

An Examination of Career Planning Processes Among Students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences

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Abstract

This study explored the career planning processes of students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences, taking into account variables such as gender, sport type, year of study, department, and income. Employing a quantitative survey design, data were collected through the Career Planning Scale, and the sample was determined using simple random sampling. The study group consisted of 249 students (99 females, 150 males; $M = 19.95$, $SD = 1.41$). Findings indicated no statistically significant differences in the sub-dimensions of career awareness by gender, economic income, or academic department, nor in professional awareness, career belief, correctness of choice, and education proficiency. However, statistically significant differences were observed in career-oriented beliefs by sport type (individual versus team sports), both career-oriented beliefs and perceptions regarding the education proficiency showed statistically significant differences by academic year and department. These results underscore the importance of strengthening career planning and guidance services, particularly for fourth year students. Moreover, expanding internship and practicum opportunities at the departmental level may further reinforce students' confidence in their career trajectories.

Keywords: career beliefs, coach-teacher candidates, physical education, sports management, recreation, university students

Career encompasses the behaviours, evaluations, and planning of individuals regarding their professional lives. It reflects the alignment between the requirements and expectations of the working environment, as shaped by societal norms, and the personal needs and aspirations of the individual (Kurtoglu, 2010). In this sense, career development refers to the process of advancing within professional life, attaining desired positions, and securing employment that enhances both social and professional status (Sabuncuoğlu, 2005). Career planning is a structured process that enables individuals to discover their talents, interests, and professional goals and to take strategic steps to achieve these goals (Çimen et al., 2022; Savickas, 2013). While every stage of education supports the integration of individuals into social life in a changing and developing world, the choices made in this process directly shape future professional life (Fan, 2025). Choosing the right profession is one of the most critical decisions for individuals in terms of both psychological satisfaction and professional productivity. The process of transitioning to a career after leaving school is one of the most important stages in an individual's career journey (Akıncı & Cingöz, 2023). Career development is shaped by the interaction of individual characteristics and contextual factors, making theoretical perspectives essential for understanding students' career planning processes. Within this framework, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), provides a comprehensive lens for examining how self-efficacy beliefs, environmental opportunities, and outcome expectations influence career choices. SCCT highlights that career planning during university education is particularly critical, as it facilitates students' adaptation to professional life and contributes to long-term success (Eroglu & Eroglu, 2020; Lent et al., 1994). While SCCT provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding career planning, the present study does not directly operationalize its core constructs, which include self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests, and contextual supports. Instead, SCCT is used here as a broader framework to situate demographic and contextual findings.

Building on these theoretical foundations, it is particularly important to examine career planning within the field of sports sciences, where students encounter unique sectoral demands and diverse professional pathways. While career planning is a universal process across disciplines, its implications in sports sciences are distinctive, given the sector's interdisciplinary nature and the critical role of graduates in addressing societal needs. Although sports sciences is a multidisciplinary and socially influential field, it has not received sufficient attention in the literature, either from an academic perspective or as an industry. By bringing together existing studies and situating them within a career planning framework, this study contributes to filling this gap and highlights other relevant research areas that could enrich the debate on this subject.

Career Planning from the Sports Sciences Perspective

Career planning in sports sciences is of great importance, as it enables individuals to adapt to the evolving demands of the sectoral needs (Chelladurai, 2014). Once graduated, sport science students contribute not only to their own professional success but also to the improvement of physical and mental health in society through roles such as trainers, coaches, teachers, and sport psychologists (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018; Prior et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Although a career is often associated with success, high status, and promotion in professional life, it also encompasses broader processes of setting goals, positioning oneself within sectoral needs, and achieving long-term development (Harmandal, 2024; Lartey, 2021). Sports sciences students face diverse career pathways, including sports management, physical education teaching, coaching, sports psychology, and recreation (Tannoubi et al., 2022). While this diversity offers opportunities, it can also create uncertainty in clarifying professional preferences and designing a career roadmap. Research indicates that the challenges encountered in career planning stem from factors such as unclear personal goals, intense competition in the sports sector, dynamic labour market conditions, and insufficient guidance (Tutar & Öner, 2023; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022; Wendling & Sagas, 2020). These findings suggest that students require a more strategic perspective on career planning.

Career planning is therefore an essential component in sports sciences, shaped by the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of the sector. The sports industry, once primarily focused on athletic performance, has transformed into a multifaceted domain intersecting with health, media, technology, marketing, and economics (Chelladurai, 2014; Pedersen et al., 2021; Thurik et al., 2024). This transformation requires graduates to develop a wide range of competencies to meet labour market expectations. In particular, soft skills—such as communication, leadership, problem-solving, and digital literacy—are indispensable for success and competitiveness in the industry (Eti, 2022). Evidence shows that the acquisition of these skills significantly enhances students' ability to integrate into the labour market. Despite these developments, sports sciences students in Turkey continue to face structural challenges in their career planning processes. These include difficulties in goal setting, limited sectoral knowledge, and a mismatch between students' competencies and labour market requirements (Aksüt & Duman, 2024; Aslan & Uğraş, 2021; Yüksel & Karafil, 2022). Furthermore, inadequate mentorship and career guidance services exacerbate these challenges, restricting access to professional opportunities and hindering career development (Yeşilyaprak, 2019). Comparable challenges can also be observed in international contexts. McMahon and Watson (2015) highlight the complex interplay of environmental, sectoral, and individual factors that shape career planning processes, and the multidimensional nature of sports sciences exemplifies this complexity. Furthermore, Taylor and Ntoumanis (2007) emphasize the pivotal role of social support—particularly from educators and mentors—in motivating students and guiding their professional choices. Addressing these dynamics requires a holistic approach that integrates external conditions with individual aspirations and competencies, ensuring that career planning strategies remain both context-sensitive and student-centred.

In summary, the evolving landscape of sports sciences necessitates adaptive and comprehensive strategies for effective career planning. Within this context, stakeholders—including universities, faculty members, career counsellors, policymakers, and industry representatives—must prioritize mentorship programs, strengthen career guidance services, bridge gaps in competencies, and cultivate critical soft skills. Such coordinated efforts will ensure that sports sciences students are well-prepared to navigate their professional paths and contribute meaningfully to the sector.

Career Awareness and Effective Planning

Career awareness constitutes a fundamental process through which individuals identify their abilities, limitations, and professional goals, thereby enabling more conscious and strategic career choices (Erdoğan, 2003). In this regard, effective career awareness requires not only the recognition of personal competencies but also the alignment of values and interests with professional environments (Holland, 1997). Furthermore, reflecting on past experiences and integrating them into future aspirations plays a critical role in shaping sustainable career trajectories (Savickas, 2013). For students in sports sciences, career awareness plays a

critical role because it directly influences both their personal career trajectories and the broader development of the sports industry. Students who are able to clearly identify their strengths and professional aspirations are more likely to select appropriate career paths—such as coaching, sports management, or physical education—that not only enhance their individual success but also contribute to the sector's growth and its long-term impact on society (Zhang et al., 2024). In this sense, career awareness functions as a bridge between individual development and sectoral advancement.

Sports sciences students therefore need to shape their careers by considering both internal factors (e.g., motivation, self-confidence, and interests) and sectoral dynamics, which refer to the external conditions and trends shaping the sports industry, such as labour market demands, technological innovations, commercialization, and evolving health and wellness priorities. These dynamics determine the opportunities available to graduates and the competencies required to succeed. The breadth of literature reviewed reflects the multidimensional nature of career planning in sports sciences. To ensure analytical clarity, the discussion is organized into thematic strands—career awareness, contextual challenges, and theoretical perspectives—each highlighting how sports sciences remain under-represented in academic and industry-focused research.

In the career planning process, psychological factors and external conditions are effective in shaping career decisions and outcomes (Martini et al., 2023; Slomski et al., 2024). For example, Kaynak (1996) and Şirin and Aydın (2020) emphasize the importance of balancing intrinsic factors—stemming from the emotional and psychological characteristics of the individual—with extrinsic factors, such as family expectations, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms (Al-Hendawi et al., 2024; Zhou, 2023). Ultimately, career awareness enhances not only individual success but also social contribution. For sports sciences students, gaining this awareness strengthens their ability to meet sectoral needs, increases their employability, and supports the training of qualified professionals who can sustain the economic and social impact of the sports industry (Yurtsızoğlu & Gül, 2023; Gottfredson, 2005).

The Importance of a Career in Sports Sciences

Career planning in the context of sports sciences involves setting goals that align with sectoral needs and developing strategies to achieve them. Professionals such as sports managers, physical education teachers, and coaches play critical roles in the industry by applying their expertise to areas including athlete development, organizational management, and the promotion of health and well-being in society (Chelladurai, 2014; Yurtsızoğlu & Gül, 2023). Students who clarify their professional goals during their education become valuable contributors to both the labour market and the broader social context of sports.

The sports sector itself is inherently multidisciplinary, encompassing not only athletic performance but also domains such as technology, marketing, and health (Chelladurai, 2014). Within this framework, education in sports sciences must be enriched with structured programs and guidance services that equip students with the competencies required to participate effectively in professional life. Strengthening career planning processes is therefore essential, as it enables students to transition smoothly into diverse career pathways and adapt to the dynamic demands of the sector (Eroglu & Eroglu, 2020).

Examining the career planning processes of sports sciences students is particularly important because these processes directly influence both individual success and the preparation of competent professionals who can respond to the evolving needs of the industry. The sector impacts not only physical health but also economic development and the social fabric of communities (Acquah-Sam, 2021). Consequently, training qualified individuals who can meet these multifaceted demands is a central responsibility of sports sciences education. Moreover, factors such as job satisfaction, performance, and career success among professionals in the sports sector directly affect the quality of services delivered (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000; Özman, 2023). Against this backdrop, the present study aims to analyze in detail the individual, environmental, and sectoral factors shaping the career planning processes of sports sciences students. By identifying both opportunities and obstacles, the study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving career planning practices, thereby contributing to the development of a workforce capable of sustaining the growth and impact of the sports industry.

Method

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational survey design to examine the relationships among students' career planning processes and selected demographic and academic variables. Specifically, the analysis focused on gender, sports type (individual versus team sports), year of study, academic department, and economic income as independent variables, and the sub-dimensions of the Career Planning Scale (i.e., career awareness, professional awareness, career belief, correctness of choice, and adequacy of education) as dependent variables. These demographic and contextual variables were selected to provide descriptive and comparative insights into career planning processes. They do not directly operationalize the core constructs of SCCT—self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests, and contextual supports—and therefore the study is positioned as situating findings within a broader theoretical framework rather than empirically testing SCCT.

The correlational survey design was chosen because it allows for the systematic investigation of associations among multiple variables without manipulating the natural conditions of the participants. This design enabled the identification of patterns of co-variation and provided insights into how demographic and academic factors are related to students' career planning outcomes. By employing this approach, data collection and analysis were aligned with the study's objectives, ensuring that the interactions among variables critical to understanding career planning in sports sciences were effectively captured.

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 249 undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences at a public university in Türkiye, including 99 females and 150 males. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling procedure. Specifically, the university's student registry was used to generate a list of eligible students, and random numbers were assigned to ensure that each student had an equal and independent chance of selection (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015). Students were contacted through official university communication channels, including email announcements and in-class invitations coordinated with faculty members. Those who agreed to participate completed the survey voluntarily during scheduled sessions. To collect the data, the Faculty of Sport Sciences was visited, and students were asked to fill out the survey in person. Prior to participation, students were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures involved, and their voluntary consent was obtained.

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the latest version of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association [WMA], 2025). This process ensured both accessibility and ethical compliance in data collection. Other demographic and academic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Instruments

The Career Planning Scale (Eroğlu & Eroğlu, 2020), originally developed and validated in the Turkish context, was employed to assess the career planning processes of sports sciences students. Although this instrument is not yet widely used in international literature, its reliability and construct validity have been demonstrated in prior studies, making it suitable for cross-cultural application. The scale consists of five sub-dimensions: career awareness (nine items), professional awareness (four items), belief in career (four items), correctness of choice (three items), and adequacy of education (three items), yielding a total of 23 items. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Sub-dimension scores were calculated by summing the relevant items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the respective construct. The overall reliability of the instrument in this study was satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).

Socio-Demographic Variables

In this study, several socio-demographic variables were included to better understand the factors influencing students' career planning processes. These variables were gender, sports type (individual versus team sports), year of study, academic department, and family income. Each variable was selected because of its potential relevance to career development in sports sciences. Data on these characteristics were collected through the survey instrument, with participants self-reporting their demographic and academic information. These variables were later used as independent factors in the analysis to examine their associations with the sub-dimensions of the Career Planning Scale.

Statistical Analysis

Before the data collected from the participants were transferred from the Excel file to the SPSS software, incomplete questionnaires were excluded. Normality tests were conducted before the relevant analyses were performed, and since the data did not show normal distribution, Kruskal-Wallis H and Mann-Whitney U tests were applied as nonparametric tests (McKight & Najab, 2010). The Games-Howell test was applied as a second level test to examine the pairwise differences between the groups in detail (Ruxton & Beauchamp, 2008). The results obtained were evaluated at 0.05 significance level ($p < 0.05$).

Results

According to Table 1, the proportion of males ($n = 150$; 60.2%) and females ($n = 99$; 39.8%) among the participants was distributed at a certain level. A greater number of participants were involved in individual sports ($n = 149$; 59.8%). The vast majority of students participating in the study were fourth year students ($n = 112$; 45%). In contrast, the lowest participation was from third-year students ($n = 40$; 16.1%). From Table 1, most participants were enrolled in the Sport Management department ($n = 76$; 30.5%), whereas the fewest were from the Coaching Education department ($n = 50$; 20%). The majority of participants ($n = 113$; 45.4%) reported monthly incomes at or below ₺2,500 (Turkish Lira), whereas a smaller proportion ($n = 29$; 11.6%) reported incomes ranging from ₺5,001 to ₺7,500.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis of Participants' Demographic Information

		<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Female	99	39.8
	Male	150	60.2
Sport Type	Team Sports	100	40.2
	Individual Sports	149	59.8
Year of Study	1 st Year Student	51	20.5
	2 nd Year Student	46	18.5
	3 rd Year Student	40	16.1
	4 th Year Student	112	45.0
Departments	PE**	66	26.5
	Coaching Education	50	20.1
	Recreation Education	57	22.9
	Sport Management	76	30.5

		<i>N</i>	%
Income	2,500 Turkish Liras (₺2,500) and below	113	45.4
	₺2,501–₺5,000	107	43.0
	₺5,001–₺7,500	29	11.6

Note: **Physical Education and Sports Teaching.

Table 2 shows no significant difference in the sub-dimensions of career awareness, professional awareness, belief in career, accuracy of choice, and education proficiency, according to the gender variable ($p > .05$).

Table 2

Analysis of Career Planning by Gender

Sub-dimension	Gender	<i>N</i>	Rank Mean	Rank Sum	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Career Awareness	Female	99	130.61	12930.0	6870.0	.31
	Male	150	121.30	18195.0		
Professional Awareness	Female	99	119.40	11820.5	6870.5	.31
	Male	150	128.70	19304.5		
Career Oriented Belief	Female	99	127.42	12615.0	7185.0	.66
	Male	150	123.40	18510.0		
Accuracy of Choice	Female	99	122.97	12174.0	7224.0	.70
	Male	150	126.34	18951.0		
Education Proficiency	Female	99	127.18	12590.5	7209.5	.69
	Male	150	123.56	18534.5		

When Table 3 is examined, no statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of career awareness, professional awareness, accuracy of choice, and education proficiency, according to the type of sports variable ($p > .05$), while a statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimension of belief in career ($p < .05$). Looking at the rank mean, in the sub-dimension of belief in career, the mean scores of the participants who do team sports are higher than the participants who do individual sports.

Table 3

Analysis of Career Planning by Sport Type

Sub-dimension	Sport Type	<i>N</i>	Rank Mean	Rank Sum	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Career Awareness	Team Sports	100	133.43	13342.5	6607.5	.12
	Individual Sports	149	119.35	17782.5		
Professional Awareness	Team Sports	100	128.98	12898.0	7052.0	.47
	Individual Sports	149	122.33	18227.0		
Career Oriented Belief	Team Sports	100	143.00	14299.5	5650.5	.00*
	Individual Sports	149	112.92	16825.5		

Sub-dimension	Sport Type	N	Rank Mean	Rank Sum	U	p
Accuracy of Choice	Team Sports	100	132.87	13287.0	6663.0	.13
	Individual Sports	149	119.72	17838.0		
Education Proficiency	Team Sports	100	128.32	12831.5	7118.5	.54
	Individual Sports	149	122.78	18293.5		

Note: *p < 0.05

While Table 4 shows no statistically significant difference in the sub-dimensions of career awareness, professional awareness, and accuracy of choice according at the year of study of the participants ($p > .05$), a statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimension of belief in career and education proficiency ($p < .05$). The Mann-Whitney U test revealed a significant difference between participants in their first, second, and third year of study and those in their fourth year of study, with respect to the sub-dimensions of career-oriented beliefs and education proficiency.

Table 4

Analysis of Career Planning by Year of Study

Sub-dimension	Year of Study	N	Rank Mean	χ^2	p	Diff.
Career Awareness	1 st Year Student	51	115.43	1.665	.64	
	2 nd Year Student	46	131.98			
	3 rd Year Student	40	131.24			
	4 th Year Student	112	124.26			
Professional Awareness	1 st Year Student	51	132.38	1.703	.63	
	2 nd Year Student	46	118.74			
	3 rd Year Student	40	132.99			
	4 th Year Student	112	121.36			
Career Oriented Belief	1 st Year Student	51	140.76	11.770	.00*	1 > 4 2 > 4 3 > 4
	2 nd Year Student	46	140.48			
	3 rd Year Student	40	134.98			
	4 th Year Student	112	107.90			
Accuracy of Choice	1 st Year Student	51	135.40	1.909	.59	
	2 nd Year Student	46	126.16			
	3 rd Year Student	40	125.78			
	4 th Year Student	112	119.51			
Education Proficiency	1 st Year Student	51	136.14	9.559	.02*	1 > 4 2 > 4 3 > 4
	2 nd Year Student	46	146.83			
	3 rd Year Student	40	123.14			
	4 th Year Student	112	111.63			

Note: *p < 0.05.

As shown in Table 5, no statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of career awareness, professional awareness, and accuracy of choice according to the department variable ($p > .05$). However, a statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of belief in career and education proficiency ($p < .05$). Similarly, the Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant difference between physical education and sports, teaching, and recreation department students as well as coaching department students in the sub-dimension of belief in careers. There was a significant difference between physical education and sports teaching, coaching, and recreation department students and sports management department students in the sub-dimension, education proficiency.

Table 5

Analysis of Career Planning by Department

Sub-dimension	Departments	N	Rank Mean	χ^2	p	Diff.
Career Awareness	PE**	66	118.79	.774	.85	
	Coaching Education	50	125.23			
	Recreation Education	57	126.50			
	Sport Management	76	129.12			
Professional Awareness	PE**	66	123.23	3.342	.34	
	Coaching Education	50	113.59			
	Recreation Education	57	122.01			
	Sport Management	76	136.29			
Career Oriented Belief	PE** (a)	66	129.26	18.614	.00*	a > b c > b
	Coaching Education (b)	50	89.59			
	Recreation Education (c)	57	148.46			
	Sport Management (d)	76	127.01			
Accuracy of Choice	PE	66	120.19	.612	.89	
	Coaching Education	50	126.18			
	Recreation Education	57	129.74			
	Sport Management	76	124.85			
Education Proficiency	PE** (a)	66	143.25	8.074	.04*	a > d b > d c > d
	Coaching Education (b)	50	126.68			
	Recreation Education (c)	57	123.25			
	Sport Management (d)	76	109.36			

Note: **PE = Physical Education and Sports Teaching. * $p < 0.05$.

As presented in Table 6, no statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of career awareness, professional awareness, belief in career, correctness of choice, and education proficiency according to the economic income ($p > .05$).

Table 6

Analysis of Career Planning by Income

Sub-dimension	Economic Income	N	Rank Mean	χ^2	p
Career Awareness	₺2,500 and below	113	124.31	.025	.98
	₺2,501–₺5,000	107	125.81		
	₺5,001–₺7,500	29	124.72		
Professional Awareness	₺2,500 and below	113	127.65	.585	.74
	₺2,501–₺5,000	107	121.07		
	₺5,001–₺7,500	29	129.19		
Career Oriented Belief	₺2,500 and below	113	125.67	2.338	.31
	₺2,501–₺5,000	107	129.31		
	₺5,001–₺7,500	29	106.47		
Accuracy of Choice	₺2,500 and below	113	120.54	.950	.62
	₺2,501–₺5,000	107	129.54		
	₺5,001–₺7,500	29	125.64		
Education Proficiency	₺2,500 and below	113	124.83	3.308	.19
	₺2,501–₺5,000	107	130.92		
	₺5,001–₺7,500	29	103.83		

Discussion

This study analyzed the career planning processes of students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences, focusing specifically on gender, type of sport, academic year of study, departmental affiliation, and income. No statistically significant differences were found between gender and the components of career awareness, professional awareness, accuracy of choice, or education proficiency. This finding is consistent with previous research reporting that gender does not act as a direct determinant in career planning outcomes (Aksüt & Duman, 2024; Erail, 2024; Yurtsizoglu & Gül, 2023). In interpreting this result, it is important to note that the present study did not examine other potential influences such as personal interests, values, family support, or cultural expectations. Therefore, while gender did not emerge as a significant factor in this sample, further research incorporating these additional variables would be necessary to clarify the broader mechanisms shaping career planning.

The findings here suggest that, at least within the studied population, career planning outcomes may be more closely related to academic and contextual variables—such as sports type, year of study, and departmental affiliation—than to gender differences. However, this interpretation should be considered cautiously, as the data do not directly measure institutional support, individual motivation, or resource accessibility. Future studies could expand on these dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing career planning in sports sciences. Studies conducted in Europe emphasize that career success is directly related to institutional support, individual motivation, and access to resources (Glebova & Zare, 2023). Vidal-Vilaplana et al. (2022) found that internship opportunities and professional networks are the main factors shaping career paths. Similarly, Baruch et al. (2023) highlight the importance of a sustainable career ecosystem at the interface between higher education and industry, emphasizing that effective talent flow and acquisition depend on coordinated structures that support students' transition into professional life. These findings support the importance of adopting more inclusive and holistic approaches rather than demographic

characteristics in career planning. Taken together, these results reinforce the broader pattern that gender exerts limited influence, while contextual and academic conditions emerge as the more decisive elements shaping career planning outcomes.

The type of sport preferred by the participants did not have any significant effect on career awareness, professional awareness, accuracy of choices, or education proficiency, but there was a statistically significant difference in belief in career (Table 3). In their study on dual career competencies of athletes, Sarı and Sağ (2024) reported that the sport type variable had no effect on perceived competence and perceived importance scores. Similarly, Koçak et al. (2024) found no significant difference in the perceptions of dual career competencies of student-athletes engaged in individual and team sports. Baron-Thiene and Alfermann (2015) observed that athletes interested in individual sports had a higher tendency to quit sports, a decision influenced by physical complaints and low motivation to win. Tessitore et al. (2021) emphasized that athlete-friendly schools and supportive programs facilitate dual career processes. These results suggest that different types of sports can shape students' career beliefs, particularly team sports, which may foster self-confidence and strengthen career beliefs. This finding implies that other contextual and educational factors may be more decisive in determining career awareness than sport type alone. Thus, the evidence indicates that sport type is not a sufficient explanatory variable for career planning differences and that broader academic and social environments provide a stronger framework for understanding these outcomes.

When considering university students' year of study, the analysis revealed no significant differences in career awareness, professional awareness, or accuracy of choices. In contrast, notable variations emerged in the dimensions of career belief and perceived education proficiency (Table 4). Similarly, Aybek (2023) and Karadaş et al. (2017) reported that the effect of the year of study on career adaptability and career development was insignificant. The uncertainty of approaching graduation and the perceived deficiencies in education can be considered as possible reasons for the decline in career beliefs and perceptions of the education proficiency. Students in the lower years of study generally had a more optimistic career perspective. Pshembayeva et al. (2022) emphasized that environmental factors such as socioeconomic conditions and career counselling may be decisive in this process. Findings show that career beliefs and educational perceptions are shaped along with cognitive and emotional development, while cumulative educational experiences also play an important role. This finding has implications for the implementation of comprehensive programs that are year-of-study independent and address environmental factors to support career planning. In this respect, the year of study functions less as a determinant in itself and more as a contextual marker, highlighting how academic progression interacts with broader institutional and environmental supports in shaping career beliefs (Moradian et al., 2025).

While no statistically significant differences were observed in the sub-dimensions of career awareness, professional awareness, and accuracy of choice, significant variations emerged in the dimensions of career belief and education proficiency (Table 5). These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting similar outcomes (Ertekin, 2021; Koçer, 2019; Yılmaz & Caz, 2022). Within the Faculty of Sport Sciences, the departments of Physical Education and Sport Teaching, Recreation, Coaching Education, and Sport Management provide distinct career trajectories: teaching positions in schools and educational institutions, leisure and community program management, athlete training and performance development, and administrative or managerial roles in sports organizations and federations, respectively. Despite these differences, departmental affiliation did not produce significant variation in career awareness, planning, adaptability, or optimism, which may be explained by overlapping curriculum structures, shared foundational courses, and common labour market challenges. Nevertheless, departments with clearer career pathways—such as teaching and sports management—may strengthen career beliefs by offering students more tangible professional perspectives. Lent and Brown (2019) underscore that self-efficacy and belief systems are central to career development, and, in this context, educational practices that foster self-efficacy can positively influence the career trajectories of sports sciences students. Furthermore, international comparative studies highlight that developmental career stages shape career awareness, suggesting that this dimension should be systematically integrated into educational programs (Robnik et al., 2022). Consequently, departmental affiliation appears secondary to the shared curricular and institutional structures, underscoring that contextual and programmatic factors carry greater weight in influencing career trajectories.

The economic income level did not create a statistically significant difference in sub-dimensions such as career awareness, professional awareness, belief in career, accuracy of choices, or education proficiency. Yurtsizoğlu and Gül (2023) and Kılıç et al. (2020) similarly reported that the effect of economic income on career awareness and planning was limited. This result suggests that intrinsic motivation—such as personal interest, skills, and passion—may be more determinant in career choices. Lent and Brown (2019), within the framework of SCCT, emphasized that self-efficacy and belief systems are more influential than economic income level. It should be noted that the findings of the present study do not directly extend SCCT, as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and contextual supports and barriers were not assessed. Interpretations grounded in SCCT are therefore tentative, and the results are best understood as descriptive insights into how demographic and contextual variables intersect with career planning processes. In addition, Savickas (2013), through Career Construction Theory, confirmed that individuals shape their careers through personal meaning and identity formation processes, and that the impact of economic factors is limited. Career guidance and mentoring programs can support individuals' career goals, regardless of their economic background. Hughes et al. (2016) and OECD (2024) reported that structured education and guidance interventions improve career outcomes by reducing the impact of socio-economic inequalities. Overall, the limited role of economic income in this study aligns with the central pattern that intrinsic motivation and contextual academic supports, rather than demographic or financial variables, are the primary drivers of career planning processes.

Conclusion

The findings of this study, conducted among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Sports Sciences, reveal that in the current sample, gender and income did not show statistically significant differences in perceptions of career awareness, professional awareness, career-oriented beliefs, choice accuracy, and the education proficiency. In contrast, career-oriented beliefs showed statistically significant differences based on sport type, year of study, and department, while perceptions regarding the education proficiency exhibited statistically significant differences based on year of study and department. For example, participation in team sports may foster stronger career beliefs by enhancing self-confidence and collaborative skills, though this interpretation should be considered cautiously and requires further investigation. Fourth-year students reported lower levels of career belief and perceived education proficiency, which may be related to the uncertainties associated with approaching graduation, the pressures of transitioning into professional life, and a heightened awareness of perceived gaps in their education. These findings imply that universities should strengthen career guidance and mentoring programs particularly for final-year students to mitigate uncertainties and reinforce confidence in their professional preparation.

Based on the results of this study, several context-specific recommendations can be made for sports sciences faculties. Career planning and guidance services could be strengthened by integrating structured workshops and internship opportunities, particularly for students nearing graduation, to reduce uncertainty and better prepare them for professional transitions. Differences observed across departments suggest that career-related support should be tailored to the distinct pathways offered—for instance, physical education and sports teaching, recreation, and sports management provide clearer professional trajectories compared to other areas. Expanding practice-based learning and internship opportunities within these curricula may help reinforce students' confidence in their career choices.

The limited effect of economic income level on career planning outcomes in this study suggests that personal interests, skills, and intrinsic motivation may play a more central role in shaping students' career decisions. Accordingly, career guidance programs should place greater emphasis on helping students identify and build upon their individual strengths and aspirations, rather than focusing solely on external economic factors. While these conclusions are specific to the sample studied, they provide insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by sports sciences students in career planning. Future research across different institutions and larger samples will be necessary to validate these findings and to develop broader recommendations for enhancing career planning processes in sports sciences education. Future research should incorporate measures of SCCT's core constructs—such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and

contextual supports—to fully operationalize the theory in the sports sciences context.

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