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Examining the Levels of Freedom, Life Satisfaction and Happiness Perceived by College Students in Leisure Time

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to identify the relationship between the perceived freedom, life satisfaction and happiness scales scores of college student according to some demographic variances. Within the scope of the research; 1024 male (n=532) and female (n=492) students who currently study in the universities were selected by random sampling method. Descriptive, correlation and regression analysis techniques were used for the data obtained through the survey. The result revealed that the perceived freedom in leisure is significantly positively correlated. In terms of life satisfaction, there is a significant difference in gender factor, while there is no significant difference in grade and active sports status. According to the happiness factor, grade variables were the only parameter that had a statistically significant correlation with happiness. Gradual regression analysis indicated that there is a positive correlation between the life satisfaction and happiness level. Similarly, significant correlation was found between the perceived freedom in leisure time and happiness levels of students. In conclusion, our findings indicate that perceived freedom in leisure has a positive impact on the life satisfaction and happiness.

Introduction

Today, individuals are moving away from their environment constantly in order to participate in leisure activities which are becoming more important for people's mental health, quality of life, personal relaxation and improving the physical condition for having a quality of life (Brajssa, Merkas, & Sverko, 2011). Many studies in different disciplines state that individuals should regularly participate in physical activities in their spare time for a quality life. (Demirel & Harmardar, 2009). Leisure time is defined as the period of time in which an individual can evaluate their time remaining from their private life and his daily job (Williams, 2003). It is important to participate in leisure activities other than mandatory needs. (Parr and Lashua 2004). Leisure activities cover all activities that individuals can enjoy themselves in their free time (Kraus, 1966). Similarly, leisure is considered as a sort of entertainment to satisfy people life in every stage and its importance has been acknowledged and emphasized to the direction (Hampton, 2000).

Leisure and recreation sector cover various areas including sportive activities, tourism movements, art activities, activities include fun and social (Society at a glance, 2009). The market size of the recreation sector is around \$ 953.9 billion and in 2018 this figure is expected to reach market share of \$1,464.3 trillion by 2026 (Research and Market 2020). Sector has reached a rapid growth trend thanks to the facilities and the advantages brought by the information technology which is the biggest capital in today's digital era (Bauman, 2002). Likewise, with these technological developments, businesses have undergone a digital transformation by moving business processes into technological platforms to make their managerial functioning more efficient in line with the different needs of societies.

As a result of this transformation, working hours has become increasingly flexible that has led individuals to devote more time to themselves for activities (Kelly, 2012). As a result of not evaluating leisure time actively in the direction of health and sports activities, the person experiences deficiencies in the point of enjoying life, attaining satisfaction, and this situation leads the individual to a monotonous way of life resulting in a low level of happiness (Spiers and Walker, 2008). Chun and Lee (2008), Kleiber, Hutchinson and Williams (2002) have noted that individuals who evaluate leisure time actively through sports activities are more successful in understanding the value of life and solving problems furthermore they are becoming more successful in developing interpersonal and social relationships within the community. To support this opinion, many

researchers agreed that, people who were sufficiently attending regular actively had better healthy condition and good manner of behavior as a result quality of life compared to people who have sedentary lifestyle (Quintiliani et al. 2007)

Due to current social, political, economic problems such as conflict between nations, wars and global pandemics are forced to limit or restrict persons from the activities that involved in their regular life (Gimeno, 2002). So that, vast majority of people became concern about how to make their leisure activities more efficient and to raise quality of life (Stebbins, 2018). In this study, the relationship between the perceived freedom, life satisfaction and happiness of college students in leisure time will be examined according to some demographic variables. Thus, understanding the relationship between perceives freedom; life satisfaction and happiness could allow us to think more help-oriented on college students for increasing quality of life and guide them to be a happier person.

Perceived Freedom Leisure and Happiness

The concept of perceived freedom in leisure time has emerged in literature as an important dimension in measuring individual behavior. People usually want to be free and control their spare time and they use this freedom as an element of choice in the activities they participated (Mannell ve Kleiber, 1997). According to Heider's definition, perceived freedom is a tool to predict human behavior (Heider, 1985). The main concept of perceived freedom in leisure time outlined Neulinger's theory on "leisure as mood" (Neulinger, 1981). In this theory, Neulinger (1981) proposed that perceived freedom is the only principle criteria in the choice of leisure activity, he defined the perception of freedom as a feeling of something that the individual does willingly by using his or her own choice (Siegenthaler and O'dell, 2000).

From a different perspective; Kelly (1978) sees perceived freedom of leisure as a key to define leisure experiences, in this model it is stated that perceived freedom in leisure is relative so individual may have experience low levels of perceived freedom as a result of constantly restrictions (Kelly, 1978). Even if participating leisure activities are different and relative, the basis of all of them is to enjoy and reach to happiness (Çelik, 2011). Leisure time activities are important sources of happiness.

In general sense, happiness is characterized as happy if individual satisfies with his life cycles, experiences and positive emotions such as joy, pride, confidence, excitement. On the other hand, feeling negative emotions rarely for instance anger, fear, anxiety and hate so on.(Argyle et.al, 1987). Moreover, happiness is the adaptation of the ability to be happy with life and is a central criterion of positive mental health (Lyubomirsky, 2005).

Life Satisfaction and Happiness

The relationship between life satisfaction and happiness has always been interesting topic by many social scientists and researchers. Life satisfaction can be defined as people making an emotional assessment by comparing themselves to what deserve, expect or reasonably demand (Sirgy, Widgery, Lee & Grace, 2010; Woo, Kim, Uysal, 2016). However, this assessment is not tangible, but includes the satisfying experiences that individuals receive from activities they participate in. (Liang et al. 2013). Evaluating leisure time cannot be considered as a single dimension (Russell & Frances, 1996).

The concept of life satisfaction is closely related to the positive emotions, experiences and achievements that arise as a result of this evaluation (Bastian, Kuppens, De Roover, & Diener, 2014; Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels & Conway, 2009). When individuals evaluate their life satisfaction levels, it is a priority situation because they decide according to their emotional experiences (Iyer & Jetten, 2011; Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008). These experiences and gains are effective in orientating interpersonal and social relationships in individual's life and also increase the degree of mental health, general satisfaction and happiness of the individual (Beard & Ragheb, 1980).

Method

In this research comparative relational screening methods was used. This method is intended to find out the causes and consequences of differences between groups of people without making any interference on the circumstances and participants (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). In this study, level of perceived the freedom, life

satisfaction and happiness of college students in their leisure time were compared according to the variables such as gender, grade and active sport status.

Population and Sample

The study group of this research consists of university students who study in different education programme of Necmettin Erbakan University and Selçuk University. Reaching all students requires considerable time, effort, economy. For the purpose of study, 1024 college students were reached by using convenience sampling method with cross sectional design. When the demographic characteristics of the participants are examined, 52% (N=532) of the students are female and 48% (N=492) are male and 12.4% (n=127) of the students were in first grade, 35.3% (n=361) were in second grade, 23.1% (n=237) were in third grade, lastly 16.7% (n=171) were in fourth grade at their universities.

Table 1. Research Sample Distribution by Demographic Factors

Gender	n	%
Female	532	52.0
Male	492	48.0
Total	1024	100.0
Age	n	%
17-20 age	178	17.4
21-24 age	681	66.5
25 age and above	165	16.1
Family Monthly Income	n	%
2000-3000 TL	250	24.4
3001-4000 TL	319	31.2
4001-5000 TL	293	28.6
5001 TL and above	162	15.8
Grade	n	%
1	127	12.4
2	361	35.3
3	237	23.1
4	171	16.7
No Response	128	12.5

Measurement

Life Satisfaction Scale

One of the aims of the study is to examine the relationship between the levels of perceived freedom of college students in leisure time and their life satisfaction. In this context, the life satisfaction scale inventory which is developed by the Diener et al., (1985) was used to determinate the level of life satisfaction of participants. The adaptation of scale into Turkish was performed by Koker (1991) on specifying the life satisfaction levels of university students in his study. The Cronbach Alpha value calculated to figure up the reliability of the scale is 0.87.

The life satisfaction scale is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 5 substances. Substances of scale are 7 point Likert type. The scale is in the form of self-assessment consisting of such expressions; “*my life is close to my ideals in many aspects*”, “*I am satisfied with my life.*”, “*I've been able to get what I wanted so far*” and “*had I been reborn, I would have changed almost nothing from my life.*” On the life satisfaction high scores scale

indicate that the individual's life satisfaction is high. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient performed on this research was calculated as 0.81

Short Form of the Oxford Happiness Scale

The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OME) was developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) as a 29 items. The short form of scale was adapted to Turkish by Dogan and Çötök (2011) consists of 8 items. The scale 5 point Likert type from (1) *disagrees at all* to (5) *completely agree*. The average high scores obtained from this scale indicated that individuals have a high level of perception of happiness. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient performed on this research data of the Oxford Happiness Scale was calculated as 0.84

The Scale of Perceived Freedom in Leisure Time

Perceived Freedom in Leisure Scale was developed by Witt and Ellis (1985). The cross-cultural adaptation was conducted by Lapa and Agyar (2011). The scale of freedom perceived in leisure is a one-dimensional structure and consists of 25 items. In this research, internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) for scale was found as 0.91. The participant response to items on a 5-point Likert scale. The response to the Likert-type scale are arranged in 1 "*absolutely disagree*" to 5 "*absolutely agree*". The total reliability co-efficient of the scale is highly reliable. The high score average from the scale demonstrates that individuals have a high level of freedom from what they perceive in leisure time.

Statistical Analysis of Data

As part of the research, the data were analyzed by using independent sample t test and one-way variance analysis. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis were applied to investigate the relationship between perceived freedom, life satisfaction and happiness variables in leisure time. The distribution of the scores obtained from measurement tools was examined by calculating skewness and flatness values. In order to satisfy the normal distribution assumption, the skew coefficient must be less than 2 and the flatness coefficient must be less than 7 (George and Mallery, 2010). Measured values in the scale showed that scores applied in the scale is normal distribution. As a result of the variance analysis, Tukey test was used to determine the source of the difference.

Findings

As shown Table 2, it was measured that the average life satisfaction scores of the college students as 17.79 ± 5.63 . Based on the average score, it has shown that university student's perceptions of life satisfaction are moderate level. Furthermore; the average score of the college student's happiness scale was calculated as 20.85 ± 3.84 . This figure has indicated that college students have a middle-level perception of happiness. Finally, the average score of the college students on the perceived freedom scale in leisure time was calculated as 89.04 ± 312.69 . This finding suggests that there is a high level of freedom that college students perceive in their leisure time.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of College Student's Scores Perceived Freedom, Life Satisfaction and Happiness Scale on their Leisure Time

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Result
Life Satisfaction	5	35	17.79	5.633	Medium
Happiness	7	33	20.85	3.849	Medium
Perceived Freedom in Leisure time	24	125	89.04	12.693	High

According to Table 3, it was observed that there was no significant gender-related difference in the perceived freedom and happiness score averages in leisure time ($p > 0.05$). However, there was a significant gender-related difference in life satisfaction averages ($p < 0.05$). The averages life satisfaction score of male college students are significantly higher. The gender factor has a low level effect on life satisfaction.

Table 3. Comparison of Mean Scores of Perceived Freedom, Satisfaction and Happiness among College Students in Leisure Time According to Gender Variable

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Perceived Freedom in Leisure	Male	492	89.28	13.032	.595	.552
	Female	532	88.81	12.380		
Life Satisfaction	Male	492	17.24	5.771	-3.040	.002
	Female	532	18.30	5.457		
Happiness	Male	492	25.59	5.990	1.196	.232
	Female	532	25.17	5.242		

As it can be seen from Table 4, there was no significant difference in the mean values of perceived freedom in leisure and life satisfaction according to grade ($p>0.05$). However, there was a significant difference in happiness score averages depending on grade ($p<0.05$). The happiness score averages of second grade and third grade students are significantly higher than the score average of fourth grade students. Thus, the grade level parameter has a low level impact on happiness.

Table 4. Comparison of Mean Scores of Perceived Freedom, Satisfaction and Happiness among College Students in Leisure Time According to Grade Variable

	Grade	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
Perceived Freedom in Leisure time	1	127	88.46	12.12	.404	.751
	2	361	88.52	11.91		
	3	237	89.59	12.38		
	4	171	88.99	14.22		
Life Satisfaction	1	127	16.96	5.79	1.794	.147
	2	361	17.68	5.29		
	3	237	17.62	5.37		
	4	171	18.43	5.78		
Happiness	1	127	20.79	3.48	3.774	.010
	2	361	20.88	3.63		
	3	237	21.47	4.17		
	4	171	20.20	3.85		

As seen in Table 5, there was no significant difference in life satisfaction and happiness score averages due to active sports variable ($p>0.05$). In contrast, there was a significant difference the average score of perceived freedom in leisure time according to active sport status ($p<0.05$). College students who do active sports have significantly higher perceived freedom in leisure time hence the active sport status has a high level of impact on the perceived freedom in leisure time activities.

Table 5. Comparison of the Perceived Freedom in Leisure, Life Satisfaction and Happiness Scores of College Students According to Active Sports Status

	What is the state of participation in sports activity?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Perceived Freedom in Leisure	Active	459	91.48	11.90	5.63	.000
	Non-Active	565	87.05	12.98		
Life Satisfaction	Active	459	18.05	5.57	1.30	.194
	Non-Active	565	17.59	5.68		
Happiness	Active	459	25.45	5.70	0.41	.683
	Non-Active	565	25.30	5.55		

When Table 6 is examined, there is a significant relationship between the life satisfaction and happiness levels of college students ($p<0.05$). Similarly, a significant relationship was found between the perceived freedom in leisure time and their happiness levels. On a contrary, there is no significant relationship between students leisure time activities and their life satisfaction ($p>0.05$).

Table 6. The Relationship between Perceived Freedom, Life Satisfaction and Happiness Scores in Leisure Time

		Life Satisfaction	Happiness	Perceived Freedom in Leisure
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.239**	.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.711
	N	1024	1024	1024
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	.239**	.1	.145**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	1024	1024	1024
Perceived Freedom in Leisure	Pearson Correlation	.012	.145**	.1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.711	.000	
	N	1024	1024	1024

From Table 7, it can be seen that there is a low level positive and significant relationship between the perceived freedom in leisure time and happiness scores of college students ($p < 0.01$). The perception of freedom in leisure time activities accounted for 2.1% of the change in college students happiness ($R^2 = 0.021$; $F = 22.013$; $p < 0.001$). The level of freedom that college students perceive in leisure time has affects their happiness positively ($\beta = 0.14$; $p < 0.01$).

Table 7. Regression Analysis of Perceived Freedom in Leisure Time and Happiness Scores

Happiness	R	R Square	Beta	F	p
Perceived Freedom Leisure	.145 ^a	.021	0.145	22.013	0.000

It is understood from Table 8 that, there is no significant relationship between the levels of freedom perceived by students in leisure time and their life satisfaction ($p > 0.05$). The perceived level of freedom in leisure time explained 0.01% of the change in students' life satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.001$; $F = 0.137$; $p > 0.05$). The perceived freedom that university students perceive in their leisure time do not significantly affect their life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.012$; $p > 0.05$).

Table 8. Regression Analysis of Perceived Freedom in Leisure Time and Life Satisfaction Scores

Life Satisfaction	R	R Square	Beta	F	P
Perceived Freedom Leisure	.012	.001	.012	.137	.711

Discussion

It is generally accepted that participating leisure activities make positive contributions on individual's physical, mental and sociological status. From this point of view, the concepts of happiness, life satisfaction and perceived freedom in leisure time should be effectively evaluated in terms of leisure activities. According to the demographic findings obtained from this research, the group of students aged 17-20 is 17.4% ($n = 178$), while the 21-24 age range is 66.5% ($n = 681$) and 16.1% ($n = 165$) are 25 years and older. It was determined that 127 (92.6%) participants who answered the questionnaire were in first grade, 35.3% ($n = 361$) were in second grade, 23.1% ($n = 237$) were in third grade, lastly 171 (16.7%) were in fourth grade. Furthermore, 459 (91.48%) of the participants are actively engaging sports activity, on the other hand 565 (87.05%) participant are not interested in taking up sports actively.

According to the research findings; the levels of perceived freedom, life satisfaction and happiness perceived by university students in their leisure time were analyzed comparatively in terms of demographic factors. Based on our findings, there was no difference perceived freedom in leisure time scores according to gender and grade variables. These findings differentiate from the research conducted by Memili et al., (2019) and Öztürk et al., (2019). In both studies, the average scores of male participants according to the gender variable were higher

than those of women. Conversely, the results of the research carried out by Ardahan and Yerlisu Lapa (2010), VongTze (2005) also obtained similar results to these findings which contradict our studies. It is understood that the gender is a neutral variable and is not a determining parameter. These contradictions arising in terms of gender can be evaluated in terms of socio-cultural and educational situations. According to the literature, college students have high perceptions of freedom in leisure time regardless of their gender.

Another finding gained in the research is that there is a significant difference in the average perceived freedom scores in leisure time due to active sports status. College students who actively involve sports activities have significantly higher perceived freedom scores. Because the university offers opportunities for individuals to learn and develop new schemes constantly so that it is necessary and important for them to feel free. The status of active sport has a high impact on the level of perceived freedom in leisure time. This finding is similar to the research results of Guin et al (1996), Akdeniz et al (2018), Kleiber et al (1986), Karaman (2015), Çakır et al., (2016). In addition to argument; Guinn et al. (1996) suggested that the increase in participation in sports-grounded leisure time events would have an effect on perceived freedom in leisure time. In addition to that, Kleiber et al., (1986) stated that a high level of perceived freedom in leisure time activities will increase participation and satisfaction in activities especially involving sports games and art hobbies. To parallel this, Aydin (2016) found that participants who actively engaged in sport activities such as fitness had high levels of leisure time autonomy perceptions.

Another variable discussed in the study is the happiness level of college students. In our result, it is found that the level of college students happiness have no significant difference according to gender. Some consistent findings exist in the literature have similar results carried out to explore the differences in feeling of happiness adolescents and adults was found no differences as a function of gender. In terms of gender variable related to happiness; all the studies conducted by Huebner et al. (2000); Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, (2003); Park and Huebner (2005); Vera et al. (2012); Malmivaara, Hunagund and Hangal (2014) have similarities with our research findings. There are also some studies that do not coincide with our findings for instance Bartels et al. (2013) and Agbaria et al. (2012) found that subjective well-being status in an adolescent (12-20 years old) was more positive than in adults so it showed that adolescents were happier compared to older ones and experiencing fewer symptoms.

When the happiness variable is evaluated, it was determined that there was no significant difference due to active sports status. This findings was not coincided the study performed by Lathia, Sandstrom, Mascolo, and Rentfrow (2017). It shows that not only active exercises, but also non-exercise physical activity are also associated with happiness. These findings contradict the research findings of the World Health Organization's (who, 2019) research report, De Rezende et al (2014). According to these report findings, there is a strong significant relationship between physical activity and individual happiness levels so such people may have a low level of negative psychological symptoms. Thus, it was found that the number of studies on the relationship between leisure activities and participation and active sports with happiness was not sufficient.

Another variable discussed in the study is related to the life satisfaction of college students. According to our research findings, there is a significant gender-related difference in life satisfaction averages. The average life satisfaction score of male college students are significantly higher in our research findings. The reason of female students have less life satisfaction level compare to male students should be explored extensively in different studies with the idea that it may have economic and socio-cultural origins. Similar to our findings, Onyishi and Okongwu (2013), Yavuz and Sünbul (2004), and Lau and Bradshaw (2016), Vong Tze (2005), and Kabanoff (1982) have found similar results with our study. To broaden the debate Onyishi and Okongwu (2013) states that life satisfaction reflects an assessment of the products and results people achieve associated with their expectations for life and in terms of life satisfaction, are men have a more positive and high expectation than women. Another concerning finding given by Lau and Bradshaw (2016) that life satisfaction for young people is the perception that they are happy with their own lives and that their lives are on the right track. To discuss gender- related difference more; some researchers express that women experience insecurity about controlling their lives, which negatively affects their satisfaction in life. The reason for this; even if men and women are born with different similarities in various aspects due to their origin, they come from different cultural backgrounds and differ in their perception and evaluation of life (Mayungbo, 2016).

In our study, there was no significant difference in averages life satisfaction score according to grade in college student. These findings are similar to the study results of Rahman and friends (2018). They state that the atmosphere of the school, rather than grade, has a higher impact on student's life satisfaction. In this context, in relation to school life, experiences proffered at school are closely related to the life satisfaction of young people.

In this respect, the overall learning environment in the classroom, rather than the grade, is also related to the student's level of satisfaction in life.

Another finding in this study was that active sport status did not lead to a significant difference in life satisfaction. These findings contradict research findings carried out by Grant N, Wardle J, Steptoe a (2009), Joseph RP, Royse KE, Benitez TJ, Molasses DW (2013), Maher et al., (2013). In literature, it has been shown that involving regular sport activity can be associated with increased life satisfaction among all age groups. Moreover, there are positive relationships between life satisfaction and sport activities performed in leisure time so that people are more likely to show a strong intention to participate in leisure activities as long as they are satisfied with their lives (Heetae, 2019). Generally, the concept of life satisfaction is associated with all dimensions of an individual's life. Within this framework, the relationships between active sports and life satisfaction can be examined in depth with qualitative research methods.

As a result of regression analysis, there is a positive correlation between college students perceive freedom in their leisure time, life satisfaction and happiness levels. In addition to this, significant correlation was found between student's perceived freedom in leisure time and their happiness levels. In the meantime, there is no significant relationship between the levels of freedom that students perceive in leisure time and their life satisfaction. According to regression analysis, the perceived level of freedom in leisure time accounted for 2.1% of the change in students' happiness. So that, the levels of freedom that college students perceive in leisure time impact their happiness levels in a positive way. These findings are similar to the research findings of Bailey and Fernando (2012), Broughton and Beggs (2007), Janke et al., (2011), Lloyd and Auld (2002). Furthermore, Bailey and Fernando (2012) research revealed that participation in leisure time activities and perceived level of freedom influence on individual's happiness level positively. While the perception of freedom experienced in leisure time activities affects the individual's psychological satisfaction and happiness level positively and it has been stated that this is related to the degree to which the individual is satisfied with their leisure time experience (Broughton & Beggs, 2007). In his longitudinal study, in which Janke et al., (2011) examined the role of life experiences on leisure time perception, Janke et al., (2011) indicated that events happening in individuals life cause some fluctuations in feelings and attitudes perceived freedom in leisure time. In addition to this, Lloyd and Auld (2002) found that the perceived sense of freedom in leisure time has positive effects on individual's quality of life.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the recreation based physical activity that individual voluntarily participates is closely related to the life satisfaction and happiness. The point to be emphasized here individuals should perceive enough freedom and feel free because feeling free is a pioneering concept that shapes and determines the level of satisfaction and happiness. Our research highlights that the majority of the sample groups in universities have a high degree of awareness of leisure time freedom level (89.04%), however, the level of life satisfaction and happiness are moderate. In summary, this paper concluded that, the perceived level of freedom in leisure time which applied in this research on the subject of college students has a positive impact on life satisfaction and happiness.

The limitations of the research are the use of the convenience sampling method, the instantaneous collection of data moreover the research consists only of students studying at certain universities. Future studies can be carried out not only in the student group, but also in a larger group such as academicians and employees from different professional field of public private sector. It is recommended that seminars, conferences and multifaceted activities should be organized in order to raise awareness on this subject by expanding the scope of the research for further studies in future.

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