

Examining the relationship between hope and life satisfaction among middle school students

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History Submitted: 16 November 2017 Revised: 5 December 2017 Published: 8 December 2017</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords Life satisfaction Hope Positive psychology Gender difference Grade level</p>	<p>Life satisfaction has received a vast amount of attention in positive psychology. The importance of life satisfaction in education has also been emphasized for students' comprehensive development. In this regard, it is crucial to understand factors related to a student's life satisfaction for their mental, social, and academic development. Positive psychology highly focuses on hope, and hope has been found related to desirable outcomes. However, it is still not known the role of hope in life satisfaction for Turkish middle school students. The main goal of this study was to examine hope's prediction of life satisfaction in middle school students. This study also aimed to investigate differences in students' life satisfaction based on their gender and grade levels. Data were collected from 339 middle school students attended three public middle school located in the west of Turkey. The findings of the study revealed that hope significantly predicted family ($R^2 = .21$), school ($R^2 = .24$), friend ($R^2 = .24$), self ($R^2 = .40$), living environment ($R^2 = .13$), and total ($R^2 = .43$) life satisfaction scores. The results also showed that girls had higher scores on life satisfaction than boys in school, friend, living environment, and total life satisfaction scores whereas no difference was observed in family and self-satisfaction scores. Regarding grade level, significant differences were found in family, school, self, and total life satisfactions scores. According to post-hoc comparisons, 8th graders reported lower level of life satisfaction. No differences were found in friend and living environment satisfaction scores based on gender. The results with implication for future research and practice are discussed.</p>

1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is one of the concepts that has been widely addressed throughout the positive psychology literature. Life satisfaction is generally considered as cognitive domain of subjective well-being, which is a positive variable that basically refers to one's global assessment of his or her own life. The literature has identified two broad domains of subjective well-being: cognitive judgment of satisfaction and emotional aspects consisting positive and negative effects (Diener, 2000; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991).

1.1. Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is one person's own evaluation of his or her life for a longer period of life (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003), and refers to "a cognitive, judgmental process" (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985, p.71). Based on the subjective well-being theoretical model (Diener, 1984; 2000; Lucas et al., 1996; Pavot & Diener, 1993), life satisfaction is interdependent from positive or negative

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effect. Life satisfaction does not refer an evaluation of one's life according to objectively determined standards, rather it is cognitive judgment of the present state based on his or her set of criteria (Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener et al., 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993; Shin & Johnson, 1978). "It appears that individuals 'construct' a standard, which they perceive as appropriate for themselves, and compare the circumstances of their life to that standard" (Pavot et al., 1991, s. 150). Therefore, people can place importance to life domains differently depending on personal judgments.

In addition to its popularity in psychology literature, the concept of life satisfaction also has interested in education (e.g., Bozkurt & Sönmez, 2016; Guess & McCane-Bowling, 2016; Suldo, Savage, & Mercer, 2014). In studies examined life satisfaction among students, relationships between life satisfaction and various psychological and educational outcomes have been investigated. The literature has also documented the relationships between many variables and life satisfaction among middle school students.

In a study, Lyons, Otis, Huebner and Hill (2014) found that lower level of life satisfaction could cause maladaptive behaviors, hence elevated level of life satisfaction can be protective factor for middle school students. Gilman and Huebner (2006) conducted a study to investigate the psychological characteristics of adolescents based on their level of life satisfaction. Participants were divided into three groups depending on their level of life satisfaction: "low", "average", and "high" life satisfaction groups. Results showed that high life satisfaction group had significantly more adaptive functioning than other groups and none of them had clinical level of psychological symptoms. However, 7% of participants in average and 42% of participants in low life satisfaction group indicated clinical levels of symptoms (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). In another study, school and family satisfaction were negatively correlated to internet addiction, so increasing life satisfaction can be protective against internet addiction (Telef, 2016). The studies among middle school students has shown that different variables affect the level of life satisfaction such as teacher support (Guess & McCane-Bowling, 2016), ADHD (Ogg, Bateman, Dedrick, & Suldo, 2016), and school climate (Suldo, Thalji-Raitano, Hasemeyer, Gelley, & Hoy, 2013).

Çivitci (2009) found that perceived family attitude, class level, and perceived academic achievement were associated to greater number of life satisfaction dimensions among 345 Turkish middle school students. In another study in Turkey, Bozkurt and Sönmez (2016) investigated the relationships between some demographic, personal, and environmental variables and life satisfaction among 184 (80 girls and 104 boys) seventh grade students attended religious middle school. Results revealed that having personal computer and enough allowance were related to greater level of life satisfaction, and using busses to go to school was associated with less family relationship satisfaction, less life satisfaction, and less satisfaction of the relationships with important people (Bozkurt & Sönmez, 2016).

Regarding other factors affecting life satisfaction, for example, Eryılmaz (2011) found in a study with 233 Turkish adolescents (121 males and 112 females) that positive future expectation significantly predicted subjective well-being ($R^2 = .24, p < .001$). In another study, Şirin and Ulaş (2015) examined the relationship between subjective well-being and character education among 326 middle school students. Results showed that character education increased middle school student's subjective well-being. Students from high socio economic status had higher level of subjective well-being. In addition, girls reported more subjective well-being than boys (Şirin & Ulaş, 2015).

As shown throughout the literature, life satisfaction could be related to different variables and there are several factors affecting life satisfaction. In that respect, hope, as a positive variable which is widely interested in positive psychology, has a potential to have a close relationship with life satisfaction. As explained, the literature has emphasized the importance of middle school students' life satisfaction for their academic and personal development. Thus, it is valuable and needed to consider possible effects of hope on life satisfaction.

1.2. Hope

Hope has been considered within two major categories: cognitive-based and emotional based. Cognitive-based hope refers to cognitions or beliefs that motivate people for future goals and aims whereas emotional-based hope is more related to feelings motivating people (Lopez, Snyder, & Pedrotti, 2003). However, Snyder et al. (1991) proposed a new model including both cognitive and emotional aspects of hope. According to this new model, hope basically refers to a cognitive combination of two components: agency and pathways. The agency component is about one's successfully determination of goals for past, present, and future to pursue whereas the pathways component refers to the ability to make successful plans to achieve these goals (Rand & Cheavens, 2011; Snyder et al., 1991).

The literature has found hope associated with satisfaction, self-worth, self-care, depression, or anxiety (Canty-Mitchell, 2001; Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, Coimbra, & Mitchell, 2015; Michael & Snyder, 2005; Peleg, Barak, Harel, Rochberg, & Hoofien, 2009; Rawdin, Evans, & Rabow, 2013; Rustoen, Cooper, & Miaskowski, 2010; Visser, Loess, Jeglic, & Hirsch, 2013). In addition, studies conducted with middle school students have shown that hope is a possible contributor to decreased possibility of being bullied/victim (Atik, 2009), mental health and academic achievements (Marques, Pais-Ribeiro, & Lopez, 2011), and life satisfaction and lower level of depression (Jiang, Huebner, & Hills, 2013; Lagacé-Séguin & d'Entremont, 2010). Therefore, there is a theoretical sense that hope is a potential variable that can positively affect life satisfaction.

For middle school students, as explained, life satisfaction is an important concept to have more academic achievement and better mental health, hence it is important to examine factors and variables affecting life satisfaction of students. Even though the literature has shown that hope is a potential contributor for desirable outcomes, to our knowledge, no study investigated the effects of hope on life satisfaction in Turkish middle school students. Thus, the main goal of this study was to examine whether hope is a significant predictor of life satisfaction in middle school students. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate differences in middle school students' life satisfaction based on their gender and grade level.

2. Method

2.1. Study Design

This study was designed as a non-experimental correlational study. In correlational studies, it is possible to examine the relationships between multiple variables. It is also possible to examine the degree of the relationship between the variables investigated (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

2.2. Participants

The sample of this study included 339 (196 girls, 138 boys, and five did not indicate) students attended three Turkish middle public schools located in the west of Turkey. Participants' age ranged from 10 to 15 ($M = 12.34$, $SD = 1.30$). One hundred and nine (32.2%) participants were 5th graders, 79 (23.3%) were 6th graders, 86 (25.4%) were 7th graders, and 65 (19.2%) were 8th graders. Participation in the study was voluntarily.

Before data collection, permissions from Provincial Directorate for National Education, and three schools' principals were obtained. Students were asked to participate in the study in the classroom environments, and an explanation about the study was provided before distribution the surveys. All data were collected in person, no personal information such as name or ID were asked.

2.3. Instruments

Demographic form. To gather information about participants' demographic variables such as gender, age, and grade, a Personal Information Form was created and utilized.

Children's Hope Scale (CHS). CHS was originally developed by Snyder et al. (1997), and adopted into Turkish by Atik and Kemer (2009). It measures children's level of hope based on two dimensions: agency and pathways but for this study, only total scores were used. CHS has six items (e.g., "I think I am doing pretty well" and "When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it") on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *none of the time* to (6) *all of the time*. CHS total scores range from six to 36, and a higher score indicates a higher level of hope. For the Turkish version of CHS, Atik and Kemer (2009) found Chronbach's alpha coefficient of .74, and test-re-test correlation coefficient of .57. For the current study, internal consistency coefficient was found as .74, which means an acceptable level of reliability.

Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS). MSLSS was developed by Huebner (1994) to measure children's life satisfaction based on five domains: family, friends, school, living environment, and self. Civitci (2007) adopted MSLSS into Turkish. MSLSS has 36 items (e.g., "I like spending time with my parents" and "I enjoy school activities") on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *never* to (4) *almost always*. MSLSS provides scores for each domain and a total score, and a higher score indicates more life satisfaction. For the internal consistency of the Turkish version of MSLSS, Civitci (2007) found Chronbach's alpha coefficient .92 for total scale, .82 for family, .85 for school, .85 for friends, .82 for self, and .83 for living environment domains. Regarding stability, Civitci (2007) found test-retest correlation coefficient .81 for total scale, .75 for family, .70 for school, .70 for friends, .53 for self, and .81 for living environment domains. For the current study, we found Chronbach's Alpha coefficients as following: .91 for total scale, .75 for family, .82 for school, .85 for friends, .77 for self, and .73 for living environment domains. The overall reliability coefficients for total score and domains showed acceptable level of internal consistency.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary Analysis

Before data analyses, a data screening procedure was conducted to examine accuracy, missing values, potential outliers, and assumptions for multivariate analyses. First, we reviewed the data and removed the cases that did not complete any of survey materials. Then, missing values were replaced with the series mean. We checked the outliers by examining standardized scores (*z* scores) of the variables. *Z* scores exceeding 3.29 ($p < .001$, two-tailed test) can be considered as

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Hope	-						
2. Family Satisfaction	.46*	-					
3. School Satisfaction	.49*	.39*	-				
4. Friends Satisfaction	.49*	.44*	.37*	-			
5. Self-Satisfaction	.63*	.52*	.42*	.57*	-		
6. Living Environment Satisfaction	.35*	.38*	.38*	.38*	.37*	-	
7. Total Satisfaction	.66*	.71*	.74*	.76*	.77*	.68*	-
<i>M</i>	28.44	3.56	3.04	3.37	3.31	3.27	3.31
<i>SD</i>	5.05	.47	.64	.59	.59	.59	.42
<i>Skew</i>	-.45	-1.27	-.61	-.76	-.74	-.69	-.51
<i>Kurtosis</i>	-.56	1.06	.14	-.49	-.19	-.19	-.43

Note. * $p < .01$

outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Therefore, totally nine outliers were removed from the data set. Regarding tolerance and variance inflation factors (Hair et al., 2010), multicollinearity was not present. Last, to check the normality, absolute skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable level (less than 2.58; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), which refers to a symmetrical distribution of the data. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations (SDs), skew, kurtosis, and correlations among the variables in this study.

3.2. Relationship between Hope and Life Satisfaction

We conducted a series of linear regression to examine whether hope scores (independent variable) predict participants' life satisfaction total and subscale scores (dependent variables). Regression is a suitable method when examining a continuous independent variable's prediction of a dependent variable (Field, 2013). For total life satisfaction and for each dimensions of life satisfaction scale (family, school, friends, self, and living environment), different regression analyses were conducted.

Hope statistically significantly predicted 21% of the variation in the family satisfaction ($F(1, 338) = 91.56, p < .001$), 24% of the variation in the school satisfaction ($F(1, 338) = 103.93, p < .001$), 24% of the variation in the friend satisfaction ($F(1, 338) = 103.79, p < .001$), 40% of the variation in the self-satisfaction ($F(1, 338) = 221.89, p < .001$), and 13% of the variation in the living environment satisfaction ($F(1, 338) = 47.62, p < .001$). In addition, hope scores significantly predicted 43% of the variation in the total life satisfaction scores ($F(1, 338) = 254.09, p < .001$).

Life Satisfaction Differences Based on Gender and Grade

Table 2. shows the descriptive statistics of the participants' total and subscale life satisfaction scores based on gender and grade variables.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Life Satisfaction Scores Based on Gender

	Family Satisfaction		School Satisfaction		Friends Satisfaction		Self-Satisfaction		Living Environment Satisfaction		Total Satisfaction	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender												
Girls	3.57	.47	3.13	.61	3.45	.58	3.31	.62	3.35	.58	3.36	.42
Boys	3.55	.49	2.92	.67	3.27	.59	3.32	.54	3.18	.59	3.24	.42
Grade												
5 th Grade	3.60	.42	3.27	.59	3.31	.58	3.34	.59	3.29	.61	3.36	.43
6 th Grade	3.64	.42	3.17	.49	3.37	.54	3.42	.51	3.31	.57	3.37	.38
7 th Grade	3.56	.49	2.97	.59	3.43	.65	3.31	.62	3.35	.56	3.31	.44
8 th Grade	3.41	.57	2.59	.72	3.40	.57	3.10	.59	3.13	.62	3.12	.40

To investigate the differences in life satisfaction total and subscale scores based on gender, we conducted six one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), which compares the variance between the groups with variability within groups (Pallant, 2010). Between girls and boys, there were statistically significant differences in school satisfaction scores ($F(1, 332) = 8.19, p < .01; \eta^2 = .02$), in friend satisfaction scores ($F(1, 332) = 8.00, p < .01; \eta^2 = .03$), in living environment satisfaction ($F(1, 332) = 6.42, p < .05; \eta^2 = .02$), and in total life satisfaction scores ($F(1, 332) = 6.56, p < .05; \eta^2 = .02$). For all these variables in which significant differences found, girls reported higher level of satisfaction than males (see Table 2). However, no difference was observed in family satisfaction scores and self-satisfaction scores between girls and boys.

Regarding examining differences in satisfaction total and subscale scores between grade levels, six ANOVAs were performed as well. There were statistically significant differences in family satisfaction scores between grades ($F(3, 331) = 3.23, p < .05; \text{Eta}^2 = .03$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that mean score for 8th grade was significantly differed than mean scores for 5th and 6th grades. There were statistically significant differences in school satisfaction scores between grades ($F(3, 331) = 19.17, p < .001; \text{Eta}^2 = .15$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD revealed that all groups significantly differed from each other except that there was not a significant difference between 5th grade and 6th grade. There were statistically significant differences in self-satisfaction scores between grades ($F(3, 331) = 3.75, p < .05; \text{Eta}^2 = .04$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD showed that only 6th and 8th grades were different than each other. Last, there were statistically significant difference in total satisfaction scores between grades ($F(3, 331) = 5.61, p < .01; \text{Eta}^2 = .05$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed that only mean scores for 8th grade statistically different than mean scores for 5th and 6th grades. However, no statistically significant differences were observed in friend satisfaction scores and living environment satisfaction scores between grade levels.

4. Discussion

We examined the relationship between hope and life satisfaction in middle school students attended three public middle schools located in the west of Turkey. This study investigated how well middle school students' hope predict their total life satisfaction and life satisfaction subscale (family, school, friends, self, and living environment) scores. In addition, we tested differences in life satisfaction total and subscale scores based on gender and grade variables. These investigations were unique since, at least to our knowledge, no study has investigated hope's prediction of life satisfaction among middle school students in Turkey.

As indicated throughout the literature, in our era, education and schools need to give students more than only academic knowledge. In this context, life satisfaction or well-being have become crucial demands of students. Besides emotional or mental benefits, increased well-being can promote accomplishing traditional goals of education or higher level of academic achievement (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Waters, 2011). Therefore, the contribution of this study as examining the effects of hope on life satisfaction is helpful to better understand life satisfaction of middle school students or even to understand factors affecting life satisfaction.

With regard to relationship between hope and life satisfaction total and subscale scores, we found that hope statistically significantly predicted total life satisfaction, family satisfaction, school satisfaction, friend satisfaction, self-satisfaction, and living environment satisfaction scores. These theoretically expected results showed that hope was a strong predictor of life satisfaction. According to these findings, as hope increases, life satisfaction is expected to raise. These results are consistent with the previous findings investigated the relationship hope and life satisfaction in different countries. For example, Jiang et al. (2013) found that hope partially mediated the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction among middle school students. They found that hope as mediator variable significantly predicted life satisfaction in middle school students in the United States. Similarly, Lagacé-Séguin and d'Entremont (2010) found hope as a significant predictor of life satisfaction in 98 middle school students in Canada. In another study (Marques et al., 2015) with 682 Portuguese middle school students, participants were divided into three groups: extremely high, average, and extremely low hope groups. Results showed that extremely high hope group had statistically significant more life satisfaction scores than other groups.

The results of this study were also consistent with the studies investigated the relationship hope and life satisfaction in different populations. For example, Kortte, Gilber, Gorman, and Wegener (2010) found that hope was a significant predictor of life satisfaction in people with spinal cord injury. In another study with 118 college students, hope was significantly correlated with life satisfaction, and compared to eustress and self-efficacy, hope was the stronger predictor of life

satisfaction (O'Sullivan, 2011). Thus, the previous findings are supporting the results of this study. Overall, the results show that hope has a strong connection with life satisfaction. As explained, life satisfaction could be a positive outcome and related to various desired outcomes including academic success, so it is needed to understand factors affecting life satisfaction. The findings of this study display the importance of hope as a contributor to life satisfaction.

Regarding life satisfaction differences based on gender, we found that girls reported statistically significantly higher level of school satisfaction, friend satisfaction, living environment satisfaction, and total satisfaction than boys. However, there were no differences in family and self-satisfaction scores between girls and boys. The literature has shown contradictory results related to differences based on gender. In a study (Cenkseven-Önder, 2012) with 562 middle school students in Turkey, boys reported statistically significant more family satisfaction than girls. However, no differences were observed in school, friend, living environment, or self-satisfaction. On the other hand, in Şirin and Ulaş's (2015) study, girls had more well-being, and Kaya, Tansey, Melekoğlu and Çakiroğlu (2015) found among 235 Turkish college students that girls had more life satisfaction than boys. Whereas they found contradict results, Huebner, Suldo, Valois, Drane (2006) examined the multidimensional life satisfaction differences of 2502 middle students based on demographic variables, and the results revealed no differences in life satisfaction scores between girls and boys.

From this perspective, it is not feasible to make a strong connection between the results of this study with previous findings. Nevertheless, this results showed that girls had more school, friend, and living environment satisfaction, the effects sizes were small though. A possible interpretation could be about differences in cultural gender role and relationship expectations. Girls may have less stress on themselves and they may have stronger social connections but more evidence is needed. On the other hand, girls and boy did not differentiate on family and self-satisfaction. This result shows that girls and boys similarly consider their satisfaction of families and living environment. Actually a difference would be expected in family satisfaction due to cultural role dissimilarity but this finding might be the result of cultural transformation in Turkish society. More research examining the cultural effects would be helpful to better understand underlying dynamics.

The last investigation of this study was life satisfaction differences based on grades. We found the significant differences in family, school, self, and total satisfaction. When looked at the deeper exploration (post-hoc comparison), the results revealed that 8th graders had less satisfaction than others. However, there was not statistically significant difference in family and living environment satisfaction between graders. With regard to life satisfaction differences based on grade level, Huebner et al., (2006) found that 6th graders reported statistically significantly more life satisfaction than 7th and 8th graders. These specific findings are consistent with the results of this study.

Significant difference in family, school, self, and total satisfaction can probably be explained by the national high school entrance exam. Eighth graders enter the Examination for Transition to Basic Secondary Education (ETBSE) to transfer high school, and they intensely prepare for this exam for a long time. Also, the exam is highly competitive and 8th graders may feel immense pressure on themselves. Family satisfaction, comparing to other life satisfaction subscales, may seem less related to exam stress though, most families and parents are excessively include their children's school and examination processes. The literature has showed the relationships between TEOG examination and different variables (e.g., Aslan, 2017; Usta, 2017). Thus, the stress related to the TEOG may cause less life satisfaction for 8th graders while 5th, 6th, and 7th graders feel less pressure since they have more time to the exam. In addition, non-significant findings in friend and living environment satisfaction verify the explanation of the causes of the TEOG examination because friend and living environment satisfaction are less related to exam stress compared to other satisfaction dimension. However, more evidence would be helpful to understand the effects of TEOG on students' life satisfaction.

5. Limitations and Implications for Future Research and Practice

There are some limitations of this study. Sample of this study included middle school students attended schools located in a western city of Turkey. Therefore, this may affect the generalizability of the results because there are crucial cultural differences between the locations of Turkey. Further research is needed for more exploration especially about gender effect on life satisfaction including cultural factors in to the investigation.

The results of this study contributed to the understanding life satisfaction in middle school students. Results clearly showed that hope has a positive effect on life satisfaction, and there are differences in middle school students' life satisfaction based on gender and grade levels. Regarding further exploration, future research can replicate this study with different sample and populations to better understand dynamics (e.g. cultural differences) affecting these relationships. Future research should also examine other possible factors impacting life satisfaction.

As discussed throughout the literature, there are contradictory findings about life satisfaction differences based on gender. Even though we found that girls had more life satisfaction than boys, more exploration is needed. Especially studies conducted in different regions of Turkey would be helpful to explain culture related gender difference. Additionally, qualitative studies would be important to understand dynamics related to gender. Another notable finding was that 8th graders had less satisfaction. Future qualitative research can explore the 8th graders' experience related to TEOG and life satisfaction, and interventions could be developed for 8th graders.

Last, this study revealed that hope could be a significant contributor to life satisfaction but future research can investigate the effects of hope on other variables such as academic achievement, motivation, school engagement, or relationship quality in middle school students. To enhance life satisfaction, hope interventions for Turkish middle school students could be developed and tested. For example, Marques, Lopez, and Pais-Ribeiro (2011) examined the short-term and long-term effects of "Building Hope for the Future" program on Portuguese middle school students' hope, life satisfaction, self-worth, mental health and academic achievement. The program was delivered in a group context over a five-week period. Results revealed that participants in the intervention group ($n = 31$) had more level of hope, life satisfaction, and self-esteem than participants in the control group ($n = 31$). In addition, the gained benefits were remained at 18-month follow-up (Marques et al., 2011). Similarly, hope interventions would be helpful to contribute Turkish middle school students' mental health and academic development.

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