

## Effects of Dental Hygiene Students' Motivation for Major Selection, Career Values, and Major Satisfaction on Their Major Immersion\*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the factors affecting the major immersion of dental hygiene students, including their major selection motivation, career values, and major satisfaction. To this end, data were collected from 191 2nd to 4th-year dental hygiene students in the Seoul and Gyeonggi regions through a survey conducted from July 1 to September 27, 2023, and subsequently analyzed using IBM SPSS/21.0 software. On a scale of 5 points, the average score for major selection motivation was 3.31, with sub-factors of individual motivation at 3.19 and social motivation at 3.46. Similarly, career values received a score of 4.15, with intrinsic values at 4.03 and extrinsic values at 4.24. The major satisfaction score was 3.74, with perceived satisfaction at 3.93, relationship satisfaction at 3.56, curriculum satisfaction at 3.66, general satisfaction at 3.67, and major immersion at 3.30. The factors influencing major immersion, in descending order, were general satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ ), curriculum satisfaction ( $p < 0.001$ ), and personal motivation ( $p < 0.05$ ). As a result of the study, it was found that personal motivation for major selection, specifically when students choose dental hygiene as their own major, and general satisfaction as well as curriculum satisfaction, among the major satisfaction, significantly influence major immersion. Therefore, it is important to respect students' aptitude and preferences during major selection and develop and provide various career counseling and major adaptation programs that can enhance major satisfaction.

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## 1. Introduction

With the increasing qualitative demands of the public for healthcare services in recent times, securing competent healthcare professionals has become essential. Dental hygienists play a crucial role as specialized professionals in the healthcare sector, contributing significantly to role performance and the provision of medical services. The cultivation of competent dental hygienists begins with

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dental hygiene education programs, making immersion in major courses highly important (Park et al., 2022). Dental hygiene education integrates both theoretical and practical training, making it a substantial component of the major. To develop into a dental hygienist equipped for future professional responsibilities, major courses are of utmost importance. Consequently, one's satisfaction and immersion in their chosen major have become integral aspects of university life (Kang, 2017; Shin et al., 2020). Furthermore, holding professional values as a dental hygienist when entering the workforce can enhance one's completeness as a specialized professional. Therefore, from university admission to graduation, assigning a strong sense of value to the chosen major and future career is vital for personal growth as a contributing member of society. However, in recent times, due to the pressing issue of youth unemployment, many individuals choose their university and major based more on employment prospects, parental guidance, and academic performance rather than their own aptitude and abilities (Shin et al., 2021). It has been noted that choosing a major without taking into account one's own abilities and aptitude or without sufficient contemplation and self-reflection can lead to difficulties in adapting to university life (Won, 2022). Hence, if the motivation for major selection is not positive, it may act as a negative factor in major course immersion, highlighting the need to examine this relationship.

College students evaluate their major in comparison to the goals they have set for themselves. Major satisfaction becomes a crucial factor that goes beyond mere contentment with the choice of field; it also influences academic achievement and career development (Lee et al., 2018). Moreover, major satisfaction is shown to have a positive impact on the academic performance, leading to an increased sense of immersion in the field. Research indicates that higher level of major satisfaction is associated with a stronger professional orientation (Shin et al., 2020). The motivation for major selection can be considered as a progressive value that plays a positive role in enhancing one's engagement in their field, thereby enabling graduates to effectively carry out their duties as dental hygienists (Kim et al., 2012). Dental hygiene students, from their motivation for major selection to subsequent major immersion and satisfaction, engage in a series of processes that can be considered as mutually influencing factors in establishing their future professional values as dental hygienists (Shin, 2017). Students in the field of dental hygiene, who will be responsible for the oral health of the public, should have a strong sense of mission and must be able to immerse themselves in their major with a clear motivation for major selection and a strong conviction in their field, in order to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations as professionals. Furthermore, a strong work ethic and high major satisfaction will be beneficial for a successful transition into the workforce. In previous studies conducted with nursing college students, the motivation for major selection was identified as a factor influencing major immersion, and major satisfaction was observed to partially mediate the relationship between the motivation for major selection and major immersion (Shin et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2021). As such, motivation for major selection, career values, and major satisfaction can be considered important factors influencing major immersion. Studies related to major selection motivation, major satisfaction, career values, and major immersion have been conducted with college students in general. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of previous research that focuses on examining these connections within the context of dental hygiene students. To date, studies targeting dental hygiene students have predominantly focused on aspects such as professional

orientation, self-resilience, adaptation to university life, and career readiness behaviors. However, it is difficult to find research that investigates how satisfaction with the major experienced during the academic process influences major immersion crucial for academic performance. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the impact of dental hygiene students' motivation for major selection, career values, and major satisfaction on their major immersion, with the goal of enhancing major immersion and providing fundamental data for effective student career counseling and major adaptation.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research subject

This study conducted among convenience-sampled 2nd to 4th-year students in dental hygiene departments in the Seoul and Gyeonggi regions from July 1, 2023, to September 27, 2023. The subjects of the study were from the second year of study when major subjects were taken. After explaining the purpose and methodology of the research, students who consented to participate completed a self-administered survey. Out of 210 students surveyed, 191 responses were included in the final analysis after excluding 19 incomplete submissions.

### 2.2 Research tools

The research tools used in this study consisted of a total of 44 items, including 5 items for general characteristics, 7 items for major selection motivation, 7 items for career values, 18 items for major satisfaction, and 7 items for major immersion.

#### 2.2.1 Major selection motivation

Major selection motivation was adapted and improved upon by using the tool employed by Shin (2021). It was comprised of the sub-factors of 4 personal motivation items and 3 social motivation items. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with '1 = Not at all, 2 = Not really, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Yes, 5 = Very much.' A higher score indicated a more positive evaluation of major selection motivation. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which indicates reliability, was 0.73 in Shin's (2021) study. In this study, it was 0.841.

#### 2.2.2 Career values

Career values were assessed using a tool that was validated by Shin (2021) and originally used by Park and Lee (2016). It consisted of 7 items, with 3 items for intrinsic values and 4 items for extrinsic values. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with '1 = Not at all, 2 = Not really, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Yes, 5 = Very much.' A higher score indicated a higher level of career values. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which indicates reliability, was 0.76 in Shin's (2021) study. In this study, it was 0.830.

### 2.2.3 Major satisfaction

Major satisfaction was measured using a tool employed in Shin's (2021) research, which was adapted from the scale created by Lee (2004). It consisted of 18 items, including 6 items for perceived satisfaction, 3 items for curriculum satisfaction, 3 items for relationship satisfaction, and 6 items for general satisfaction. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with '1 = Not at all, 2 = Not really, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Yes, 5 = Very much.' A higher score indicated a higher level of major satisfaction. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which indicates reliability, was 0.92 in Shin's (2021) study. In this study, it was 0.921.

### 2.2.4 Major immersion

Major immersion was assessed using a tool that was applied in Shin's (2021) study, which was adapted from the scale created by Kim (2015). It consisted of 7 items as a single factor. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with '1 = Not at all, 2 = Not really, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Yes, 5 = Very much.' A higher score indicated a higher level of major immersion. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which indicates reliability, was 0.94 in Shin's (2021) study. In this study, it was 0.894.

## 2.3 Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis of the collected data was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 21.0 software (IBM SPSS Statistics, New York, USA), with the significance level for statistical tests set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Frequency, percentage, and descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the general characteristics and variables of the research subjects. Independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were performed to examine differences in major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion according to the general characteristics. Scheffe's post-hoc tests were used for the groups that showed statistical significance. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationships between major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the factors influencing major immersion.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 General characteristics of the research subjects

The participants consisted of 95.3% females and 4.7% males. among them 26.2% were in their second year, 47.6% in their third year, and 26.2% in their fourth year. 15.7% expressed dissatisfaction, 38.2% reported being neutral, and 46.1% were satisfied with school life. In terms of GPA, 18.3% had a GPA of 4.1 or higher, 37.7% scored between 4.0 and 3.6, 27.7% fell between 3.5 and 3.1, and 16.2% had a GPA of 3.0 or lower. In regards to their career goals, 51.8% wanted to work in hospitals, and 18.3% aimed for positions in university hospitals (Table 1).

**Table 1.** General characteristic of the subjects

Characteristics	Division	N	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	9	4.7
	Female	182	95.3
<b>Grade</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	50	26.2
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	91	47.6
	4 <sup>th</sup>	50	26.2
<b>School life satisfaction</b>	Dissatisfied	30	15.7
	Moderate	73	38.2
	Satisfied	88	46.1
<b>GPA(Grade Point Average)</b>	≥ 4.1	35	18.3
	4.0-3.6	72	37.7
	3.5-3.1	53	27.7
	≤ 3.0	31	16.2
<b>Career aspiration</b>	University hospital	35	18.3
	Hospital	99	51.8
	Clinic	27	14.1
	Others	30	15.7
<b>Total</b>		191	100.0

*3.2 Research subject's major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion*

The overall average score for Major Selection Motivation was 3.31±0.64 points, broken down into 3.19±0.88 points for personal motivation and 3.46±0.79 points for social motivation. The average score for Career Values was 4.15±0.60 points, comprising 4.03±0.77 points for intrinsic values and 4.24±0.62 points for extrinsic values. Major Satisfaction had an average score of 3.74±0.61 points, which included perceived satisfaction at 3.93±0.70 points, relationship satisfaction at 3.56±0.89 points, curriculum satisfaction at 3.66±0.65 points, and general satisfaction at 3.67±0.79 points. Major Immersion was assessed with an average score of 3.30±0.75 points (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Research subject's major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion

Variables	Mean	SD
<b>Major selection motivation</b>	3.31	0.64
Personal motivation	3.19	0.88
Social motivation	3.46	0.79
<b>Career values</b>	4.15	0.60
Intrinsic values	4.03	0.77
Extrinsic values	4.24	0.62
<b>Major satisfaction</b>	3.74	0.61
Perceived satisfaction	3.93	0.70
Relationship satisfaction	3.56	0.89
Curriculum satisfaction	3.66	0.65
General satisfaction	3.67	0.79
<b>Major immersion</b>	3.30	0.75

### 3.3 Major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion according to the general characteristics

The results (Table 3) illustrate the relationships between major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion concerning the general characteristics of the research participants. When analyzing the data based on the students' academic year, it was found that 4th-year students exhibited higher major selection motivation, scoring  $3.52 \pm 0.67$  points, and greater major satisfaction, with a score of  $3.93 \pm 0.57$  points compared to 2nd and 3rd-year students ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between school life satisfaction and higher major selection motivation, major satisfaction, and major immersion ( $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, students with a GPA of 4.1 or higher showed the highest major satisfaction, scoring  $4.13 \pm 0.53$  points, and the greatest major immersion, with a score of  $3.92 \pm 0.58$  points, indicating that a higher GPA was linked to increased major satisfaction and major immersion ( $p < 0.001$ ). In terms of career aspirations, students with ambitions to work in university hospitals displayed the highest major selection motivation, with a score of  $3.51 \pm 0.61$  points ( $p < 0.05$ ), the highest major satisfaction, at  $3.92 \pm 0.49$  points ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the highest major immersion, with a score of  $3.63 \pm 0.53$  points ( $p < 0.001$ ). This was followed by students aspiring to work in hospitals, clinics, and other areas.

**Table 3.** Major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion according to the general characteristics

Characteristics	Major selection motivation		Career values		Major satisfaction		Major immersion	
	Mean±SD	<i>p</i> *	Mean±SD	<i>p</i> *	Mean±SD	<i>p</i> *	Mean±SD	<i>p</i> *
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	3.34±0.92	0.908	3.84±1.62	0.108	3.40±0.77	0.206	3.14±0.61	0.440
Female	3.31±0.63		4.17±0.50		3.75±0.60		3.31±0.76	
<b>Grade</b>								
2 <sup>nd</sup>	3.32±0.49 <sup>a</sup>	0.015	4.00±0.74	0.091	3.74±0.66 <sup>a</sup>	0.023	3.18±0.83	0.212
3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.19±0.68 <sup>a</sup>		4.18±0.53		3.63±0.58 <sup>a</sup>		3.28±0.73	
4 <sup>th</sup>	3.52±0.67 <sup>b</sup>		4.26±0.54		3.93±0.57 <sup>b</sup>		3.45±0.71	
<b>School life satisfaction</b>								
Dissatisfied	2.76±0.63 <sup>a</sup>	<0.001	4.19±0.58	0.242	3.25±0.71 <sup>a</sup>	<0.001	2.73±0.86 <sup>a</sup>	<0.001
Moderate	3.27±0.54 <sup>b</sup>		4.06±0.49		3.59±0.43 <sup>b</sup>		3.10±0.57 <sup>b</sup>	
Satisfied	3.53±0.62 <sup>b</sup>		4.22±0.68		4.03±0.55 <sup>c</sup>		3.66±0.66 <sup>c</sup>	
<b>GPA(Grade Point Average)</b>								
≥ 4.1	3.50±0.72	0.238	4.24±0.57	0.121	4.13±0.53 <sup>b</sup>	<0.001	3.92±0.58 <sup>c</sup>	<0.001
4.0-3.6	3.30±0.52		4.25±0.48		3.75±0.61 <sup>a</sup>		3.27±0.72 <sup>ab</sup>	
3.5-3.1	3.26±0.74		4.05±0.77		3.56±0.55 <sup>a</sup>		3.19±0.64 <sup>ab</sup>	
≤ 3.0	3.19±0.62		4.01±0.51		3.56±0.59 <sup>a</sup>		2.85±0.75 <sup>a</sup>	
<b>Career aspiration</b>								
University hospital	3.51±0.61 <sup>b</sup>	0.036	4.18±0.47	0.230	3.92±0.49 <sup>b</sup>	<0.001	3.63±0.53 <sup>b</sup>	0.001
Hospital	3.33±0.57 <sup>ab</sup>		4.15±0.51		3.78±0.59 <sup>b</sup>		3.35±0.80 <sup>ab</sup>	
Clinic	3.29±0.78 <sup>ab</sup>		4.30±0.53		3.84±0.64 <sup>b</sup>		3.14±0.70 <sup>a</sup>	
Others	3.04±0.72 <sup>a</sup>		3.98±0.95		3.28±0.56 <sup>a</sup>		2.90±0.67 <sup>a</sup>	

\* by t-test for two groups and one-way ANOVA(post-test Scheffé) for three or more groups

<sup>a, b, c</sup> The same letter indicates no significant difference by Scheffé test at  $\alpha = 0.05$

### 3.4 Correlation between major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion

The correlation among major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion of the research subjects is as shown in Table 4. There found a positive correlation between major selection motivation ( $r=0.524$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), career values ( $r=0.260$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), major satisfaction ( $r=0.756$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and major immersion.

**Table 4.** Correlation between major selection motivation, career values, major satisfaction, and major immersion

Variables	Major selection motivation	Career values	Major satisfaction	Major immersion
Major selection motivation	1			
Career values	0.381**	1		
Major satisfaction	0.587**	0.435**	1	
Major immersion	0.524**	0.260**	0.756**	1

\*\* $p<0.01$ , by Pearson's correlation analysis

### 3.5 Factors influencing major immersion

In order to determine the factors of major selection motivation, career values, and major satisfaction of research subjects on the major immersion, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with the subfactors of each variable as independent variables and major immersion as the dependent variable. The results (Table 5) are as follows: The regression model showed significance ( $F=45.783$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and it explained 65.3% of the variance in major immersion. The factors influencing major immersion appeared in the following order of significance: general satisfaction ( $p<0.05$ ), curriculum satisfaction ( $p<0.001$ ), and personal motivation ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Factors influencing major immersion

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$	t	$p^*$
Personal motivation	0.107	0.046	0.125	2.302	0.022
Social motivation	0.013	0.045	0.013	0.280	0.779
Intrinsic values	-0.032	0.052	-0.033	-0.622	0.535
Extrinsic values	-0.094	0.066	-0.077	-1.420	0.157
Perceived satisfaction	0.038	0.059	0.035	0.637	0.525
Relationship satisfaction	0.043	0.046	0.051	0.930	0.354
Curriculum satisfaction	0.210	0.078	0.184	2.687	0.008
General satisfaction	0.556	0.066	0.584	8.461	<0.001

$R^2=0.668$ , adj  $R^2=0.653$ ,  $F=45.783$ ,  $p<0.001$

\*by multiple regression analysis

## 4. Discussion

Major immersion of dental hygiene students during their college years is a crucial process for developing into competent dental hygienists responsible for the oral health of the nation. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the factors influencing major immersion, including major selection motivation, career values, and major satisfaction, among dental hygiene majors. Major selection motivation of the participants scored 3.31 on a 5-point scale, which was consistent with the findings of a study conducted on nursing students (Joo & Han, 2021). This score was slightly higher than that of dental technician students, who scored 3.15 (Choi & Kang, 2022). Among the general characteristics, higher school life satisfaction, aspirations for working in university hospitals, and being in the fourth year resulted in higher Major Selection Motivation than the second and third-year students. This suggests that having a clear conviction about one's major choice serves as a strong motivator for making future career decisions. Regarding the sub-factors, social motivation scored 3.46 points, higher than personal motivation, which scored 3.19 points. This indicates that, given the serious issue of youth unemployment, students might have chosen their major considering societal factors and job opportunities based on family recommendations rather than their aptitude and inclination. Therefore, it is essential for educational institutions to provide various career development and major adaptation programs to enhance major immersion and satisfaction by presenting a clear vision and direction for the future of dental hygienists during their school education.

The average career values of the participants were 4.15 points, which was somewhat higher than the 3.85 points observed in a previous study focusing on dental hygiene students (Park et al., 2022). This score was similar to the research on nursing students, where they achieved a score of 4.19 (Shin et al., 2021). Specifically, in terms of sub-factors, extrinsic values scored 4.24 points, surpassing intrinsic values at 4.03 points. This outcome indicates that participants placed more significance on extrinsic values, such as material rewards associated with the job like salary, welfare, and occupational stability.

The average major satisfaction of the participants was 3.74 points, and this was somewhat higher compared to dental technician students, who scored 3.56 points (Choi & Kang, 2022). Major satisfaction appeared to increase with higher academic years, higher GPAs, greater satisfaction with school life, and having aspirations to work in university hospitals. These results suggest that as students advance in their academic years and gain a deeper understanding of their major through advanced courses, their major satisfaction increases, indicating a positive relationship between major satisfaction and academic achievement. The sub-factors of satisfaction appeared as follows: perceived satisfaction at 3.93 points, general satisfaction at 3.67 points, curriculum satisfaction at 3.66 points, and relationship satisfaction at 3.56 points. These findings were similar to the results of a study on nursing students, which reported perceived satisfaction at 4.23 points, general satisfaction at 3.80 points, and curriculum and relationship satisfaction at 3.70 points (Shin et al., 2020). These results suggest that dental hygiene students have higher personal satisfaction regarding their social awareness and lower satisfaction with the relationship between professors and students. Therefore, there is a need to activate counseling programs that can enhance the relationship between professors and students.

The major immersion of the participants was slightly lower at  $3.30 \pm 0.75$  points, compared to

the dental technician students who scored 3.45 (Choi & Kang, 2022). In fact, major immersion, like major satisfaction, increased as school life satisfaction and grades improved.

Lastly, it was observed that among the factors influencing major immersion, the sub-factors of general satisfaction and curriculum satisfaction from Major Selection Motivation, along with sub-factors from major satisfaction, particularly personal satisfaction, had a greater impact on major immersion. It is observed that having a well-defined career goal, coupled with a strong determination to excel in one's major, leads to higher levels of major immersion (Jeong, 2013). Consequently, if dental hygiene students possess a sense of professionalism and confidence in their major while harboring clear career aspirations as future dental hygienists, they are more likely to fully engage in their major coursework. Therefore, universities should implement educational strategies that enhance career values within dental hygiene programs and develop various initiatives to boost major satisfaction and major immersion.

Based on professional knowledge and skills in dental hygiene, we confirmed the factors that influence the major immersion of dental hygiene students preparing to become dental hygienists, and proved that it is important to consider aptitude, talent, interests, and future occupation when choosing a dental hygiene department. It is significant in that it was done.

One limitation of this study is its focus on dental hygiene students in the Seoul and Gyeonggi region, which presents a narrow scope. Future research should consider broadening the sample and addressing these constraints to facilitate continuous and comprehensive investigations.

## 5. Conclusion

This study surveyed a total of 210 2nd to 4th year students attending the Department of Dental Hygiene in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do to investigate the factors that influence major selection motivation, career values, and major satisfaction of dental hygiene students on major immersion. Excluding 19 people with insufficient responses, 191 participants were selected for the final analysis. The analysis results are as follows:

1. Major selection motivation was rated at 3.31 points, career values stood at 4.15 points, major satisfaction received a score of 3.74 points, and major immersion was at 3.30 points.
2. With increasing academic years, there was a significant increase in Major selection motivation and major satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ ). Higher levels of school life satisfaction were associated with elevated major selection motivation, major satisfaction, and major immersion ( $p < 0.001$ ).
3. Higher GPA levels were positively correlated with increased major satisfaction and major immersion ( $p < 0.001$ ). When students aspired to work in university hospitals, Major selection motivation ( $p < 0.05$ ), major satisfaction ( $p < 0.001$ ), and major immersion ( $p < 0.001$ ) were notably higher.
4. Factors found to influence major immersion included general satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ ), curriculum satisfaction ( $p < 0.001$ ), and personal motivation ( $p < 0.05$ ).

As a result of the study, it was found that personal motivation for major selection, specifically

when students choose dental hygiene as their own major, and general satisfaction as well as curriculum satisfaction, among the major satisfaction, significantly influence major immersion. Therefore, it is important to respect students' aptitude and preferences during major selection and develop and provide various career counseling and major adaptation programs that can enhance major satisfaction.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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