A STUDY ON EXAMINING THE PREDICTIVE POWER OF TEACHER CANDIDATES' SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON THEIR LIFE SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Life satisfaction is expressed as the satisfaction of the individual as a result of his general assessment in his life and, it is influenced by many different variables. The fact that teacher candidates love the life they live can make them happy and successful in life, as well as being more effective in the education process they are in. This makes it important to accuratelydetermine the variables that explain life satisfaction. This study was aimed to reveal the relationships among teacher candidates' life satisfaction and their social connectedness and perceived social support levels. A correlational survey model was used to achieve this goal. Teacher candidates at Firat University formed the sample of the study. Study data was collected with the help of the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale, Social Connectedness Scale, and Life Satisfaction Scale. The results obtained from the analysis of the data showed that while social connectedness and social support perceived from a significant other were not predictors of life satisfaction, social support perceived from the family and friends were meaningful predictors of teacher candidates' life satisfaction. At the end of the study, it was proposed to expand or enhance the functionality of the psychological counseling and application centers to increase teacher candidates perceptions of social support and life satisfaction.

Keywords: *life satisfaction, social connectedness, perceived social support, teacher candidates*

INTRODUCTION

It can be said that the essential motivation source of human actions is to reach the level of satisfaction they aim for. In other words, individuals hope that every action they take will increase the level of satisfaction with their lives. Besides, the level of relish and happiness of the individual may be positively affected by the increase in the level of satisfaction. In this sense, it can be said that the life satisfaction level of the individual is substantial.

Satisfaction means perceived entertainment as a result of evaluating a value and is a mood that includes both cognitive and emotional values (Veenhoven, 1996). Life satisfaction can be expressed as the level of positive emotion that the individual reaches and mentally perceives as a result of his assessment of the quality of life (Gulacti & Ciftci, 2018). In another definition, life satisfaction is defined as the degree

of a positive assessment of the general quality of the individuals' life or the degree of how much the individuals love the life they lead (Veenhoven, 1996).

Individuals with high life satisfaction develop more positive relationships with others with low social stress (Gilman & Huebner, 2006) and receive more social support from their friends and family (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). On the other hand, a significant number of students with low life satisfaction have clinical problems. It was also revealed that students with low life satisfaction also had significantly lower hope (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Speaking of many social and personal characteristics that affect life satisfaction, Veenhoven (1996) asserted that the factors that determine life satisfaction are complicated and that individual and environmental features are practical in determining life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction, which develops as a result of its interaction with the environment of the individual (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), is one of the primary elements that an individual should have to be happy and gain meaning (Sar, Isiklar, & Aydogan, 2012). It is possible to say that individuals with higher life satisfaction have fewer behavioral and emotional problems (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Therefore, life satisfaction is an crucial psychological variable and an essential indicator of individuals' psychological development.

However, it is noteworthy that the teacher candidates' life satisfaction is low, and those who unwittingly chose the department they studied have low life satisfaction as well as depression levels (Gundogar, Sallan-Gul, Uskun, Demirci, & Kececi, 2007). It is thought that increasing the life satisfaction of teacher candidates, who are known to affect many people and educational outcomes after being appointed, is an important issue. Because there were significant relationships among teachers' life satisfaction and teaching professional attitudes, student engagement, instructional strategies and class management efficacy, and general self-efficacy.. For this reason, it is crucial to carry out the necessary studies to reveal and develop variables that will increase teacher candidates' life satisfaction.

Researches on life satisfaction support the view that life satisfaction is associated with positive social and emotional bonds (You, Furlong, Felix, Sharkey, Tanigawa, & Green, 2008). Many factors affect life satisfaction, which is accepted as an essential element of general happiness (Diener et al., 1985), and one of these factors is expressed as social relationship (Appleton & Song, 2008; Schmitter, Zisselman, & Woldow, 2003). Therefore, social connectedness and perceived social support (PSS), which are reflections of the relationships of the individual with their environment, can be specified as environmental factors determining life satisfaction.

While social connectedness is expressed as a sense of intimacy that is important for the sense of belonging to others and based on the experiences of relationships with others (Lee & Robbins, 2000), it is also considered as one of the basic needs of the individual (Lee & Robbins, 1995). High social connectedness reduces the individual's sensitivity to rejection in interpersonal relationships and lowers the anxiety levels of individuals (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001). Factors such as the fact that the individual does not feel threatened, feel safe and comfortable, and can participate in social environments and groups as a result of a high level of social commitment can have positive effects on life satisfaction (Kara, Gurbuz, Kucuk-Kilic, & Oncu, 2018). Besides, strong social ties against negative experiences are factors that facilitate positive compliance (Pietrantoni & Prati, 2008) and can be expected to affect life satisfaction positively. Myers (2004) states that research results between interpersonal relations and life satisfaction are not sufficient, and more research should be done.

Social support, which is one of the environmental factors determining the life satisfaction of the individual, is defined by the provider or receiver as a resource exchange between at least two people aiming to increase the goodness of the receiver (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984) and may affect the individual positively or negatively (Cohen & Syme, 1985). Hobfoll (1988) defined social support as social interactions or relationships that provide real help to individuals, placing individuals in a valuable social group or in a social system believed to provide a sense of loyalty. While the received support expresses naturally emerging aid behaviors, PSS expresses the belief that such aid behaviors will be provided

when necessary (Norris & Kaniasty, 1996). The realized behaviors emphasize the received support while the perceived support emphasizes the possible behaviors (Barrera, 1986).

PSS is defined as an individual judgment as to whether individuals find the support they believe comes from the people around them and this judgment can make the individual feel valuable (Yildirim, 2017). Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) stated that individuals believe that social support will come from three important sources: family, friends, and a significant other. Emotional and instrumental support, which is believed to come from the family, is assumed to be positively associated with life satisfaction (LaRocco, House, & French, 1980). Numerous studies (Argyle & Lu 1990; Cooper, Okamura, & Gurka, 1992; Diener & Seligman, 2002) demonstrated a positive relationship between social support and life satisfaction. Significant evidence was provided that family and friend support perceived by students positively affects their life satisfaction (Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland, & Wold, 2009) and social support from family, teachers, and peers are associated with perceived life satisfaction of students (Diener & Fujita, 1995). In Yilmaz and Aslan's (2013) study, there was a significant negative relationship between teachers' life satisfaction and emotional deprivation and social friendship, which were dimensions of loneliness at the workplace. It was also inferred that there was a meaningful opposite relationship between the emotional deprivation dimension of teachers' loneliness at the workplace and the social friendship dimension of life satisfaction. From this point of view, PSS is thought of as an important variable determining life satisfaction. Besides, although there have been studies examining the relationship between different variables and life satisfaction in the domestic literature, there is no study examining the relationship between teacher candidates' life satisfaction and perceptions of social support.

Life satisfaction is the degree of the positive development of the individual in every stage of the living space (Recepoglu, 2013), and life satisfaction is expected to affect teacher candidates' education and job lives directly. For this reason, it is hoped that the teacher candidates who are expected to be important subjects in the education system will affect their life outcomes or academic success. It is thought that the perception of social support that affects life satisfaction is essential both for the development of teacher candidates and for their contribution to the education process when they are appointed as a teacher in the future. Besides, it was evaluated that teacher candidates' social connectedness, which expresses their relationship and belonging with their environment, and their PSS is related to their life satisfaction levels. In this context, the general aim of this study is to determine the predictive power of teacher candidates' social connectedness and perceived social support levels on their life satisfaction. To achieve this goal, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Is there a significant relationship among teacher candidates' life satisfaction, social connectedness, and PSS (family, friends, and significant other) levels?
2. Do teacher candidates' social connectedness and PSS (family, friends, and significant other) levels predict their life satisfaction?

METHOD

In the current study designed within quantitative research, the predictive pattern research technique, which is one of the correlational survey models, was used. The correlational survey model is the research technique that determines the direction and level of the relationship between the two and more variables (Karasar, 2010). Predictive pattern research provides the opportunity to predict the changes that occur in the dependent variable depending on the independent variable (Creswell, 2014). In this study, it was used to determine the effect of PSS and social connectedness on teacher candidates' life satisfaction.

Population and Sampling

The study population was composed of 1898 teacher candidates' studying at Firat University in Turkey the 2019-2020 academic year. A population of 1898 requires 492 participants for a 99% confidence level and 320 participants for a 95% confidence level for a 5% error level (Yazicioglu and Erdogan, 2004). Determined by the disproportionate element sampling method from this population constitute the sample of the study. The disproportionate element sampling method means that every unit in the

universe has an equal chance to be selected for sampling (Karasar, 2010). The data were collected by the researchers as a result of the face-to-face interview. After the researchers explained the purpose of collecting the data, they distributed 500 questionnaires to the students randomly. Among 435 forms returned, 29 of them were missing and inaccurately filled, and 24 were filled slipshod. Inaccurate and incomplete forms were not evaluated, and analyzes were made with 382 questionnaire forms (4.48% error at 95% confidence level). Of the participants constituting the sample 38.7% (n = 148) were male and 61.3% (n = 234) were female.

Data Collection Tools

To collect research data, a questionnaire form containing "Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale", "Social Connectedness Scale" and "Life Satisfaction Scale" was prepared.

Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale was developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The Likert-type scale consists of three dimensions: Family, friends, and a significant other. The scale was adapted Turkish by Eker, Arkar, and Yaldiz (2001), and its internal consistency coefficients were calculated between 0.80 and 0.85. In the current study; exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to verify the scale structure showed that KMO = .91, Bartlett's Sphericity (df_{66}) = 4227.22, and internal consistency values of the scale dimensions were .94 for the significant other, .92 for the family, and .93 for the friends. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results; χ^2/df = 3.04; NNFI = .98; NFI = .98; CFI = .99; GFI = .94; SRMSR = .03 and RMSEA = .07 values showed that the present structure of the scale was confirmed.

Social Connectedness Scale was developed by Lee and Robbins (1995). The internal consistency coefficient of the one dimension-Likert type scale was calculated as .91. In the current study; EFA performed to verify the scale structure showed that KMO = .94, Bartlett's Sphericity (df_{28}) = 2358.82, and the internal consistency value of the scale was .94. CFA results; χ^2/df = 2.76; NNFI = .99; NFI = .99; CFI = .99; GFI = .94; SRMSR = .02 and RMSEA = .07 values showed that the present structure of the scale was confirmed.

Life Satisfaction Scale was developed by Diener et al. (1985). The internal consistency coefficient of the one dimension-Likert type scale was calculated as 87. In the current study; EFA performed to verify the scale structure showed that KMO = .86, Bartlett's Sphericity (df_{10}) = 881.61, and the internal consistency value of the scale was .86. CFA results; χ^2/df = 1.68; NNFI = .99; NFI = .99; CFI = 1.00; GFI = .97; SRMSR = .02 and RMSEA = .04 values showed that the present structure of the scale was confirmed.

Data Analysis

SPSS 22.0 program was used in determining the missing and extreme values of the data, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis. To determine whether the data provides a normality assumption, kurtosis and skewness values were examined. Then Cook's value was checked to determine whether the multivariate normality assumption was met. To determine whether there are multicollinearity problems between variables, Tolerance and VIF values were checked along with the correlation values. Findings regarding these values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of the data

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Tolerance	VIF	Cook's
Life satisfaction	382	3.96	1.42	-.13	-.52	1.00	1.00	
Social connectedness	382	3.83	1.09	-.69	-.34	.86	1.16	.003
Family	382	3.76	1.17	-.65	-.57	.50	1.99	
Friends	382	3.59	1.19	-.47	-.80	.40	2.48	
Significant other	382	3.19	1.40	-.14	-1.27	.70	1.42	

As seen in Table 1, skewness and kurtosis values in the range of ± 1.5 indicate that the data provide a single normality assumption (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Secer (2015) states that the approach of cook's to zero means that the data show the normal distribution and provides the condition of multivariate normality. The current data was found to satisfy multivariate normality requirements. Finally, VIF and Tolerance values were examined to determine whether there is a multicollinearity problem between the data. If the VIF value is below 10 and the Tolerance value is above .10, can be said that there is no multicollinearity problem (Can, 2013). The current data satisfied this requirement. Besides, the correlation between the variables above .80 means that there may be a multicollinearity problem. Relationships between the variables were found to be below .80 (Table 2).

After the descriptive statistics of the data were tested, structural equations were tested with the help of Lisrel 8.80. First of all, the fit of the measurement model was tested. Defining the measurement model correctly is essential for the structural model. Therefore, it is not correct to test the relationships between the structures without testing the measurement model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1982). In the Structural Equation Model (SEM), t-values were checked for the significance of the path coefficients of the path between external and internal latent variables. The t value of less than 1.96 indicates that the path is not significant, and between 1.96 and 2.56 indicates that this path is significant at the level of .05, and above 2.56 is significant at the level of .01 (Cokluk, Sekercioglu, & Buyukozturk, 2016). RMSEA, SRMR, NFI, NNFI, CFI, and GFI values were also evaluated as well as $\chi2/df$ ratio to check the fit-values. In the literature, these criteria are frequently used to determine the fit of the structural model, and whether the model is significant is evaluated by considering these criteria as a whole (Kline, 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Values with a ratio of $\chi2/df$ up to 3 indicate good fit, and values up to 5 indicate acceptable fit (Kline, 2011). If the RMSEA value is less than or equal to .05, it means good fit and a value between .08 and .10 means acceptable fit (Hayduk, 1987). The goodness of fit indices such as NNFI, CFI, GFI, and AGFI take values between 0 and 1, and the closeness of these values to 1 indicates that model fit is good (Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 1998; Jöreskog, 1996).

RESULTS

In this section, the results of the study are given consecutively. Correlation results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Correlation analysis results

Variables	LS	SC	FS1	FS2	SO
LS. Life satisfaction	1				
SC. Social connectedness	.14**	1			
FS1. Family	.55**	.24**	1		
FS2. Friends	.55**	.36**	.70**	1	
SO. Significant other	.41**	.13**	.43**	.54**	1

**p<.01

As seen in Table 2 there was a low relationship between life satisfaction and social connectedness (r = .14; p < .01). There were also moderate, positive, and significant relationships between life satisfaction and social support from family (r = .55; p < .01), friends (r = .55; p < .01), and significant other (r = .41; p < .01). While there was a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between social connectedness and social support from friends (r = .36; p < .01), there were low, positive, and significant relationships between social support from family (r = .24; p < .01) and significant other (r = .13; p < .01).

In the study, the measurement model fit-values were examined before testing the SEM. To improve the fit indices of the model, items with a high correlation between error variances were identified and error covariances of these items (SC2 and SC3, PSS1 and PSS2, PSS6 and PSS7) were combined and χ^2/df =

2.16; NNFI = .98; NFI = .97; CFI = .98; GFI = .89; SRMSR = .04 and RMSEA = .06 values were found to be good. Then, the SEM in Figure 2 related to the general purpose of the study was created.
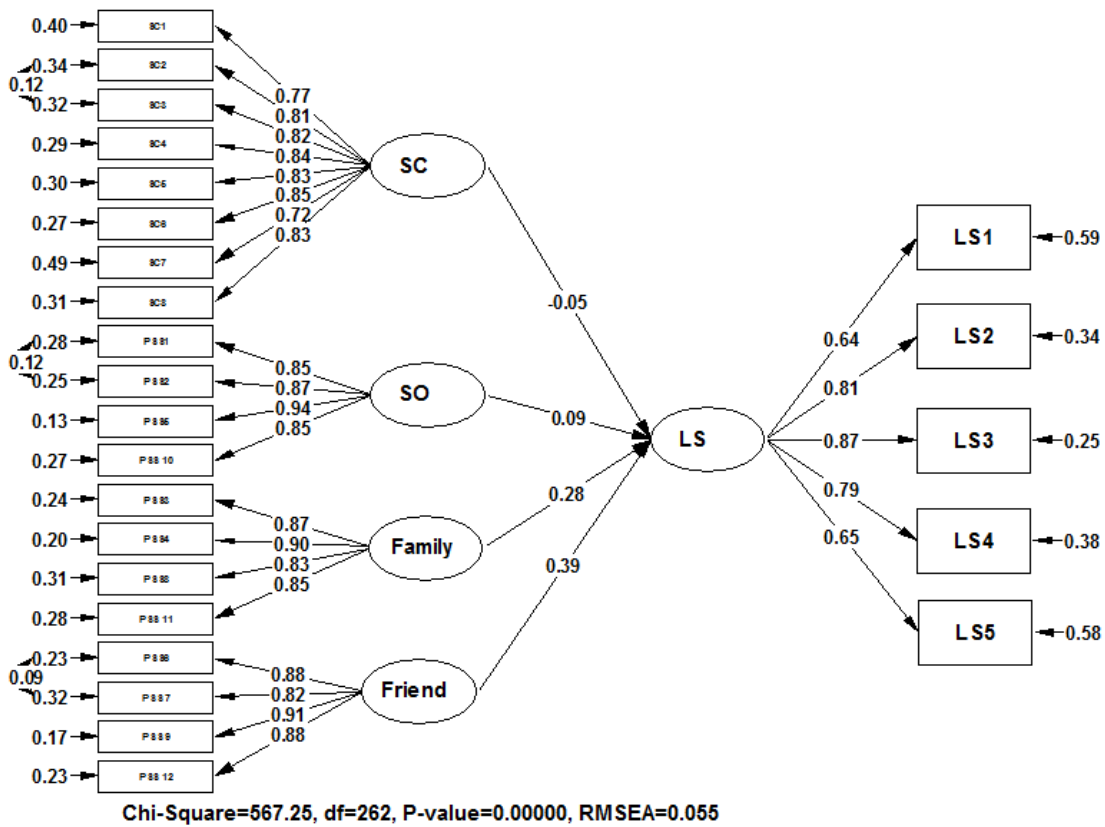
Chi-Square=567.25, df=262, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.055

SC: Social connectedness; LS: Life satisfaction; SO: Significant other; PSS: Perceived social support

Figure 2. SEM of research

As seen in Figure 2, social connectedness (β = -.05, p > .01; t = -1.05) and significant other (β = .09, p > .01; t = 1.54) have no significant effect on life satisfaction, family (β = .28, p <.01; t = 3.47) and friends (β = .39, p <.01; t = 4.08) were found to be significant in predicting life satisfaction. The results obtained for the model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Results obtained regarding the SEM

Variables	Factor loading	t-values	R^2
Life satisfaction			
LS1	.64	12.70	.41
LS2	.81	12.97	.66
LS3	.87	13.51	.75
LS4	.79	12.66	.62
LS5	.65	10.88	.42
Social connectedness			
SC1	.77	17.63	.60
SC2	.81	18.92	.66
SC3	.82	19.30	.68
SC4	.84	20.11	.71
SC5	.83	19.81	.70
SC6	.85	20.54	.73
SC7	.72	15.87	.51
SC8	.83	19.73	.69
Significant other			
PSS1	.85	20.22	.76
PSS2	.87	20.75	.80
PSS5	.94	23.62	.69
PSS10	.85	20.44	.72
Family			
PSS3	.87	21.08	.77
PSS4	.90	22.08	.68
PSS8	.83	19.46	.83
PSS11	.85	20.24	.77
Friends			
PSS6	.88	21.31	.72
PSS7	.82	19.19	.75
PSS9	.91	22.70	.87
PSS12	.88	21.38	.73
Structural Equations	Error var.	t-value	R^2
LS = -.05*SC + .09*SO + .28*Family + .39*Friends (-1.05) (1.54) (3.47) (4.08)	.56	6.43	.44

SC: Social connectedness; LS: Life satisfaction; SO: Significant other; PSS: Perceived social support

As seen in Table 3, the factor loads and t-values between the model's external latent variables and the internal latent variables are all significant. Besides, the dimensions of social connectedness and PSS explained 44% of life satisfaction as a model, and the model was significant (t = 6.43). When looking at the life satisfaction explanation status of each variable, the level of social connectedness and PSS from significant other was not explaining life satisfaction meaningful. Table 4 shows the fit indices for the model in question.

Table 4
Fit indices of SEM

χ^2/df	RMSEA	NNFI	NFI	CFI	GFI	SRMR
2.06 (df = 262) Good	.055 Acceptable	.98 Good	.97 Good	.98 Good	.89 Acceptable	.04 Good

As seen in Table 4, the values of χ^2 / df = 2.06; RMSEA = .055; NNFI = .98; NFI = .97; CFI = .98; GFI = .89 and SRMR = .04 showed that the model fit was good.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to reveal whether teacher candidates' social connectedness and PSS levels predict their life satisfaction. According to the first result of the study, a low positive correlation was found between life satisfaction and social connectedness. Researches result that life satisfaction had positive relationships with social connectedness (Duru, 2007; Kara et al., 2018) and social relations (Iwasa, Kawaai, Gondo, Inagaki, & Suzuki, 2006) supported this result of the current study. Life satisfaction showed relationships with others, even if it was at a low level. This result of the study can be interpreted that individuals with strong social connectedness can develop more positive emotions about life and that can be happier, and their satisfaction with life can be higher.

Moderate and positive relationships were found between life satisfaction and social support from family, friends, and significant other. In the literature, there are study results (Ali et al., 2010; Altiparmak, 2009; Bozoglan, 2014; Duru, 2007; Topkaya & Buyukgoze-Kavas, 2015; Yildirim, 2017) regarding the positive relationship between life satisfaction and social support. This finding showed that as the level of PSS increases, their life satisfaction increases.

While there were low positive relations between social connectedness and both PSS from family and significant other, there was found a positive moderate between social connectedness and friend support. Many theoretical and empirical studies (Lee et al. 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1995; 2000) showed that PSS was associated with social connectedness. There was a positive relationship between social support from family and friends and social connectedness (Williams & Galliher, 2006). The interactions that meet the social needs of the individual, such as close friend relationships and social activities, were associated with PSS (Kirel, 2003). In this sense, the current research results were supported by the results of other studies. In other words, the social connectedness that individuals establish with others increases their belief that they will receive social support when needed.

According to another finding of the study, social connectedness did not predict life satisfaction. In the literature, relationships with friends, social skill development (Kasprzak, 2010), and intimate social relationships (Chioqueta & Stiles, 2007) increased life satisfaction, and poor social relationships caused a significant decrease in life satisfaction (Damasio, Melo, & Silva, 2013). The interactions were expressed as an influential factor affecting life satisfaction (Kirel, 2003). Close relationships with other people were considered an important source of life satisfaction and happiness (Haller & Hadler, 2006). Although there is a consensus in the literature on the fact that social connectedness predicts life satisfaction, in this research, the social connectedness of teacher candidates did not explain life satisfaction. In fact, according to the findings of this study, it can be said that different variables affect the life satisfaction of teacher candidates, and their social relationships are left behind in explaining their life satisfaction.

The dimension of significant other did not predict life satisfaction, while family and friends dimensions predicted it significantly. In the study by Schimmack, Diener, and Oishi (2002), university students cited their sources of life satisfaction as academic performance, romantic relationships, and family relationships. Kasprzak (2010) stated that perceived practical support is an important determinant of life satisfaction. Social support from relatives represented an important living space related to life satisfaction (Adams, 1971). It was determined that emotional support from the family did not affect effect on life satisfaction, but instrumental support had a positive effect on it (Adams, King, & King, 1996). Provided meeting the expectations and needs of the individuals increased their life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). People who completed the socialization process, have good relationships with others, have high participation in social life, and are at peace with themselves and others gained more satisfaction from their lives (Eroglu, 2013). Mahanta and Aggarwal (2013) revealed a strong relationship between students' life satisfaction and PSS. The researchers also found that students who perceive support and encouragement play an active role in problem-solving and in fighting stress and have high life satisfaction. Both this research and other studies showed that PSS increases life satisfaction. The belief that the social support needed by teacher candidates would be met by their family and friends was an important determinant of their life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Life satisfaction has a multi-faceted structure and reflects the general assessment of the individual in many areas, and social relationships are one of these areas (Agyar, 2013). This study showed that teacher candidates had a low positive relationship between their life satisfaction and their social connectedness, but their life satisfaction was not predicted by social connectedness. In fact, life satisfaction reflects the quality and happiness of undergraduate students (Karaman, Neslon, & Cavazos, 2018). For this reason, the teacher candidates' positive feelings about life will also reflect their education process. Also, the positive relationships of teachers are very important for an effective and productive education process. So high life satisfaction will cause the people to be appointed as teachers to have good relations with their students, colleagues, and others. Because teachers who have positive feelings about life can make both school and classroom environments positive. For this reason, to increase the relationship between teacher candidates' life satisfaction and social affiliation, various social activities (such as scientific, cultural, artistic, and sports activities) can be organized within the education faculties, so that teacher candidates can participate actively in group activities that will increase their communication with each other.

The acceptance of individuals by their social environment and getting the social support they need are seen as factors that increase their life satisfaction (Hwang, Johnston, & Smith, 2009). In this study, PSS especially from family and friends had a significant predictive power on teacher candidates' life satisfaction and increased their life satisfaction. Social relationships are compulsory relationships necessary for individuals to survive. Various requirements are at the core of all relationships. These requirements are mostly met by the people closest to the individual, and as these needs are met, individuals' life satisfaction and job performances may increase. Therefore, PSS from family and friends is essential both for the development of the teacher candidate and for their contribution to the education process when they are appointed as a teacher. In this sense, this study showed an important result in terms of determining the level of PSS from family and friends in explaining the level of life satisfaction.

In this study, although there was a moderate relationship between life satisfaction and PSS from significant other, teacher candidates' life satisfaction was not explained by the support from a significant other. This result is also among the important results of the research. It can be suggested to expand or to increase the functionality of the psychological counseling and application centers where psychological counselors can be used as life coaching for students in order to increase the effect of significant other support in teacher candidates' life satisfaction.

This study is a quantitative study using only scales. For this reason, the research should be supported by qualitative studies to reveal the reasons for the low relationship between teacher candidates' life satisfaction and social connectedness. Besides, empirical and mixed studies on why social connectedness and PSS from a significant other cannot predict life satisfaction will also provide an interpretation of the outcome of this study. Researchers can conduct qualitative research on what other variables affect life satisfaction and what can be done to increase teacher candidates' life satisfaction. In the research, only the opinions of the teacher candidates in the education faculty at a specific university were taken. Obtaining the opinions of teacher candidates in the education faculties of different universities is important in terms of the generalizability of the research results.

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