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## The Role of Sports Participation in the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Career Awareness: A Research Study on University Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to reveal the relationship between emotional intelligence levels and career awareness levels of university students and to examine the role of sports participation in this relationship. Quantitative research method was used in the study. The research data were collected through demographic data form, Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form and Career Awareness Scale. The population of the study consisted of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University students, and the sample consisted of 391 students selected from the population by simple random method. The data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0, JASP and JAMOVI statistical package programs. Descriptive statistics, Two-Factor Analysis of Variance and Simple Linear Regression Analysis were used in the research analysis. According to the analysis results, positive significant relationships were found between emotional intelligence and career awareness, and emotional intelligence accounted for 31% of the variance in career awareness scores. It was determined that students with high emotional intelligence levels had significantly higher career awareness levels than other students. Additionally, it has been determined that participation in sports has a positive and significant effect on career awareness. Although emotional intelligence and sports participation are separately significant predictors of career awareness, the interaction effect between emotional intelligence and sports participation was not found to be statistically significant. This indicates that the combined influence of these two variables does not contribute additional explanatory power in predicting career awareness beyond their separate effects.

**Keywords:** Career Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, Higher Education, Sport Participation, University Students.



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## INTRODUCTION

It is known that the experiences and interests of individuals during their high school and university years have a great influence on shaping their careers (Kleinberg, 1976). The university years are the stage of career exploration, and individuals evaluate their career options during this period (Martens & Felissa, 1998). It can be said that taking the right steps at this stage is the key to having a good working life in the future (Watson & Stead, 1997). It may be difficult for undergraduate students to decide which career path is the right one. It is thought that having career awareness has an effect on students' ability to achieve this. Students with a high career awareness will make more accurate career choices and manage their careers more effectively.

In order to have high career awareness, it is first necessary to understand what the concept of awareness means. Awareness is the state when people have consciousness of existence and the necessary knowledge about situations (Meager et al., 2002). Career awareness can be evaluated as being aware of the factors that contribute to people's success in their targeted profession and better managing their careers in line with their intelligence and abilities (Wiroterat, 2013). Based on this evaluation, it can be said that being aware of their intelligence and abilities plays a key role in shaping the career awareness levels of individuals. At this point, it is thought that the concept of emotional intelligence is effective. Because emotional intelligence improves thinking by combining intelligence and emotions (Mayer et al., 2008). Emotional intelligence includes skills such as recognising and controlling emotions, empathy, and effective communication (Çakır & Özdilek, 2023). In other words, emotional intelligence enables individuals to be aware of their emotions (Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999).

Educational institutions are expected to play an active role in developing students' emotional intelligence and awareness (Çevik & Çevik, 2023). There are many potential personal, social, and societal benefits of focusing on emotional intelligence that can be shaped in higher education (Cohen, 1999; Goleman, 1995; Topping, Holmes & Bremmer, 2000). In terms of personal benefits, it has been reported that having high emotional intelligence at the undergraduate level has benefits such as making wise career choices and increasing the likelihood of success in a career (Gelso & Fretz, 2001; Vandervoort, 2006).

Considering the studies investigating the interaction between career and emotional intelligence, it can be said that the studies investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and career development, career adaptability, and career choice are intensive (Aksaraylı & Ozgen, 2008; Di Fabio et al., 2012; Jiang, 2014; Tanrıverdi et al., 2019). Based on these studies, it can be mentioned that there is a lack of studies in the literature that reveal the relationship between students' emotional intelligence levels and career awareness levels and investigate the role of sports participation in this relationship. Therefore, it can be said that this research is an original study that will contribute to the literature.

In light of all these thoughts, this study was aimed at revealing the relationship between emotional intelligence levels and career awareness levels of university students and examining the role of sports participation in this relationship.

### Conceptual Framework

It is thought that the basic perspective of the concept of career awareness is formed by the concepts of 'paying attention' and 'readiness' of social cognitive career theory. Social cognitive career theory reveals that people should have self-competence and that the adequacy of their cognitive levels is important (Sunay & Yaşar, 2019).

When we look at the concept of emotional intelligence, there are three main models: the trait model, the mixed model, and the ability model. According to the trait model, emotional

intelligence is a personality trait that plays an important role in the formation and development of personality and can be measured by self-perceptions (Petrides et al., 2007). The trait model of emotional intelligence includes some characteristics such as 'self-control' and 'awareness' (Petrides, 2010).

From this point of view, it was concluded that the social cognitive theory, which is the theory that forms the basis of career awareness (considering its emphasis on the concept of self-efficacy), may be related to the trait model of emotional intelligence. Therefore, in this study, which examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness, the trait model of emotional intelligence was used.

In line with all these theoretical and factual studies, it can be said that the career awareness and emotional intelligence of undergraduate university students should be addressed together in order for them to manage their careers effectively. Moreover, the idea that students' having high emotional intelligence may play a role in having high career awareness is one of the ideas that form the basis of this research. In order to investigate the effect of students' emotional intelligence levels on their career awareness levels, the following question will be tested:

**Q1:** Does the level of emotional intelligence have an effect on the level of career awareness in university students?

Some studies suggest that sport participation positively affects emotional intelligence (Laborde et al., 2018; Magrum et al., 2019; Meyer & Zizzi, 2007). In addition, it has been reported in the literature that emotional intelligence positively affects the academic performance and career plans of student athletes (Laborde et al., 2016). Therefore, it is thought that participation in sports may play a role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness. In order to investigate the role of sport participation in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness, the following question will be tested:

**Q2:** Are there significant differences in the career awareness levels of university students according to their emotional intelligence levels, sporting status, and the integration of emotional intelligence levels and sporting status?

## METHOD

Quantitative research methods were used in the study. Quantitative research methods are widely used in all branches of science (Yıldırım, 1999).

### Research Model

The study was designed using the general survey model. The general survey model is a survey conducted on a sample that is representative of the universe within large populations (Karasar, 2012).

### Study Group

The study group of the research consists of university students. The population of the research consists of 17,240 undergraduate students studying at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University. The population is the large group from which the research results are predicted (Karasar, 2012). The research sample consists of 391 volunteer students selected by simple random method from the population. The sample is defined as a representative set selected from the population with some rules (Karasar, 2012).

For large universes, the sample size that is sufficient to represent the universe can be determined by the following formula (İslamoğlu & Alniaçık, 2019);

$$n = \frac{Nz^2 \cdot pq}{Nd^2 + z \cdot pq}$$

n= Universe size

p= Proportion of those with a particular characteristic in a random sample

q= 1-p

d= Sensitivity level

z= Estimated reliability interval

In estimating the minimum number required for a population of 17,240 units, it was determined that a minimum of 362 participants were required for the study sample, assuming a precision rate of 5%, a 95% confidence interval, and a coincidence rate of  $z = 1.96$ , with a precision rate of 5%, a 95% confidence interval, and a coincidence rate of 0.5 (p) and a non-occurrence rate of 0.5 (q), taking a random sample from this population as a reference.

$$n = \frac{17.240 \cdot (1,96^2) \cdot (0,5) \cdot (0,5)}{17.240 \cdot (0,05)^2 + 1,96 \cdot (0,5) \cdot (0,5)} = 362$$

### Procedure and Ethics

Firstly, permission to use the relevant measurement tools was obtained from the researchers who developed and adapted the data collection tools used in the study. Then, the approval of the ethics committee dated May 8, 2023, and numbered 2023/190, was obtained from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee. The research was conducted in accordance with the ‘Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive’.

### Procedure for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire including validated scales was distributed both online and face-to-face to gather data from students. Questionnaire is a data collection method in which data are collected by asking questions to the people who make up the sample according to the study designed on a subject (Balcı, 2010). The research questionnaire consists of two scales measuring independent variables: emotional intelligence characteristics and career awareness levels. Data were collected between May and June 2023.

### Data Collection Tools

In the study, the demographic data form created by the researcher, the ‘Career Awareness Scale’ developed by Yaşar and Sunay (2019) and the ‘Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form’ developed by Petrides and Furnham (2000) and adapted into Turkish by Deniz, Özer and Işık (2013) were used as data collection tools.

***Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form:*** The questionnaire was developed by Petrides and Furnham (2000) and adapted to Turkish culture by Deniz, Özer, and Işık (2013). The scale consists of 4 sub-dimensions (Self-Control, Subjective Well-Being, Sociability, and emotionality) and 20 questions. In addition, total SWB score, which is called global score, can also be obtained from the scale. The scale is graded on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1: Strongly disagree to 7: Strongly agree). The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) for the entire scale was reported as 0.81 in the original study, while it was calculated as 0.84 in the current study.

**Career Awareness Scale:** The scale, consisting of 18 items (4 sub-dimensions: Professional Development Disposition, Professional Readiness, Professional Awareness, and Professional Self-Confidence), was developed by Sunay and Yaşar (2019). The scale is graded on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree). The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the entire scale was reported as 0.92 in the original study, while it was calculated as 0.90 in the current study.

The acceptability of alpha values between 0.70-0.95 is reported in many studies (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

### Data Analysis

SPSS 25, Jamovi and JASP statistical package programmes were used in the analysis of the data. In the analysis of the data, firstly descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, etc.) were made. Then, it was evaluated whether the data showed normal distribution or not. In order to decide on the distribution of the data, kurtosis-skewness values were analysed.

**Table 1**

*Skewness and Kurtosis Values of the Data*

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Intelligence	-0.471	-0.158
Career Awareness	-0.293	-0.308

In Table 1, it is seen that the skewness and kurtosis values of the data are between -1.5 and +1.5, and the skewness and kurtosis values between -1.5 and +1.5 indicate that the data show normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). According to these results, it was accepted that the data showed normal distribution. Two-Way Analysis of Variance (Two-Way ANOVA), Tukey test, which is one of the Post-Hoc tests, and Simple Linear Regression Analysis were performed. The error level of the statistics was accepted as  $p < 0.05$  and the significance level as Alpha ( $\alpha$ ).

## FINDINGS

In this section, the statistical results obtained from the analysis of the research data are presented in line with the research questions and hypotheses.

### Participants:

The distribution of the participants according to their sporting status and gender is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of Participants by Sport Participation Status and Gender*

Gender	Sport Participation	n	%	Total (n)
Female	Yes	93	46.70%	199
	No	106	53.30%	
Male	Yes	103	53.60%	192
	No	89	46.40%	
Total	Yes	196	50.10%	391
	No	195	49.90%	

The data (Table 2.) suggest that male students were more likely to participate in sports compared to female students. Specifically, 53.6% of men reported participating in sports (103

out of 192), while 46.7% of women (93 out of 199) reported the same. Conversely, the proportion of non-participation was slightly higher among females (53.3%) than among males (46.4%).

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics such as the scores obtained by the participants from the scales and the standard deviations of the scores are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3**

*Emotional Intelligence Scores of Participants by Gender and Sport Participation Status*

Gender	Sport Participation	n	M	SD
Female	Yes	93	18.61	4.97
	No	106	18.58	4.61
Male	Yes	103	20.01	4.76
	No	89	19.89	4.53
<b>Female (Total)</b>	—	199	18.59	4.77
<b>Male (Total)</b>	—	192	19.96	4.64
<b>Overall</b>	—	391	19.26	4.75

As shown in Table 3, emotional intelligence (EI) scores varied slightly by both gender and sport participation status. Among male participants, those who engaged in sports ( $M = 20.01$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ) had slightly higher EI scores compared to those who did not ( $M = 19.89$ ,  $SD = 4.53$ ). Similarly, among female participants, the mean EI score of those who did sports ( $M = 18.61$ ,  $SD = 4.97$ ) was nearly identical to those who did not ( $M = 18.58$ ,  $SD = 4.61$ ). Overall, male students reported higher emotional intelligence scores ( $M = 19.96$ ,  $SD = 4.64$ ) than female students ( $M = 18.59$ ,  $SD = 4.77$ ). The total sample mean EI score was 19.26 ( $SD = 4.75$ ), suggesting a moderate level of emotional intelligence across the sample.

**Table 4**

*Career Awareness Scores of Participants by Gender and Sport Participation Status*

Gender	Sport Participation	n	M	SD
Female	Yes	93	68.19	11.53
	No	106	64.58	11.39
Male	Yes	103	69.71	11.96
	No	89	65.92	10.11
<b>Female (Total)</b>	—	199	66.27	11.57
<b>Male (Total)</b>	—	192	67.95	11.27
<b>Overall</b>	—	391	67.10	11.44

Table 4 presents the career awareness scores of university students by gender and sport participation status. Among male students, those who participated in sports reported the highest mean career awareness ( $M = 69.71$ ,  $SD = 11.96$ ), while male non-participants had a lower mean score ( $M = 65.92$ ,  $SD = 10.11$ ). Similarly, female students who did sports had higher career awareness ( $M = 68.19$ ,  $SD = 11.53$ ) compared to those who did not ( $M = 64.58$ ,  $SD = 11.39$ ). When gender is considered independently, male students had slightly higher overall career awareness ( $M = 67.95$ ,  $SD = 11.27$ ) than female students ( $M = 66.27$ ,  $SD = 11.57$ ). The total sample mean was 67.10 ( $SD = 11.44$ ), indicating moderately high career awareness across participants.

### Research Question 1

Simple linear regression analysis was used to determine the effect of emotional intelligence level on career awareness level in university students. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Simple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Career Awareness from Emotional Intelligence*

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Intercept	41.35	2.02	—	20.51	<.001
Emotional Intelligence	1.33	0.10	.55	13.15	<.001

Model Summary:  $R = .55$ ,  $R^2 = .31$ ,  $F(1, 389) = 173.02$ ,  $p < .001$

**Note.** B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether emotional intelligence significantly predicted career awareness among university students. The model was found to be statistically significant,  $F(1, 389) = 173.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , and accounted for approximately 31% of the variance in career awareness scores ( $R^2 = .31$ ). Emotional intelligence significantly predicted career awareness ( $\beta = .55$ ,  $t = 13.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $B = 1.33$ ) indicates that for every one-point increase in emotional intelligence, career awareness increases by approximately 1.33 points. The regression equation is: "Career Awareness =  $41.35 + 1.33 \times \text{Emotional Intelligence}$ ". These findings suggest that emotional intelligence is a strong and positive predictor of students' career awareness.

### Research Question 2

Two-Way Analysis of Variance (Two-Way ANOVA) test was used to examine whether there are significant differences in the career awareness levels of university students according to emotional intelligence level, sport participation and the integration of emotional intelligence level and sport participation. The test results are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

**Table 6**

*Career Awareness Scores by Emotional Intelligence Level and Sport Participation Status*

Emotional Intelligence Level	Sport Participation	n	M	SD
Low	Yes	32	57.47	11.94
	No	27	57.19	10.38
Moderate	Yes	122	68.99	10.15
	No	132	64.32	9.8
High	Yes	42	77.76	7.91
	No	36	74.42	8.37
<b>Low</b>	<b>Total</b>	59	57.34	11.16
<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Total</b>	254	66.56	10.22
<b>High</b>	<b>Total</b>	78	76.22	8.24

**Note.** M = mean; SD = standard deviation. EI = emotional intelligence.

**Table 7**



*Two-Way ANOVA Results for the Effects of Emotional Intelligence and Sport Participation on Career Awareness*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Emotional Intelligence Level	1910.29	2	955.15	61.48	< .001	.242
Sport Participation	508.16	1	508.16	5.25	.022	.013
Interaction (EI $\times$ Sport)	233.23	2	116.62	1.20	.302	.006
Error	6057.65	385	15.73			
<b>Total</b>	<b>10709.33</b>	<b>390</b>				

**Note.** SS = sum of squares; df = degrees of freedom; MS = mean square;  $\eta^2$  = partial eta squared. According to Cohen (1988),  $\eta^2$  benchmarks: small = .01, medium = .06, large = .14.

Table 7 presents the results of a two-way ANOVA examining the effects of emotional intelligence level and sport participation on students' career awareness. The analysis revealed a statistically significant main effect of emotional intelligence level,  $F(2, 385) = 61.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .242$ , indicating a large effect size. This result suggests that students' levels of emotional intelligence significantly influence their career awareness.

A significant main effect was also found for sport participation,  $F(1, 385) = 5.25$ ,  $p = .022$ ,  $\eta^2 = .013$ , indicating a small effect size. This suggests that students who participate in sports have significantly higher career awareness scores compared to those who do not.

However, the interaction between emotional intelligence level and sport participation was not statistically significant,  $F(2, 385) = 1.20$ ,  $p = .302$ ,  $\eta^2 = .006$ , suggesting that the combined influence of these two factors does not significantly explain additional variance in career awareness.

**Table 8**

*The Pairwise Comparison of Career Awareness Levels of Students by Emotional Intelligence*

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
Low EI	Moderate EI	-9.22*	1.44	< .001
	High EI	-18.87*	1.72	< .001
Moderate EI	Low EI	9.22*	1.44	< .001
	High EI	-9.65*	1.29	< .001
High EI	Low EI	18.87*	1.72	< .001
	Moderate EI	9.65*	1.29	< .001

**Note.** EI = emotional Intelligence; SE= standard error

Post-Hoc Tukey test (Table 8) was applied to determine the source of the significant difference in career awareness levels according to emotional intelligence levels of students. According to the results of Tukey test, it was determined that the career awareness levels of students with high emotional intelligence level were significantly higher than other students ( $p < 0.05$ ). In parallel with this, it was also seen that the career awareness levels of students with moderate emotional intelligence level were significantly higher than the students with low emotional intelligence level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Since the majority of university students (except those who continue postgraduate education) will enter business life after graduation, the concept of career awareness is of great importance for them (Büyükgöze & Gelbal, 2016). In this context examining the interaction of sport participation, emotional intelligence and career awareness is extremely important for university students. On the other hand, emotional intelligence is one of the concepts that affect students' ability to achieve success in both academic and business life after graduation (Chapin, 2015). In addition, when the literature is evaluated, based on the information that sport participation increases emotional intelligence (Laborde et al., 2018; Magrum et al., 2019; Meyer & Zizzi, 2007), this study aimed to investigate the relationship between the concept of emotional intelligence and career awareness and the role of sport participation in this relationship and university students were determined as the sample.

The descriptive findings obtained from the analyses in the study showed that the emotional intelligence levels of university students who participated sport are slightly higher than those of students who do not. It is known in the literature that participation in sports improves emotional intelligence. (Börekçi, 2002; Eraslan, 2015; Ergin, 2000; Sarıkabak, Karakulak, & Sunay, 2019).

The findings from the analyses in the study showed that the career awareness levels of students who participated sport are higher than those of students who do not. When the studies in the literature are examined, there are studies in which results parallel to our research findings are reported (Yavuz Eroğlu, 2020; Yılmaz, Genç & Safi, 2023).

In our research, it was determined that emotional intelligence positively and significantly affected career awareness. . It was determined that the career awareness levels of students with high and medium level emotional intelligence were higher compared to other students. Accordingly, as students' emotional intelligence increases, their career awareness also increases. This findings demonstrated how important for students to have high emotional intelligence in order to have high career awareness. Pirsoul and colleagues' meta-analysis on the career outcomes of emotional intelligence found that emotional intelligence was significantly related to career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, salary, career commitment, career decision-making difficulties, career satisfaction, entrepreneurial intentions, and turnover intentions (Pirsoul et al., 2023).

In the findings of our research, the interaction between emotional intelligence level and sport participation was not statistically significant. This finding shows that although sports participation and emotional intelligence are effective separately, they do not create a significant change in career awareness together.

## **Conclusion**

As a result, the findings obtained in the study provide important evidence to the literature in terms of explaining the relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness and sport participation. In the relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness, it was concluded that emotional intelligence accounted for 31% of the change in students' career awareness. This finding shows us how important emotional intelligence is in shaping students' career awareness. In addition, as the emotional intelligence levels of students increase, their career awareness levels also increase, and significant differences were found in the career awareness levels of students with high emotional levels and students with lower emotional intelligence levels. In this context, it is extremely important for students to have high emotional intelligence. It is known that sports increase emotional intelligence. Based on the relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness, it is possible that participation in sports also affects career awareness. In fact, our research results have also reached the conclusion that participation in sports affects career awareness positively at a significant level. In this context, as students participate in sports, their career awareness levels increase. Since both emotional intelligence and participation in sports affect career awareness separately to this extent, it was finally examined whether they created a change in career

awareness when the two variables were taken together, but no statistically significant result was found.

### Recommendations

In the light of all these results, it is seen that the development of emotional intelligence is important for students to increase their career awareness. Since sports positively affect the development of emotional intelligence, it is recommended that students participate in sports in order to increase their career awareness. Because emotional intelligence includes the concept of awareness (Petrides, 2010). Since individuals who participating sports will increase their awareness and their emotional intelligence, they will reflect this awareness to their academic and professional life and will be among individuals with high career awareness.

Researchers in future studies;

- It can collect data from students at different educational levels and compare the results with this research.
- In order to investigate the effect of sport participating more deeply, a longitudinal study can evaluate the change in emotional intelligence and career awareness as pre-test and post-test by having a group of students to do sports for a while.
- The relationship between emotional intelligence and career awareness revealed in this study can be investigated through different independent variables (academic achievement, self-esteem, etc.) other than sport participation.

### Limitations

The research is limited to the data to be collected from students' study in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University in the 2023-2024 Academic Year.

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