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EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEISURE SATISFACTION AND EMPATHIC TENDENCY LEVELS IN PRE-SERVICE PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS TEACHERS

Research article

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between leisure satisfaction and empathic tendency levels by certain demographic variables in university students. The study was conducted using a relational screening model. The study was carried out with 180 pre-service physical education and sports teachers selected using a convenient sampling method. In analyzing the data, descriptive statistics, t-Test, ANOVA and Pearson correlation analyses were performed using the SPSS 26.0 package program. The findings of the study revealed that the difference between the participant gender and the Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS) was not significant, while there was a significant difference with the Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) in women participants. There was no significant difference between the year in school variable of the participants and the LSS and ETS. A positive and low-level significant relationship was found between the participants' year of sports variable and LSS and ETS. A positive and moderately significant relationship was found between the mean scores of pre-service physical education and sports teacher in the leisure satisfaction scale and the empathic tendency scale. As a result, it can be said that the increase in the leisure satisfaction level of pre-service physical education and sports teachers positively affects their empathic behaviors. It is thought that planning activities that will increase the leisure satisfaction levels of pre-service physical education and sports teachers will contribute to their empathic behaviors.

Keywords: Pre-service physical education and sports teachers, leisure satisfaction, empathic tendency

1. Introduction

Many roles and responsibilities are expected particularly from physical education and sports teachers in the education process. Communication skills are very important in fulfilling these roles and responsibilities. Therefore, physical education and sports teachers need effective communication and empathy skills. In acquiring this skill, knowing themselves and others, and establishing social relationships are very important. Koçyiğit et al. (2018) stated that free time activities are at the forefront of the elements that enable the individual to acquire the skills of recognizing and managing their own emotions through socialization. As a result, it is believed that the level of satisfaction obtained by physical education and sports teachers as a result of leisure activities will have an impact on their professional and social lives.

Free time is defined as the time period left over from the work that the individuals has to do to continue their life (Mull et al., 1997), as the time when the individuals are free to do what they choose in their out-of-work time (Tezcan, 1994), and as the time when individuals participate in activities for the purposes of resting, having fun, increasing their knowledge or skills, participating in social life, etc. after their social duties are fulfilled (Altunay, 2015).

University years are one of the periods that have a great impact on students' education processes and when students try to be accepted by expressing themselves in the social environment. During this period, the skills and habits acquired in their free time have positive or negative effects in the later process, and with whom they spend time is important. Arslan (2011) highlighted that today, everyone has more free time than in the past, and emphasized the need to make the right choice among the diverse set of activities. When free time is not spent with the right activities, it can lead to outcomes such as depression, alcohol, television and (Sivan & Ruskin, 2000) technology addiction (Siddiqi & Memon, 2016). When spent with positive activities, it improves the self-esteem and skills of the individual (McAvoy, 2001), it can prevent the formation of undesirable student behaviors (Ayhan et al., 2022), and it can enable students to develop identity and socialize (Büküşoğlu & Bayturan, 2005). Because of these risks and opportunities, Karaküçük (2014) makes a double-edged sword analogy regarding free time. Planned free time activities support the process of developing desired behaviors by ensuring students' harmony with the society.

Mahoney (2000) stated that extracurricular activities reduce students' dropout and crime rates. In addition, young people who cannot socialize may have tendencies towards being offensive, aggressive and violent (Tuncay, 2000). The active use of free time has an impact on many important factors including work life, family, friends, and social environment (Yaşartürk & Yılmaz, 2019). According to Büküşolu and Bayturan (2005), participating in free time activities can reduce the likelihood of youth joining risky groups by satisfying the need for self-realization and belonging to a group. According to Yaşartürk et al. (2021), students who have a positive attitude towards free time experience lower test anxiety. We can emphasize that it is critical for teachers to have a wide repertoire of leisure activities, to plan activities and to ensure the participation of students in these activities, to prevent negative behaviors of students at school and to prevent them from being included in the wrong social environments.

Although people participate in leisure activities for a variety of reasons, the main purpose is to enjoy the activities and thus achieve satisfaction (Çelik, 2011; Yaşartürk, 2013; Gürkan et al., 2021). With the positive use of free time, people get satisfaction and develop a desire to participate more in activities (Cengiz & Yaşartürk, 2020). Leisure satisfaction can also be evaluated as the level of meeting the free time needs of individuals (Demir, Yeşiltepe & Demir, 2013). Beard & Ragheb (1980) define leisure satisfaction as positive emotions obtained by individuals participating in activities. In addition to the positive effects that free time activities have on students, leisure satisfaction obtained by participating in activities, and teachers having a positive relationship with teacher's self-efficacy beliefs (Akay & Yaşartürk 2023), life (Sevin & Şen, 2019) and job satisfaction (Pearson, 1998) makes these activities important for teachers. Therefore, the leisure satisfaction level of physical education and sports teachers also affects the quality of education, and establishing social relationships will help with developing the habit of empathizing which would contribute to their communication skills.

Empathy is the efforts made by an individual in communication by putting themselves in the other person's shoes, looking at events from their perspective, and trying to understand their feelings and thoughts (Pala, 2008). Dökmen (1988) described empathy as the individual's

understanding, feeling, and transferring of a situation to the other person by looking at the events from the other person's perspective. As evident in the definitions, the understanding of the individual in the communication process indicates the cognitive aspect of empathy while feeling like the other person indicates the emotional side empathy. Empathic tendency not only creates the emotional aspect of empathy, but also shows the potential to empathize (Saygili, Kırıktas & Gülsoy, 2015). The educational process begins with establishing communication. In this process, teachers are in constant communication with their colleagues, administrators, students, and parents. Therefore, they are expected to have strong communication skills. It was reported that empathizing is important in communication skills and that teachers should make empathic communication an attitude to establish healthy communication with students (Pala, 2008). The fact that physical education and sports teachers are generally in contact with students and parents reveals the importance of empathy skills.

Teachers with a high level of empathy can be more successful in recognizing and solving students' problems. Findlay et al. (2006) stated that people with empathy skills are more successful compared to others in understanding the underlying causes of others' behaviors. Furthermore, students are more likely to open up to teachers who understand their problems and do not judge them. Because students feel more respect and love for their teachers when they believe they understand them (Kuzgun, 2006). It has been found that people with high empathy skills have more positive social adaptation, low aggression tendencies (Sergeant et al., 2006) and show more prosocial behavior characteristics (McMahon et al., 2006) than those with low empathy skills. As shown in studies, empathy improves individuals' social aspects. It is very important for the young people who constitute our future to acquire empathy skills, socialize, and adapt to the society. Physical education and sports lessons in schools contribute to the acquisition of these skills.

Individuals learn to do activities together, to win and lose, to share, to cooperate, and to be respectful of other people's opinions and thoughts through sports (Şahan, 2008). Thanks to sports, individuals can have healthy lifestyle, develop social identity and increase physical well-being (Sarol et. al., 2022). Additionally, individuals develop the characteristics of knowing the society they live in, learning traditions and customs, being aware of right and wrong, and being respectful to other people through sports (Yetim, 2000). Sports can be said to be effective in the socialization of individuals in these aspects. Considering the effect of sports on socialization, physical education and sports lessons in schools enable students to establish social relationships in controlled environments, to complete an activity in cooperation by following the rules, and to create a sense of unity with their friends, thus improving their empathy skills. Therefore, it is important to determine the empathic tendency levels of pre-service physical education and sports teachers. It is expected that physical education and sports teachers, who are satisfied with their participation in free time activities, establish social relations and develop emphatic tendencies as a result. From this point of view, the aim of the study is to examine the relationship between leisure satisfaction and emphatic tendencies of pre-service physical education and sports teachers.

2. Method

The study was conducted using a relational screening model. The screening model is used to obtain general information from a large group. Relational screening is a research model in which the covariance of variables are examined (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018).

2.1. Study Group

The population of the study consists of 190 pre-service teachers studying at Kırıkkale University, Physical Education and Sports Teaching department between 2021-2022. The sample of the study consists of 180 pre-service physical education and sports teachers selected from the population using the convenient sampling method.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

The data collection tools consist of 3 sections. The first section consists of a personal information form developed by the authors that includes demographic information about the participants (gender, year in school, age, and year of sports).

In the second section, the Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS) developed by Beard & Ragheb (1980) to determine the satisfaction levels of pre-service physical education and sports teachers. The adaptation of the scale to Turkish, and the validity and reliability studies of the scale were performed by Karlı et al. (2008). The scale consisting of 6 sub-factors contains a total of 39 items. Items in the scale are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Almost never true of me, 5=Almost always true of me). The high scores obtained from the scale indicate that the participants' leisure satisfaction levels are high. In the Turkish adaptation study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.92. In our study, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.97.

In the last section of the survey, the Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) developed by Dökmen (1988) was used to measure the participants' potential to empathize. The scale is a 5-point likert scale consisting of 20 items. The items 3,6,7,8,11,12,13 and 15 are reverse-coded in the scale. A minimum of 20 and a maximum of 100 points are obtained from the scale. High scores obtained from the scale indicate that participants have high empathic tendencies, and low scores indicate low empathic tendencies. Dökmen (1988) implemented the scale to a group of 70 people twice, with an interval of 3 weeks, using the test-retest method. As a result, the reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.82. Afterwards, the split-half method was performed and the correlation coefficient of odd and even items was calculated as 0.86. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was measured as 0.79 in our study.

2.3. Data Analysis

Kurtosis and skewness values were examined to determine the tests to be used in the data analysis. George & Mallery (2019) accept the range of ± 2 to be acceptable for the assumption of normality. When the kurtosis and skewness values in our study are examined, it is seen that

they support the normality assumption (Table 1). In the analyses, t-Test for pairwise comparisons, ANOVA and Pearson Correlation for multiple comparisons were performed using the SPSS 26.0 program. The significance level was accepted as $p < 0.05$ in the ANOVA and t-Test analyses, and $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$ were accepted in the Pearson Correlation analysis.

Table 1. *LSS and ETS value table*

Scales	Item Number	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha
LSS	39	192	3.46	0.84	-0.022	-0.756	0.97
ETS	20	192	3.25	0.31	0.476	0.868	0.79

When table 1 is examined, it is seen that the mean score of LSS is 3.46, the standard deviation is 0.84; and the mean score of ETS is 3.25 and the standard deviation is 0.31. When the LSS skewness (-0.022) and kurtosis (-0.756) values and the ETS skewness (0.476) and kurtosis (0.868) values are examined, it is seen that the assumption of normality is met. The internal consistency of the LSS (39 items) was 0.97 and the internal consistency of ETS (20 items) was calculated as 0.79.

3. Findings

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of participants*

Variables	n	%	$\bar{X}$	S
Gender	Male	100	55.5	
	Female	80	45.5	
Year in School	Freshmen	36	20.0	
	Sophomore	31	17.3	
	Junior	56	31.1	
	Senior	57	31.6	
Age	180		22.62	2.02
Year of Sports	180		7.60	4.28

According to table 2, 55.5% of the participants are male while 45.5% are female. It was determined that 20% of the participants are freshmen, 17.3% are sophomore, 31.1% are junior, and 31.6% are Senior students. The mean age of pre-service physical education and sports teachers was 22.62 and the year of sports was determined to be 7.60.

Table 3. *The t-test results for LSS and ETS by the gender variable of university students*

Scales	Female (n=80)		Male (n=100)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Psychologic	3.31	1.03	3.39	.94	.562	.575
Education	3.42	.98	3.38	.87	-.316	.753
Social	3.50	.98	3.48	.80	-.212	.833
Relaxation	3.54	.90	3.43	1.03	-.800	.425
Physiologic	3.40	.93	3.48	.94	.566	.572
Aesthetic	3.50	.98	3.45	1.00	-.366	.715
LSS	3.43	.84	3.43	.85	-.022	.983
ETS	3.31	.34	3.19	.28	-2.436	.016*

(p<0.05)*

Table 3 shows, the results of the t-test examining the effect of gender on students' leisure satisfaction and emphatic education levels. According to the results of the analysis, there was no significant difference between the gender variable and LSS and its sub-dimensions, while a significant difference was found between the gender variable and ETS [$t_{(178)}=-2.436$; $p<0.05$]. It is seen that female students have emphatic tendency scores of ($\bar{X}=3.31$) and male students ($\bar{X}=3.19$). This shows that female pre-service teachers have a higher empathy potential than male pre-service teachers.

Table 4. *ANOVA results for LSS and ETS by the year in school variable of university students*

Sub Dimensions	Year in school	$\bar{X}$	N	F	P	Significant Difference
Psychologic	Freshmen	3.27	36	.538	.657	
	Sophomore	3.30	31			
	Junior	3.42	56			
	Senior	3.52	57			
Education	Freshmen	3.30	36	1.133	.337	
	Sophomore	3.34	31			
	Junior	3.53	56			
	Senior	3.58	57			
Social	Freshmen	3.42	36	.323	.809	
	Sophomore	3.48	31			
	Junior	3.60	56			
	Senior	3.54	57			
Relaxation	Freshmen	3.43	36	.127	.944	
	Sophomore	3.48	31			
	Junior	3.49	56			
	Senior	3.57	57			
Physiologic	Freshmen	3.38	36	.360	.782	
	Sophomore	3.40	31			
	Junior	3.46	56			
	Senior	3.59	57			

Aesthetic	Freshmen	3.37	36	.841	.473
	Sophomore	3.41	31		
	Junior	3.66	56		
	Senior	3.58	57		
LSS	Freshmen	3.36	36	.528	.663
	Sophomore	3.40	31		
	Junior	3.52	56		
	Senior	3.56	57		
ETS	Freshmen	3.21	36	1.048	.372
	Sophomore	3.26	31		
	Junior	3.32	56		
	Senior	3.33	57		

Table 6 shows, the results of the ANOVA test for the year in school variable of the participants showed that there was no significant difference between the year in school variable and the LSS ($p>0.05$). In other words, it can be said that the year in school variable does not have a significant effect on students' leisure satisfaction. There was no significant difference between the year in school variable of participants and the ETS ($p>0.05$). Although it is not significant, it is seen that as the year in school the participants increases, their empathic education and leisure satisfaction increase.

Table 5. Correlation table results for the age variable of the participants and LSS and ETS

		Psychologic	Education	Social	Relaxation	Physiologic	Aesthetic	LSS	ETS
Age	r	-.035	-.104	.026	.004	-.004	-.046	.034	.041
	p	.632	.149	.718	.959	.952	.525	.644	.576

Table 5 shows, the results of the correlation analysis performed to determine the relationship between the age variable and LSS and ETS showed no significant relationship between the age variable of the participants and LSS and ETS ($p>0.05$).

Table 6. Correlation results for the participants' years of sport variable and LSS and ETS

		Psychologic	Education	Social	Relaxation	Physiologic	Aesthetic	LSS	ETS
Year of Sports	r	.274**	.169*	.187*	.194**	.290**	.196**	.244**	.203**
	p	.000	.015	.012	.006	.000	.005	.000	.004

($p<0.01$)** ($p<0.05$)*

Table 6 shows, the results of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between the year in sports of pre-service physical education and sports teachers and LSS and ETS. The analysis results revealed a positive and low-level significant relationship between the variable of the year in sports and the LSS and ETS. It can be said that as the year in sports increase, the leisure satisfaction and empathetic tendency levels of the participants who do sports increase.

Table 7. *Correlation Results of LSS and ETS*

Scales		Psychologic	Education	Social	Relaxation	Physiologic	Aesthetic	LSS
ETS	r	.310**	.325**	.308**	.300**	.202**	.214**	.372**
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

(p<0.01)**

Table 7 shows, the results of the analysis conducted to determine the relationship between the leisure satisfaction and empathic tendencies of physical education and sports teachers are presented. The analysis revealed a moderately positive and significant relationship between the mean scores of LSS and ETS. In other words, the increase in the leisure satisfaction level of the participants also increases their tendency to engage in empathetic behavior.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study aims to examine the relationship between university students' leisure satisfaction and empathic tendency levels. The data collected for this purpose are discussed in line with the literature.

In our study, no significant difference was found between LSS and its sub-factors by the gender variable of the participants. Ngai (2005) and Misra & McKean (2000) found in their study that male participants had a significantly higher leisure satisfaction. However, similar to the studies by Siegenthaler & O'Dell (2000), Lu & Hu (2005), Ardahan & Yerlisu Lapa (2010), Yaşartürk et al., (2018) and Ayhan & Özel (2020), our study results showed that gender does not significantly affect leisure satisfaction. When the literature on the effects of gender on empathic tendency is examined, some studies showed no difference (Akçakaya, 2021; Yılmaz & Akyel, 2008), while others found that the difference was significant and in favor of women (Ekinci & Aybek, 2010; Mellor & Fung, 2012). Arnocky & Stroink (2010) stated that gender had a significant effect on empathy and women had higher emotional empathy. Gender roles suggest that women are raised to value and empathize more with the needs of others than men (Stern, Dietz, & Kalof, 1993). Our study results support the literature.

No significant difference was found between the year in school variable of pre-service physical education and sports teachers and LSS and its sub-dimensions. However, although it is not significant, as the year in school of the participants increases, the mean score they get from the leisure satisfaction scale increases. Similarly, Kaya (2019), in their study conducted with high school students, found that although there was no significant difference between the year in school variable and leisure satisfaction, senior year students' leisure satisfaction was higher. Kocaer & Yaşartürk (2022) found in their study that as the year in school the participants increased, the level of benefits obtained from recreational activities increased. In their study, Çavuşoğlu (2021) and Yıldırım & Latifoğlu (2020) examined the effect of year in school on leisure satisfaction, and determined that there was a significant difference between the leisure satisfaction of the freshmen participants and the leisure satisfaction of the other year in school, and that they were at a lower level. When the literature on the subject is examined, it is seen that the senior in the year in school have higher leisure satisfaction. According to

Uğurlu (2021), the loneliness levels of the university students in their first year in university were quite high and their loneliness levels decreased in the following years. Karaca & Yerlisu Lapa (2016) consider leisure activities as an effective factor for the socialization of the individual, but state that the lack of friends creates an obstacle to participation in activities. Therefore, the feeling of loneliness of students trying to gain a new social environment in the first years of university may have negatively affected their participation in activities and their leisure satisfaction. There was no significant difference between the year in school variable and empathic tendencies of the participants. It is seen that the mean scores of pre-service physical education and sports teachers obtained from the emphatic tendency scale increase as the grade level increases. Similarly, in the study conducted by Yurttaş & Yetkin (2003) with freshmen and senior university students, although no significant difference was found in empathy skills, it was found that senior students mean scores were higher. Alver (2005) found in their study that the empathy skills of the junior and senior students were at a significant level and had a higher mean score. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the students who are in their last year of university education have higher empathy skills. Findings of our study support the literature. The fact that pre-service physical education and sports teachers take courses that will improve their empathy skills during their undergraduate education process (drama in physical education, human relations and communication, drama in education) may have improved their empathy skills.

In our study, a positive and low level significant relationship was found between the year in sports of pre-service physical education and sports teachers and LSS and its sub-dimensions. Our study results are in alignment with the results of other studies conducted on leisure satisfaction. Yazgeç (2019), in their study on individuals participating in recreational activities, found that those who exercise regularly have a significantly higher leisure satisfaction. In their study conducted with physical education and sports teachers, Akay (2023) found that teachers who exercise regularly had significantly higher levels of leisure satisfaction. Lu & Hu (2005) found that individuals participating in recreational activities involving physical activity had higher levels of leisure satisfaction. In a longitudinal study examining the effect of leisure activities on leisure satisfaction, Shin & You (2013) found a positive and significant effect on leisure satisfaction of adolescents who spend their free time by participating in sports activities. Siegenthaler & O'Dell (2000), and Ahn & Song, (2021) stated that sports leisure activities increase leisure satisfaction more than other types of activities. Sports, regular exercise, and participation in physical activity are shown to have a positive effect on leisure satisfaction in the literature. Therefore, the high level of leisure satisfaction of pre-service physical education and sports teachers who have more years of sports in our study overlaps with the literature.

A positive and low level significant relationship was found between the year in sports variable of pre-service physical education and sports teachers and ETS and its sub-dimensions. Eraslan (2015) found the emphatic tendency levels of the participants who are licensed and engaged in sports activities were higher than those who did not. Yılmaz & Akyel (2008) found that the emphatic tendency levels of those who do sports professionally were higher and Gençoğlu & Namlı (2020) found that the cognitive empathy levels of university students who do sports professionally were higher. In their study on team sports and individual sports

athletes, Aslan & Çoknaz (2016) found that the emphatic tendencies of national athletes were significantly higher than other athletes and attributed the reason for this to the fact that the sports ethics and character of national athletes are established as they have been in sports for longer. There are also research results showing that sports do not have a significant effect on empathy, which do not overlap with our findings (Karabulut & Bahadır, 2013; Tozoğlu, Dursun & Şebin 2020).

In our study, no significant relationship was found between the age variable and the leisure satisfaction levels of pre-service physical education and sports teachers. Çakır (2017), Riddick (1986), Demiral (2018), Yaşartürk & Bilgin (2018) found that age did not significantly affect leisure satisfaction. Ayyıldız (2015), Broughten & Beggs (2008) found that age had a significant effect on leisure satisfaction. In their study on leisure satisfaction, Brown & Frankel (1993) found that leisure satisfaction decreased depending on age. Similarly, Yerlisu Lapa (2013) concluded that psychologic and physiologic leisure satisfaction of the participants decreased as the age increased. In our study, no significant difference was found between the age variable and emphatic tendencies of pre-service physical education and sports teachers. When the literature on the subject is examined, it has been determined that some studies did not show significant difference (Mutlu, Şentürk & Zorba, 2014; Çelik & Çağdaş, 2010; İnan & Kartal, 2018) which is aligned with our study, while there are other studies showing significant differences (Kılıç, 2005; Biçer & Başer, 2019) and that the emphatic tendency increases depending on age. Lennon & Eisenberg (1990) argue that empathy skills is most developed in adults. In our study, the reason why age did not have a significant effect on pre-service teachers' emphatic tendencies and leisure satisfaction can be attributed to the ages of participants were relatively close to each other since all participants in the sample group were students.

A positive and moderately significant relationship was found between leisure satisfaction and emphatic tendency. According to the findings, when the leisure satisfaction levels of pre-service physical education and sports teachers increases, their empathy skills also increase. Koçyiğit & Özel (2018) stated that recreational activities play an important role in individuals' understanding of others, establishing empathy with them and developing communication skills, and as a result, empathic tendency levels of individuals participating in recreational activities will increase. Yiğiter (2013) found that recreational activities improve students' empathic skills. The findings of our study overlap with the literature.

As a result, it can be said that leisure activities contribute to the socialization and adaptation of individuals to society and ultimately increase the empathic tendencies of individuals. According to the findings we obtained from our study, the empathy skills of pre-service physical education and sports teachers are not sufficient and should be improved. It reveals the necessity of developing empathic tendency levels that will determine the communication of teachers with the elements of education and the quality of education.

5. Suggestions

Since empathy is a teachable skill, preparation of in-service programs for teachers is recommended. With drama technique and role playing method used in education faculties, students can be provided with the ability to look at events from someone else's perspective and to develop their understanding of the other person. Based on our study results, planning free time activities that will enable pre-service physical education and sports teachers to establish social relations can also contribute to their empathy skills.

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