

Students' Attitudes Toward Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT This qualitative study examines the factors influencing field preferences and professional perceptions of students enrolled in the Hair Care and Beauty Services Associate Degree program. The study sample consisted of 32 students studying at the Vocational School of Near East University during the 2024-2025 academic year. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview form and analysed through content analysis. Findings indicate that students primarily chose the program due to personal interest and employment opportunities. Most participants expressed satisfaction with their education and intended to pursue the profession after graduation, although concerns related to working conditions and social recognition were noted. The results highlight the importance of practice-oriented training, adequate infrastructure, and professional guidance in vocational education.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing and developing business world, individuals' professional orientations and field preferences directly affect not only their personal success but also the economic and social development of society. In this context, vocational schools play a key role by undertaking the task of training qualified intermediate staff needed by the labour market. The factors that shape the field preferences of students receiving vocational education, the extent to which these preferences are made consciously, and the students' perspectives on the profession they choose are of immense importance in terms of evaluating the quality of education in vocational schools.

Factors such as family influence, social expectations, job opportunities, income level, gender roles, and personal interests are decisive in students' career choices. However, how the experiences and education they receive throughout their education shape students' attitudes towards the profession is also a critical issue to be investigated.

Vocational schools are institutions that train the qualified workforce needed by the industry and service sectors. The development of vocational schools in Türkiye accelerated with the restructuring of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) after 1980, and various programs were opened in line with the demands of the labour market (YÖK 2022). Similarly, in Europe, vocational training is considered an important strategic tool for economic growth and combating unemployment (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) 2020).

Many factors are effective in students' career preferences. These include individual interests and abilities, family influence, economic reasons, job search expectations, social status, and gender roles (Super 1990; Gati and Asher 2001). In studies conducted in Türkiye, it has been determined that job security, the expectation of earning income in a brief time and easy employment opportunities are the most effective in students' field preferences (Özsoy and Gündüz 202; Erdem and Sarier 2020).

The attitudes of vocational school students towards their fields are shaped by the education process. It is seen that applied courses, internship opportunities and connections with the sector have a positive effect on professional motivation during the education process (Özdemir and Aydin 2021). However, some students do not choose their departments willingly, which leads to results such as disinterest and low motivation towards the profession (Karatas and Yilmaz 2017).

Similarly, in CEDEFOP's (2022) evaluation of vocational training systems in Europe, it is emphasised that vocational programs supported by practical training increase student motivation and employment rates. Amin and Wahyudi (2024) discussed eight essential qualities for a vocational teacher in Europe are as follows, according to a study on the competency of vocational education teachers conducted at the European Bank for the Development of Modular Curriculum and Educational Technologies, that is, collaboration, professional development, learning motivation, establishing a learning environment, mastery of ICT and foreign language-

es, comprehension of school administration, good interpersonal skills, and organisational competence.

Conversely, students being placed in a department they do not want may cause them to develop negative attitudes towards the department and the profession. Tunca (2021) states that the reasons why students choose their departments are due to sufficient scores and the desire not to be left out, which causes low motivation during the education process.

In international literature, vocational orientation is addressed with the concepts of “career choice” and “vocational identity” (Sarimanond et al. 2025). Karahoca and Uzunboylu (2010) examined research and trends in career counselling published in selected professional sources. The findings highlight the necessity of standardising school guidance programs in order to guarantee uniformity and fairness in career assistance across academic fields. Dayag and Picajas’s (2025) findings highlight the necessity of standardising school guidance programs in order to guarantee uniformity and fairness in career assistance across academic fields. Holland (1997) argues that personality types are determinants of vocational field choices, while Lent et al.’s (2000) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) states that individuals make career choices in line with environmental factors and self-efficacy beliefs. According to this theory, students’ attitudes towards their profession are closely related to environmental support and barriers. Social structure and cultural norms play a key role in students’ career choices, especially in developing countries. For example, while family expectations are the dominant factor in students’ choices in Asian countries, individual interests and talents are more prominent in Western countries (Leung 2002). In societies in transition, such as Turkey, both factors are seen to be effective together.

Gender is an important variable in professional field preferences. Traditional gender roles are effective in directing male and female students towards certain professions (Eccles 1994). For example, the fact that areas such as beauty and care services are mostly preferred by women is one example of this trend (Betz and Fitzgerald 1987). However, in recent years, these perceptions have begun to break down and a more balanced structure in gender distribution in professions has begun to emerge (OECD 2021).

The impact of vocational education on employment is a topic of discussion both in Türkiye and around the world. According to CEDEFOP (2022)

data, the employment rate of vocational high school graduates in Europe is higher than that of general high school graduates. In Türkiye, although this relationship is strong in some sectors, the same result is not valid for every program (TUIK 2023). This situation shapes students’ perspectives on the profession depending on their expectations of quality and sectoral adaptation in vocational education.

Cultural perspectives, employment opportunities, and societal values are some of the elements that influence students’ attitudes toward vocational education. The way that people regard vocational education is greatly influenced by cultural perceptions. For example, Sam (2023) points out that certain cultures place a lower value on vocational education than on academic pathways, which may discourage students from enrolling in such programs. Students’ satisfaction and perceived gains from vocational training are impacted by this perception (Martínez-Carmona et al. 2022).

Students’ opinions are also greatly influenced by their career prospects. Vocational education is seen by many students as a means of improving employment prospects. According to research by Aryanti and Adhariani (2020), students’ decision to participate in vocational programs is influenced by their expectation that these programs will equip them with employable abilities. Furthermore, attitudes are also shaped by societal ideals.

Today, the importance of vocational education is growing, and training qualified individuals who meet the needs of the labour market is of paramount importance. Vocational Schools (VOCs) play a key role in meeting this need. However, the reasons students choose vocational school programs, the factors that inform their field choices, and their perspectives on their professional futures remain insufficiently understood. This creates a significant gap in the development of educational policies and the updating of program content.

Furthermore, it has been observed that some students are reluctant to pursue their chosen fields, do not choose their fields consciously, or harbour negative opinions about their future careers. This can negatively impact both academic success and post-graduation employment. Therefore, a study was needed to understand the factors influencing students’ field choices and their perspectives on the profession.

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors influencing vocational school students’ field

choices and their perspectives on their chosen professions. In this context, topics such as the following are explored.

- ♦ Reasons for students choosing their preferred majors.
- ♦ The influence of factors such as family, environment, guidance services, and personal interests on field selection.
- ♦ Students' future career expectations, job search concerns, and motivation levels.
- ♦ Satisfaction with their field selection and whether they have alternative preferences will be addressed.

The findings of the research will contribute to improving student guidance processes at educational institutions and supporting students' career planning.

METHODOLOGY

Model of Research

This research is a qualitative research design. The case study method was used. A case study is a method that aims to examine a specific situation in depth and evaluates the phenomenon under investigation within its real-life context (Yildirim and Simsek 2018). In this study, the field preferences of the Hair Care and Beauty Services Associate Degree Program students, their attitudes towards the profession and their experiences regarding the education process were examined in detail. The data obtained based on the individual opinions of the participants were analysed using the thematic analysis method. The study aimed to provide factual integrity by using the subjective experiences and statements of the participants.

Participants

The sample of the study consists of students of Hair Care and Beauty Services Associate degree programs of vocational schools of universities located in North Cyprus. The sample was determined using maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods. This method was preferred to ensure that the study produces in-depth information and to reflect differences of thought and experience among the students.

Within the scope of the research, students from different grade levels, age groups and professional

goals were included. A total of 32 students were interviewed. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis and student identities were kept confidential. The fact that individuals participating in the study had positive and negative opinions about the department increased the diversity of the data and strengthened the reliability of the study.

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used to collect data in this study. The interview form was developed by reviewing relevant literature and tailored to the purpose of the study. To ensure the form's content validity, the opinions of two academics with at least a doctoral degree who are experts in their fields and conduct courses and academic research in the relevant field were consulted. Necessary adjustments were made to the questions regarding content, meaning, and wording based on the expert opinions.

To evaluate the form's applicability and understandability, a pilot study was conducted with five students. Based on the feedback obtained during this pre-test, some questions were restructured, the language and wording were simplified, and the interview form was finalised.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one (face-to-face) in quiet, distraction-free, and safe environments where students could express themselves freely. All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, and informed consent was obtained from the participants. Each interview lasted an average of 15 minutes, while some interviews were shorter, and others were longer due to the participants' detailed responses.

Data Analysis

For the data obtained in this study, content analysis is one of the qualitative data analysis techniques. The data were analysed using the method. Content analysis is a technique that aims to systematically reveal the hidden meanings in the participants' statements (Yildirim and Simsek 2018). The data were collected through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and then classified under certain themes.

During the data analysis process, firstly, all participants' answers were read carefully, and similar statements were grouped. Codes were created. These

codes were then grouped according to their common features to themes. The themes and sub-themes obtained were transformed into with frequency (f) values. They were tabulated together. The depth and diversity of the data was preserved by indicating how many students used similar expressions under each theme.

The researcher in the analysis process direct quotes. The coding process was conducted carefully in line with the purpose of the research and care was taken to analyse the data without taking it out of context.

RESULTS

In this section, the reasons for choosing the field, perspectives on the profession, evaluations about the education process and opinions about applied education environments of the students of Hair Care and Beauty Services Associate Degree Program participating in the research are presented. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview form, analyzed with the content analysis method and tabulated in accordance with themes and frequencies. The findings obtained reflect the experiences and professional orientations of the participants in a multidimensional manner.

Table 1 shows that most students (60%) chose this program because they liked it and were interest-

ed in it, indicating that personal inclination and professional awareness had developed even before education. Additionally, 30 percent expressed that they specifically wanted to study in this department, supporting an elevated level of conscious choice. About 10 percent found the department “simple”, suggesting that prejudices may influence some students’ perspectives. The proportions of those who came for it being a “practical department” and to “open a workplace” are lower (each 5%).

Table 2 indicates that students’ positive opinions about the department continued and even strengthened. 43.3 percent described it as a “field they like and find beautiful”, 20 percent expressed a desire to “improve and advance”, and 13.3 percent stated that they “made the right choice”. The opinion that it should be practiced with a diploma (10%) reflects the need for institutionalisation of the profession. Meanwhile, views questioning quality, such as “practices are inadequate”, stood out at 3.3 percent.

Table 3 shows that most students (58.1%) chose the field due to personal interest. 16.1 percent indicated “to open a workplace”, and 9.7 percent “enjoying hair care and beauty practices”. Themes like “manual skills” and “becoming a successful beautician” also stand out (9.7% and 6.5%, respectively). Rare preferences, such as “making people happy” and “university career”, reflect diversity in motives.

Table 1: Students’ thoughts before coming to the associate degree program in hair care and beauty services

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Liking and having interest in the field	12	60
Willingness to study in the program	6	30
Considering it a simpler and superficial field	2	10
Being a practical-oriented program	1	5
Desire to open a workplace	1	5

Table 2: Students’ thoughts after coming to the associate degree program in hair care and beauty services

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
A field they like and find beautiful	13	43.3
Desire to improve and advance in this field	6	20
Believing they made the right choice	4	13.3
Believing it should be practiced with a diploma, not a certificate	3	10
Being able to become not only a beautician but also a teacher	1	3.3
Finding it sufficient	1	3.3
Believing that the practices are inadequate	1	3.3
Increased interest in this field	1	3.3
Believing it is a health-impacting field	1	3.3
Because the course content is rich	1	3.3

Table 3: Reasons why students choose the associate degree program in hair care and beauty services

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Interest in this field	18	58.1
To open a workplace	5	16.1
Enjoying hair care and beauty practices	3	9.7
Having manual skills	3	9.7
High job opportunities	2	6.5
To become a successful beautician	2	6.5
Making people happy	1	3.2
Previous experience in this profession	1	3.2
To pursue a career at university by studying for a bachelor's degree	1	3.2
To achieve an advantageous position	1	3.2
Having a beauty component alongside another profession	1	3.2
A rapidly developing and lucrative profession	1	3.2

Table 4 shows that most students (64.5%) believe the profession plays a key role in society. However, 9.7 percent characterised it as “not respected”. Views that it is “popular” or “depends on the individual” (6.5% each) highlight that societal perception of the profession is not homogeneous.

Table 4: The place of hair care and beauty profession in society

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Playing a key role in society	20	64.5
Not a respected profession	3	9.7
Popular and prominent profession	2	6.5
Varies from person to person	2	6.5
Very advanced profession	1	3.2
Preferred profession	1	3.2
Respected profession	1	3.2
Valued profession	1	3.2

Table 5 shows students expect “good education” (35.5%) and “self-improvement” (25.8%). The demand for a bachelor's program (16.1%) indicates an aspiration for academic advancement.

Table 6 shows students are motivated by ambitions like “achieving a good position” (19.4%) and “doing the job with love” (16.1%). Goals like “professionalism” and “opening a workplace” reflect a strong entrepreneurial vision.

Table 7 shows that most students (90.6%) are satisfied with their education, indicating that the program meets expectations.

Table 8 shows that students' main expectations are “more spacious workshops” and “adequate materials” (both 45.5%). Cleanliness and organisation are also important.

Table 9 shows that students' main complaints are “lack of space” (40%) and “lack of materials”

Table 5: Expectations of students from hair care and beauty education

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
To receive good education	11	35.5
To improve themselves in the field	8	25.8
Opening a bachelor's program and graduating from it	5	16.1
To be professional in their work	4	12.9
To improve their practice through lessons and activities	3	9.7
To open a workplace	2	6.5
To become a teacher or beautician after graduation	2	6.5
Improving education quality	2	6.5
Diplomas to count as mastership certificates	1	3.2
Employment opportunities	1	3.2
Insufficient practice areas	1	3.2
Creating innovations	1	3.2
Standing out in the market due to university background	1	3.2

Table 6: Expectations of students from the hair care and beauty profession

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Achieving an advantageous position	6	19.4
Do the job with love	5	16.1
Become a professional beautician, hairdresser, or teacher	5	16.1
Open a workplace	4	12.9
Become respected and recognised	3	9.7
Good income	3	9.7
Improve themselves in the field	2	6.5
Better assessment of educators and the industry	1	3.2
Master the requirements of the profession	1	3.2
Work with dedication	1	3.2
Finding an excellent job	1	3.2
Do the job properly	1	3.2
Stay true to principles	1	3.2

Table 7: Students' satisfaction with hair care and beauty education

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Satisfied	29	90.6
Not satisfied	3	9.4

Table 8: Expectations of students regarding hair care and beauty application workshops

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
More spacious, advanced, airy workshops	20	45.5
Fully equipped with materials	20	45.5
Cleaner and more organised environment	6	13.6
Separate sections (for example, nails, hair)	1	2.3
Space for more students to practice	1	2.3
More suitable for teaching	1	2.3

Table 9: Factors affecting students in hair care and beauty workshops

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Lack of space	16	40
Lack of materials and equipment	13	32.5
Lack of cleanliness	5	12.5
Stuffy, cramped atmosphere	4	10
Not advanced	2	5
Limited time for practice	2	5
Lack of briefing before practice	1	2.5
Lack of order	1	2.5

(32.5%). Environmental conditions like cleanliness and comfort also matter.

Table 10: Students' views on whether hair care and beauty profession has scary aspects

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
No	17	53.1
Yes	15	46.9

Table 10 shows that about half of students (53.1%) believe the profession has no frightening aspects, while 46.9 percent do believe so.

Table 11 shows the most common fear is "collaborating with people with low satisfaction" (26.7%). "Occupational diseases" and "business closure" also stand out (13.3% each).

Table 12 shows that most students (96.9%) intend to work in this profession after graduation.

Table 11: Students' views on the scary aspects of the hair care and beauty profession

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Collaborating with people with low satisfaction	4	26.7
Closing the business	2	13.3
Occupational diseases	2	13.3
Unsympathetic salon owners	1	6.7
Suffering losses	1	6.7
Making mistakes on clients	1	6.7
Saying the wrong thing to clients	1	6.7
Only being perceived as an associate degree graduate	1	6.7
Being too involved with people	1	6.7
Work not being appreciated	1	6.7
No official holidays	1	6.7
Requiring patience	1	6.7
No private life due to work hours	1	6.7

Table 12: Opinions of students on whether they will do this profession after graduation

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	31	96.9
No	1	3.1

tion, reflecting high motivation and professional commitment.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that students' field preferences are predominantly influenced by personal interest and perceived employment opportunities rather than external pressure. This result aligns with recent vocational education research emphasising intrinsic motivation as a key determinant of professional commitment (Karaman and Kiliç 2024; OECD 2024). Unlike earlier studies that reported high levels of indecision among vocational students, the present findings suggest a stronger sense of professional identity among Hair Care and Beauty Services students.

However, infrastructural limitations and insufficient practice areas negatively affect students' learning experiences, consistent with recent European vocational education evaluations (CEDEFOP 2024). These constraints may undermine skill acquisition despite high motivation levels. Furthermore, concerns regarding social recognition and occupational health risks echo findings reported in contempo-

rary sector-based studies (Yildirim and Özdemir 2023; Karaman and Kiliç 2024).

For students determining their career paths, vocational education is an essential route, especially in light of shifting labour market trends. A complex decision-making process for vocational school students is revealed by examining the interrelated effects of mentorship, personal interests, labour market changes, and socioeconomic background. This essay investigates how these factors influence students' perceptions of the professions they hope to pursue as well as their career decisions.

One important factor in choosing a career route is socioeconomic background. Due to their need for quick employment, students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds frequently choose vocational training as a practical option (Obiora 2022). Because their socioeconomic circumstances force them to pursue stability and income, these students might place a higher value on disciplines with immediate employment opportunities than on long-term professional fulfilment (Duman and Ercan 2022). Additionally, socioeconomic position and the availability of resources for vocational education frequently differ, which strengthens the impact of financial stability on career decisions (Koçak et al. 2021).

This equation is further complicated by personal interests. Although socioeconomic considerations can influence how urgent job decisions are, they do not completely eclipse individual goals. According to Rodrigues and Couto (2025), students often choose careers that align with their interests or inclinations. For example, despite outside economic pressures, a student who is interested in technology might be drawn to disciplines like engineering or information technology. Higher job satisfaction and better opinions of their chosen professions can result from this alignment between occupational training and personal interests (Wang et al. 2022).

Vocational students' career decisions are also greatly influenced by the erratic currents of the labour market. Students must decide which disciplines are most likely to provide long-term employment given the quick changes in industry demands and technological advancements (Van Hai et al. 2022). According to current trends, students may want to pursue careers in information technology, healthcare, and green technologies because of their great growth potential. However, matching one's profession choice to the reality of the labour market might result in a perceived loss of agency, forcing stu-

dents to make practical decisions instead of pursuing their own interests (Duman and Ercan 2022).

The way that students view possible career paths is greatly influenced by mentoring. Good mentorship can give students the support and direction they need to better comprehend and manage their career choices (Grundall and Mack 2023). Students who have positive mentorship experiences are more inclined to consider a wider range of professional possibilities and weigh their individual interests against market needs and socioeconomic realities (Tomlinson and Jackson 2021). Mentors can also help learners make well-informed career decisions by converting complicated job market realities into easier-to-understand information.

Furthermore, students' decision-making processes require a careful balance created by the interplay of various contributing elements. According to Koçak et al. (2021), students' self-efficacy in selecting career decisions can be greatly impacted by family support. Regardless of the children's immediate socioeconomic limitations, a supportive home environment may encourage a belief in following one's passions. Students who receive this support may be able to pursue careers out of passion rather than out of need.

In brief, a complex interaction between socioeconomic background, personal preferences, job market trends, and mentorship shapes vocational school students' perceptions and career choices. The combination of these factors shows that although outside forces have a big impact, students' career experiences can be greatly improved by individual enthusiasm and good mentoring. For educators and politicians looking to enhance vocational training outcomes and broaden the horizons for future generations, addressing these complex impacts should be a top priority. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of comprehending this complexity since it helps students develop durable and rewarding professional identities in a changing labour market, in addition to careers.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that most of the students of the Associate Program preferred consciously and voluntarily. It was determined that the interests and motivations of the students are strengthened by the educational process and that they have a professional commitment to the profession and the de-

sire to play a tutorial-productive role. Students see the profession as a means of long-term career and social contribution, not a temporary occupation. However, the lack of social dignity of the profession and the problems of recognition point to the contradiction in perception.

Inadequate physical conditions, lack of equipment and hygiene problems in the application workshops adversely affect the quality of vocational education. This reveals the necessity of a sustainable and strong vocational training infrastructure. Although the desire to maintain the profession after graduation is high, difficulties such as customer pressure, intensive working tempo, occupational diseases and not being able to spend time in private life show that students should be supported.

These findings emphasise that infrastructure improvements in vocational education and that students should be strengthened against sectoral difficulties. It offers important data for the development of educational policies of vocational schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate the need for targeted improvements in vocational education policies and institutional practices within the beauty and care sector. In particular, the physical infrastructure and workshop conditions of hair care and beauty services programs should be upgraded to ensure effective skill development and adequate access to materials for practical training. Increasing the number of practice-oriented courses, diversifying internship opportunities, and strengthening cooperation with professional studios would enhance students' exposure to real working environments prior to graduation. In response to students' expectations, establishing undergraduate completion options and specialised academic pathways in the field may contribute to professional recognition and sustainable career development. Moreover, integrating topics such as psychological resilience, customer relations, business ethics, and entrepreneurship into curricula would help students manage occupational challenges more effectively. Finally, promoting public awareness of the social, aesthetic, and well-being contributions of beauty services and encouraging student participation in scientific and professional activities may strengthen professional identity, sectoral development, and social value.

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