 78.7% of group (A) and 83.4% of group (B) answered that the current education term was sufficient, 57.9% of group (A) and 56.7% of group (B) responded that the theoretical lessons hours was enough, 63.9% of group (A), and 54.2% of group (B) reported that the practical hours were enough, 75.3% of group (A) and 74.5% of group (B) said that the practical courses were useful and 73.7% of group (A), and 85.1% of group (B) answered that they found that basic medical course should be taken. This showed that the students were satisfied with the current education plan. These results are compatible with a similar study¹⁷ that showed that the education given in both our faculty and other faculties in our country is in accordance with the standards.

The SARS-COV2 epidemic, which started in Wuhan city of Hubei province of the People's Republic of China on December 31, 2019, affected the whole world. The epidemic reaching the level of pandemic

(COVID-19) has greatly affected each country policy in managing the epidemic. Due to the high level of contagiousness, most countries have taken tough decisions to fight the epidemic, and as a result, disruptions have occurred in many sectors such as education, health and industry. Due to the rapid spread of the epidemic and its aggressive nature, it has been decided to continue the current training online making restrictions on all levels of education all over the world. The effectiveness of online distance education in professions where practical education is also intense, such as dentistry, and how successful it is a controversial issue. A survey study was conducted to examine the opinions of students in higher education institutions about online education during the 2020 pandemic process. In this study, the efficiency of practical and theoretical courses with the online education method during the pandemic process was questioned, 12.5 % of the students were productive for practical lessons, 87.5% were inefficient and for theoretical courses, 21.5% answered that it was efficient while 78.5% reported that it was unproductive. After the pandemic phase ended, the students were asked about which education system they would prefer, 90.3% of them wanted face-to-face education and 9.7% preferred to continue online education.¹⁸ Students' anxiety about the quality of education they perceive should be evaluated. The pandemic phase affected the career choice of 31 students (18.4%) and 84 students (50%) preferred the healthcare sector because of recognizing the importance of health and the sanctity of helping people. Another important issue regarding the pandemic is that the pandemic is not affecting every city. Since the attendance periods of the students were also during the epidemic, the students could consider the rate of cases in cities in their city selection. In the survey study, only 10 students (6%) stated that the case rates in cities affected their choices. Since this number was quite low, it was concluded that the pandemic period did not affect the students negatively.

One of the limitations of this study was that the survey was conducted face-to-face for part of the participants and online for the other. This may have been reflected on the results of the survey, as group (B) students filled out this survey while having distance education and could not see the city, university, and faculty-based variables.

CONCLUSION

Students consider many factors when choosing a profession. The widespread use of technology for getting information about any profession allows the students to have preliminary information about the profession and make their right choice. The data obtained in the study revealed that the students who preferred our faculty in 2 different academic education terms chose it voluntarily and knowingly about dentistry profession and about our faculty. This conclusion made us recognize that the students will be more motivated and will have a more successful education life.

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