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The effects of emotional intelligence on optimism of university students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the relation between optimism levels of students and their levels of emotional intelligence according to their perception. This study is based on screening model. This study was performed with 300 students studying at Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Education in 2010-2011 Academic Year. In this study “Optimism Scale” and “Emotional Intelligence Evaluation Scale” were applied. In this study, the relation between variables was determined by linear regression and simple correlation analyses in SPSS 13 Programme. According to this study, there is a positive relation between optimism levels of students and their levels of emotional intelligence and the optimism level that students perceive predicts level of emotional intelligence meaningfully.

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Keywords: Optimism, optimism level, intelligence, emotional intelligence, university students

1. Introduction

Individuals' perceptions against challenges they meet show their optimism or pessimism. Optimism is defined as positive feelings, high morale, determination and effective problem solving, academic and professional success, being popular, healthy long life and adopting positive attitudes to overcome trauma and turning them into behaviours (Peterson 2000). We can define optimism as developing positive expectations to negative results that may happen in the future, believing that negative events may have positive progress and to look on the bright side of negative events (Balci and Yilmaz 2002). Optimist individuals can easily face up to challenges, and they do not care challenges that much. It is apparent that individuals are remarkably biased, and they comment in a particular direction when they are asked to predict positive and negative events. Bias can grow depending on whether events are positive or negative. Optimist individuals see problems as a temporary period, and they believe that they can overcome challenges. Optimist individuals think that failure is not personal. For optimists, there is certainly a positive exit door in situations that fail. (Fellman 2000).

In recent years many alternative perspectives have been developed to conceptualise the structure of emotional intelligence (İşmen 2001). The concept of emotional intelligence attracts attention as being the ability to control an individual's emotional life and his/her success in life (Salovey and Grewal 2005). In this statement, individual's feeling good, establishing good relationships with others, being satisfied with his/her life and enjoying it are the factors that determine success in life (Dogan and Demiral, 2007; Kaya and Kececi, 2004). Emotional intelligence is defined as: individual's understanding his/her own feelings, developing empathy with others' feeling and organizing life in a way to enrich it. In addition, it includes maturity and socialization of individuals and increasing intellectual level of individuals. Furthermore, it includes successful human relations and harmony with the environment

(Cadman and Brewer 2001, Cakar and Arbak 2004, Goleman 2006). The basis of emotional intelligence management is to appropriately manage feelings (Yaylacı 2006). This approach underlying emotional intelligence emphasises the positive contribution of feelings to general intelligence and the process of logic (Acar 2002). In his researches, Goleman from Harvard University matched emotional intelligence skills with factors in business life, and moved the issue to organizational life, and obtained striking results. Goleman listed emotional intelligence under five main topics. These are: 1- Individual's being aware of his/her own feelings, 2- Individual's managing his/her own feelings, 3-Individual's motivating his/herself, 4- Empathy, 5- Social skills (Goleman 1998).

There is a significant relation between levels of social skill and levels of emotional intelligence (Özabacı 2004). It is proposed that individuals with a high level of emotional intelligence can adapt themselves to their current situation and overcome problems more easily by understanding themselves and other's situations better and utilising these emotional data. Therefore, it is thought that individuals with a high level of emotional intelligence feel less stressed when they face stressful situations (Sahin et al. 2009).

It is seen that optimism influence life satisfaction positively (Guler and Emec 2006; King and Broyles 1997). At this point a question comes to mind: Do optimism levels of university students predict their levels of emotional intelligence? The aim of this study initiated with the interest aroused by this question is to examine the relation between optimism levels of students and their levels of emotional intelligence. Hence, the study tries to find answers to these questions:

- Is there a relation between optimism levels and levels of emotional intelligence according to their perception?
- Does optimism level meaningfully predict level of emotional intelligence according to their perception?

2. Method

This study is based on screening model. A screening model is a method applied on an entire target population or a sample group that has the ability to represent in order to reach a general conclusion about the target population consisting of a large number of elements. (Karasar, 2003).

2.1. Population and the sample group: The target population of the study consists of 1456 randomly selected students in total studying at Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Education Department of Psychological Counselling and Guidance (483), Department of English Language Teaching (534), Department of Hearing Impaired Teacher (339). In selecting the sample group, applying tools were delivered to 350 students reached in the present target population, 300 scale forms received from these students were evaluated.

2.2. Instruments: In data collection, "the Optimism Scale" developed by Balcı and Yılmaz (2002), and "the Emotional Intelligence Evaluation Scale" standardised by Ergin (2000) were used.

2.2.1. The Optimism Scale: In 1999 Balcı and Yılmaz developed the scale and checked its validity and reliability. The scale consists of 24 items, and it is a 4-point Likert scale. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is (Cronbach Alpha) .96, the reliability coefficient determined by the test-retest method is .61, and the correlation coefficient between the two halves determined by the split-half method is .91. The lowest score of the scale is 24, and the highest score is 96. High score means that individual perceives him/herself as "optimist" (Balcı and Yılmaz, 2002).

2.2.2. The Emotional Intelligence Evaluation Scale: The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the Emotional Intelligence Evaluation Scale developed by Hall (1999) was assessed by Ergin (2000). The Cronbach Alfa is computed as .84. The scale consists of five sub-dimensions as follows: to be aware of feelings (6 items), to manage feelings (6 items), to motivate oneself (6 items), empathy (6 items) and social skills (6 items). The Likert-type scale consists of 30 items. The answers to the questions in the scale were evaluated by 6-point Likert-type scale (Ergin 2000).

2.3. Analysing Data

In this study, the optimism level of students was taken as independent variable, and the level of emotional intelligence as dependent variable. Simple linear regression analysis was applied to determine if the independent variable predicts the dependent variable meaningfully. Simple correlation analysis was used to determine the direction of the relation between the independent variable and dependent variable according to students' perception. Regression model and correlation analyses were performed on the total scores by calculating the grand averages of students' answers.

3. Findings

The results of simple regression and correlation analysis obtained from this study are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 the Correlation between Variables

	Optimism	Emotional Intelligence		
Optimism	r	1	,330	P.000*
Emotional Intelligence	r	,330	1	P.000*

*Results are significant at the $P < .01$ level.

Related to the correlation analysis Table 1 shows that there is a positive relation ($r = .330$, $P < .01$) between optimism levels of students and their levels of emotional intelligence

Table 2. The Simple Regression Model between Variables

The Independent Variable	B	Standard Error	β	T	P	F	R	R^2
Optimism								
Invariant	89,820	8,222		10,925	,000	36.39	,330	,11*
Optimism	,744	,123	,330	6,041	,000			

The dependent variable: Emotional Intelligence * $p < .01$

Table 2 shows that the independent variable of optimism predicts the levels of emotional intelligence ($R = .330$, $R^2 = .109$, $p < .01$) positively and meaningfully. Looking at the standardized β (Beta) values, the optimism levels of students meaningfully predict the levels of emotional intelligence at $\beta = .330$, $P < .01$ level. The optimism variable predicts the level of emotional intelligence 10 % and meaningfully. In this regard, the emotional intelligence level of students varies according to their optimism level.

4. Discussion And Conclusion

The study performed to decide whether or not the optimism levels of university students predict their levels of emotional intelligence were discussed below in the light of findings.

As a result of the analyses, it is observed that the optimism levels of students are the meaningful predictor of their levels of emotional intelligence. In other words, the findings show that the increase in the optimism levels of students predicts the levels of emotional intelligence positively. Although we did not find any research that directly

examines the influence of optimism levels on levels of emotional intelligence in literature, the findings obtained in our study indicate that the optimism levels of students increase their levels of emotional intelligence.

Some studies indicate that optimist individuals are more successful in schools, have happy, healthy and long lives and marriages, and care about their children (McGinnis, 1998). Examining the related literature, it is observed that there is a meaningful and contrary relation between emotional intelligence and stress symptoms. According to these researches, as the level of emotional intelligence increases, stress symptoms will be less (Sahin et al., 2009, Shulman and Hemenover 2006). We can assume that our findings are supported in this way.

On the most important features of emotional intelligence is to manage relations with other people. These skills are the underlying elements of being popular, leadership and interpersonal effectiveness. Each person differs in terms of his/her skills in different areas of emotional intelligence. For instance; although some are very skilled at settling others' concerns, they cannot use this skill for their own concerns. Some can be more empathic while some others can be unskilled at both being aware of their own feelings and responsive to others' feelings at the same time (Tugrul 1999).

The main restriction of this study is that the study was performed on only definite departments and the number of sample group is low. Similar researches can be performed on larger samples in order to increase the generalizability of this study. This study concludes that optimism in students predicts emotional intelligence. This is another example to show the significance of emotional intelligence described as the basis of success in personal and professional life. Therefore; both students and educators must be imbued with the significance of emotional intelligence via several programmes. The skills of critical thinking, criticizing, questioning etc. in students can be increased through the development of emotional intelligence and optimism, so that students can be successful in their professional life in the future. Moreover, education programmes must be generated and practised for the development of emotional intelligence and optimism as soon as possible. At the first stage of the development of emotional intelligence students must be supported to know themselves, to realize their weaknesses and strengths, to evaluate their emotional reactions to different events and to gain skills of emotional control. Programmes focusing on the significance of emotional intelligence that positively influence on academic success and social life, and supporting its development can be prepared to raise awareness of individuals.

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