Self-esteem, hopelessness and communication skills in preschool teacher candidates: A mediation analysis

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to investigate the relation of self-esteem, hopelessness and communication skill; while testing self-esteem as an intermediary variable. The research, designed in survey model, has been conducted with preschool teacher candidates. The research group comprises 305 teacher candidates that volunteered for the research. According to the findings of the research, teacher candidates' self-esteem is negatively correlated with their level of hopelessness and positively correlated with their communication skills. On the other hand, the relation between their level of hopelessness and communication skill is a negative correlation. According to the results of regression analysis, hopelessness, along with self-esteem, explain 31.6% of communication skill. Furthermore, another very important finding of the regression analysis is that teacher candidates' self-esteem plays a complete intermediary role in the relation between their level of hopelessness and their communication skill. Implications of the findings are discussed in the light of the related literature.

Keywords: Self-esteem, hopelessness, communication skills, preschool teacher candidates.

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1. Introduction

It is possible to make a distinction between the notion of the self that consists of one's beliefs concerning oneself, and that of 'self-esteem', which is formed through evaluation of the self (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995). Self-esteem is usually viewed as an attitude towards oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). As with all attitudes, it has cognitive and affective aspects.

While low self-esteem is linked to insecure attachments and a lack of belonging, high self-esteem is caused by feeling accepted by persons we deem important (Baldwin, 1992; Leary et al, 1995). A feeling of importance through validation and support of others, one's parents and peers in particular, is among the chief contributing causes of self-esteem (Harter, 1993). Garber and Flynn (2001) have found that low self-esteem emerges as a result of negative interpersonal interactions such as a lack of maternal acceptance, one's mother suffering from depression and negative parenting.

Self-esteem is an integral part of mental health and has a protective effect on healthy, positive social behaviour (Mann, Hosman, Schaalma & De Vries, 2004). It has been found to be the strongest and most dominant predictor of happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000). Research shows that self-esteem is negatively correlated to anxiety and other psychological and physiological problems (Beck, Brown, Steer, Kuyken & Grisham, 2001). High self-esteem reduces anxiety, ameliorates coping skills and contributes to physical health (Greenberg et al., 1992). A positive view of oneself is seen as an important psychological tool in overcoming problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 cited in Mann et al., 2004).

Self-esteem is also a predictor of hopelessness. Cakar and Karakas (2012), in their research on adolescents, have found a negative correlation between self-esteem and hopelessness. Beck et al. (1975, 1976) define hopelessness as negative expectations concerning the future. According to Beck's cognitive model, individuals who are prone to depression are hopeless about their future. These individuals view themselves, the world and their future negatively. Feelings of hopelessness, as experienced by hopeless individuals who think that their problems cannot be solved, are also correlated with suicidal tendencies (Beck, 1963). This statement is also supported by empirical research (e.g., Seber, Dilbaz, Kaptanoglu & Tekin, 1993). In students with low self-esteem, hopelessness plays a partially intermediary role in the relation between depressive ideations and permanent depressive reactions (Abela, 2002).

Snyder et al. (1991) define hope not in terms of expectations, but goals. Hope, in his view, is a cognitive process concerning an aspiration towards a goal and an ability to formulate a plan in order to achieve it (Snyder et al., 1991). Feeling hope can directly increase one's satisfaction in life and their general wellbeing (Snyder, 1995). Parental support, relations with friends and relations with the opposite sex have been found to be the three main factors determining hopelessness (McLaughlin, Miller & Warwick, 1996). Research done in Turkey shows a correlation between one's feeling of hopelessness and their relations with their friends (Unguren & Ehtiyar, 2009). Self-sufficiency, optimism and hope are among the important predictors of one's general wellbeing (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999). Chang (1998) states that individuals who feel a high amount of hope have advanced problem- solving skills and employ less ineffective coping strategies in highly stressful academic situations compared to their peers who feel less hope. Loneliness and negative life events, on the other hand, are positively correlated with hopelessness (Chang, Sanna, Hirsch & Jeglic, 2010). Hopelessness, or a lack of hope, contributes particularly to the risk of depression, sociopathy and suicidal behaviour (Erickson, Post & Paige 1975; Frank, 1968; Hanna, 1991).

Adolescents with high self-esteem are found to be perceiving social support more and feeling less hopelessness (Cakar & Karakas, 2012). The more support and validation and individual receives, the more self-esteem they have (Harter, 1993). This view underlines the importance of social acceptance and interpersonal relations. High self-esteem relates to a feeling of being securely accepted regardless of one's success or failure, whereas low self-esteem concerns a view that acceptance is conditional, and therefore fragile (Baldwin, Baccus & Fitzsimons, 2004). Individuals with high self-esteem are more popular (Battistich, Solomon & Delucchi, 1993). According to the sociometer theory of self-esteem,

put forward by Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs (1995), self-esteem is an internal measurement of one's desirability and success. It follows that while being popular contributes to high self-esteem, social rejection decreases it. Individuals with low self-esteem report having more negative social relations, having a more stressful life experience and receiving less social support (Lakey, Tardiff & Drew, 1994). Furthermore, individuals with high self-esteem express a more positive view of their friendly relations (Keefe & Berndt, 1996). Bishop and Inderbitzen (1995), in their research done on 542 ninth graders, have found that individuals that are not in reciprocal friendships express lower self-esteem than those that are in at least one reciprocal friendship. Children with high social anxiety express lower self-esteem (Ginsburg, La Greca & Silverman, 1998). Adolescents with extreme social anxiety feel less socially accepted and have lower self-esteem compared to their peers with less social anxiety (La Greca & Stone, 1993). Low self-esteem leads to a negative view of social relations. This in turn leads to behaviour, such as social resignation, and therefore receiving less social support (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 1999). Individuals with high self-esteem form more social relations as they do not experience fear of rejection as strongly (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Research done in Turkey shows that individuals with low self-esteem form weaker peer relations (Gur, 1996).

Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg and Reis (1988) examined the relationship between social relations patterns and self-esteem of university students through self-assessments and roommates evaluations. High self-esteemed university students have found themselves more positive in all social skills, such as initiating relationships, exploring things about themselves, defending themselves against inappropriate behaviour, providing emotional support for others, and managing conflicts among individuals. However, the findings of Buhrmester et al. (1988) show that the self-esteem scores assessed by the roommates are more related to the social skill scores obtained by the roommate's assessments than individual self-esteem scores. In addition, the correlations between self-esteem and interpersonal skills assessed by roommates, and self-assessment of self-esteem and interpersonal skill scores are very similar. These findings can be interpreted as different people's evaluation of self-esteem may lead to different findings. In a research experiment conducted by Brockner and Lloyd (1986), subjects are first asked to evaluate their self-esteem, and then have a 10-minute meeting with another subject from the opposite sex. Afterwards, they were asked about their impressions of their fellow subjects, and also whether they thought the other party liked them, and how much. The results showed that people with high self-esteem were more likely to think that they were liked. Subjects with low self-esteem, on the other hand, tended to think they were liked much less than what their counterpart stated. These results are important, especially in that they show how self-esteem impacts our perception of social relations.

Communication skill is an important factor in determining the outcome of social relations. Research shows that communication skill and self-esteem are positively correlated (Parker, 1982; Pasli-Erdogan, Cetinkaya-Ulusoy, Kurt & Yasak, 2016), and that interpersonal communication and interpersonal relations are predictive of self-esteem (Meche, 2002). Al-Daoud's (1989) experimental research on high-school students showed that students who were educated in communication skills had higher self-esteem and were better at solving interpersonal problems, compared to the students in the control group who were not given the same education. Similarly, Parker (1982) created an education program structured around interpersonal relations for fourth graders. The goal of the program was to raise awareness of oneself and others, and to improve communication skills. The results showed significant improvement of the participants' self-esteem and communication skills. It is also noted that among the participants, those with high self-esteem were more likely to offer criticism of the program and views on how to improve it (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). In a longitudinal study conducted by LePine and Van Dyne (1998), nearly 600 employees from 21 different organisations were observed for six months. During this period, their colleagues were also interviewed regarding their impressions on the participants. The main areas of focus were a willingness to speak in a group, and behaviour such as offering criticism on how the group functions and offering alternative solutions. The hypothesis that high self-esteem was correlated these traits was confirmed, albeit in low effect level.

1.1. The present study

In Turkish literature, it was not found that these three variables (self-esteem, hopelessness and communication skills) were examined together. In this research all three variables are observed, the relation between them is analysed and it is the goal of this study to contribute to the literature in this manner. In the study, the relation between preschool teacher candidates' level of hopelessness and communication skills is analysed, along with self-esteem as an intermediary variable. That the sample group consists of candidate preschool teachers is because of the role teacher competence plays in early childhood development. Personality development occurs in great part during early childhood. As the starting age for pre-school education goes down, teachers play a more important role in personality development. Teachers' psychological wellbeing is important for children who learn through conditioning, observation and imitation. In light of these, the following hypotheses are developed and tested in this study:

H1: Preschool teacher candidates' self-esteem and level of hopelessness are negatively correlated.

H2: Preschool teacher candidates' self-esteem and communication skills are positively correlated.

H3: Preschool teacher candidates' communication skills and level of hopelessness are negatively correlated.

H4: The relation between preschool teacher candidates' communication skills and their level of hopelessness is mediated by self-esteem.

2. Method

It is aimed to investigate co-integration of variables in the research and is designed as a descriptive study based on the survey model (Creswell, 2012; Karasar, 2013).

2.1. Design

This research has been conducted with a goal of understanding and explaining the relation between preschool teacher candidates' self-esteem, level of hopelessness and communication skills; through the survey model. Figure 1 shows the model we have determined through use of the research's goal, its hypotheses and other research in the literature. The model incorporates three variables and three relations that link them together. The letter '*c*' on Hypothesis 4 is employed to mark the relation between the intermediary variable and the other variables.
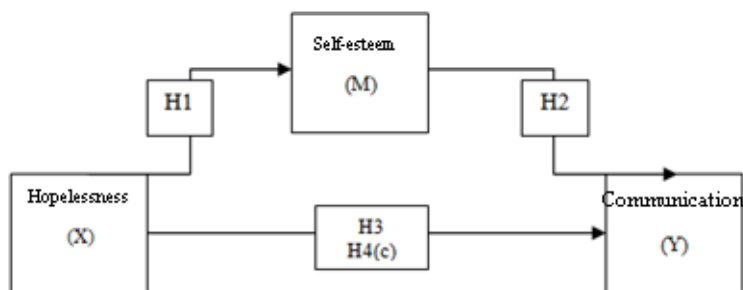

Figure 1. Research model

2.2. Participants

Purposeful sampling technique was used in research and participants of the study were selected on a voluntary basis. The research group comprises 305 teacher candidates for the research, and who were third or fourth year students in Marmara University Ataturk Institute of Education's Program for

Preschool Education during the school year 2015–2016. 93.8% of the participants were female while 6.2% of them were male. %60.3 of them were third year students while 39.7% were on their fourth year. The average age of the participants was 21.95. 84.9% had placed this program in their first five preferences in the national university exam. 3.6% identify as lower income, 91.8% as middle income and 4.6% high-income socio-economic groups.

Looking at the types of high school the participants graduated from; 27.2% graduated from an Anatolian Teachers' High school, 22.3% graduated from a Vocational High School, 21.3% graduated from an Anatolian High School, 17.4% graduated from an Anatolian Vocational High School, 7.2% graduated from a General High School and the remaining 4.6% graduated from a different kind of high school (Science High School, Foreign Language Intensive High School, İmam Hatip (Islamic Vocational) High School, etc.).

2.3. Measures

Four data collection tools have been used in the research: 'Personal Information Form', 'Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale', 'Beck Hopelessness Scale' and 'Communication Skills Rating Scale'.

2.3.1. Personal information form

The form, developed by the researchers, has been used to acquire data on demographic variables, such as the participants' age, sex, school semester, type of high school, university exam preferences and socio-economic group.

2.3.2. Rosenberg self-esteem scale

Developed by Rosenberg (1965) with a focus on adolescents, it comprises 63 multiple choice questions and 12 sections. In accordance with our research goals, only the 'Self-Esteem' subdivision has been used. This subdivision, comprising of five positive and five negative statements, has been used on a 'total score' basis, as it is accepted to be unilateral (Corwyn, 2000). A high score on the scale indicates low self-esteem. The scores between 0 and 1 show high, 2–4 moderate and 5–6 low self-esteem when calculating scale scores (Cuhadaroglu, 1990). The Turkish adaptation of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale has been created by Cuhadaroglu (1986) and its reliability coefficient has been calculated as 0.71. Its test–retest reliability coefficient has been found to be 0.75. This scale was used in a large number of studies and differences were found among the studied groups (see Aypay, 2010; Kutlu & Sogukpınar, 2015; Morsunbul & Atak, 2013; Tugrul, 1994). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the self-esteem sub-dimension was calculated as 0.74.

2.3.3. Beck hopelessness scale

Beck Hopelessness Scale, developed by Beck, Weissman, Lester and Trexler (1974), aims to determine an individual's level of pessimism concerning the future. The scale, consisting of 20 items, comprises 11 true and 9 false statements concerning one's feelings and thoughts about the future. A high score on the scale indicates that the participant has a high level of hopelessness. These statements are divided into three sub-sectors, in 'feelings about the future', 'loss of motivation' and 'expectations concerning the future'. The score from these sub-sectors are then averaged to find the hopelessness score. A study on the scale's validity and reliability in Turkish has first been made by Seber et al. (1993) and its internal consistency coefficient has been found as 0.86. A subsequent study conducted by Durak and Palabiyikoglu (1994) has determined it to be 0.85.

2.3.4. Communication skills rating scale

Developed by Korkut (1996), it is a five-point Likert scale consisting of 25 items. Communication Skills Rating Scale aims to determine the qualities an individual might have that contribute to their relation and communication with others. Each item in the questionnaire is to be answered as either (4) always, (3) often, (2) sometimes, (1) rarely or (0) never. A high score on the scale indicates that one

rates oneself highly in terms of their communication skills. The construct validity of the scale has been tested in an exploratory factor analysis by Korkut (1996) and it has been identified as a single factor construct. In the study, the internal consistency coefficient has been found to be 0.80 and the test–retest reliability coefficient has been determined to be 0.76. The Cronbach Alfa internal consistency coefficient of the scale has been determined to be 0.89 in this same study.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

First of all, the skewness-kurtosis values of the variables were examined and the values obtained for hopelessness (skewness = −0.380 and kurtosis = 0.043), self-esteem (skewness = 0.880; kurtosis = −0.221) and communication skills (skewness = 0.193; kurtosis = −1.303) were determined to be between +1.5 and −1.5. It can be said that these values show that the data is normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In order to test the proposed model of the relation between preschool teacher candidates' self-esteem, level of hopelessness and communication skills, the researchers have conducted correlation and hierarchical regression analyses. Also, a Sobel test (1982) has been used to examine the intermediary role of self-esteem. In regression analyses, possible effects of aforementioned demographic variables on the dependent variables have been tested, but these findings will not be reported as they are not the focus of this study, and for simplification purposes. Two models have been examined in regression analyses (see Table 2). 'Hopelessness', 'Communication Skills' and 'Self-Esteem' have been analysed as the independent variable, dependent variable and intermediary variable, respectively. In addition, descriptive analyses have been done regarding the variables. SPSS 22 program has been used in the evaluation of the data.

3. Results

Below are presented the findings of correlation and regression analyses conducted on the data.

Table 1. Pearson product moment correlation analysis between hopelessness, self-esteem and communication skills

	$\bar{x}$	Ss	1	2	3
1. Hopelessness	7.27	1.16	1	0.250**	−0.197*
2. Self-esteem	1.85	1.79		1	−0.559**
3.Communication	102.29	11.39			1

*** p < 0.01.*
** p< 0.05.*

The results of the correlation analysis indicate that there is significant positive correlation between participants' level of hopelessness and self-esteem (*r* = 0.250), significant negative correlation between their level of hopelessness and communication skills (*r* = −0.197) and significant negative correlation between their self-esteem and communication skills (*r* = −0.559).

Table 2. Significant predictors of communication skills of preschool teacher candidates through hierarchical regression analysis

	Model	B	SH	β	t	p
1	Constant	116.312	3.180		36.578	0.000*
	Hopelessness	−1.927	0.432	−0.197	−4.464	0.000*
2	Constant	113.011	2.696		41.920	0.000*
	Hopelessness	−0.597	0.376	−0.061	−1.586	0.113
	Self-esteem	−3.441	0.243	−0.543	−14.152	0.000*

* p < 0.01.

Two models have been tested for the regression analysis, as can be seen in Table 2. According to Model 1, pre-school teacher candidates' level of hopelessness significantly predicts their communication skills ($\beta = -0.197$), and adjusted R squared is 3.9% ($R = 0.197$, $R^2 = 0.039$, $p < 0.05$). In Model 2, with the addition of 'self-esteem' as a variable, it has been found that self-esteem significantly predicts communication skills ($\beta = 0.543$, $p < 0.05$) and accounts for 31.6% of the variance ($R = 0.562$, $R^2 = 0.316$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, it has been observed that level of hopelessness loses its significant correlation with communication skills in Model 2 ($\beta = -0.061$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, it can be stated that preschool teacher candidates' self-esteem plays a fully intermediary role in the relation between their level of hopelessness and communication skills (Baron and Kelly, 1986). Results of the Sobel test (1982) indicate that this intermediary role is significant (See Table 3).

Table 3. Mediation analysis results

Independent variable	Intermediary variable	Dependent variable	z
Hopelessness (X)	Self-esteem (M)	Communication (Y)	1.99*

* $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion

According to the findings of the correlation analysis, it has been found that pre-school teacher candidates' level of hopelessness and their self-esteem have a significant negative correlation, thus confirming H1. This positive correlation follows from the scoring systems of the data collection tools used in the study. A high score in the hopelessness scale indicates high levels of hopelessness. In addition, a high score in the self-esteem scale indicates low self-esteem. Therefore, this positive correlation should be interpreted as a negative correlation between the two variables. In other words, preschool teacher candidates with high self-esteem have low levels of hopelessness, and vice versa. These findings are in concordance with many studies in the literature. Research on adolescents shows that adolescents with high self-esteem experience less hopelessness (Baran, Baran & Maskan, 2015; Cakar & Karatas, 2012; Karatas & Cakar, 2011; Ozmen, Dundar, Cetinkaya, Taskın & Ozmen, 2008). In a research done with 303 participants who are students in a pedagogical formation program and whose average age is 27.98, it has been found that hopelessness and self-esteem are negatively correlated (Cevik & Yildiz, 2016). Furthermore, it has been found that there is a negative correlation between stress level and self-esteem (Rosli et al., 2012). Considering the fact that university students with low self-esteem (students who do not view themselves as talented, valuable or important) experience more stress and tend to avoid dealing with negative feelings more often compared to students with high self-esteem (Eisenbarth, 2012), it can be stated that they are less skilled in problem solving (Kilic, Erol & Kilic, 2011), which in turn translates into less satisfaction in life (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). It has been observed that university students with high self-esteem feel more hope, are more content with and optimistic about their lives (Mahanty, Sushma & Mishra, 2015; Yadav & Thingujam, 2015) and that have good coping skills (Guloglu & Karairmak, 2010). Even at advanced ages, self-esteem is determined as a predictive variable of hopeless (Lyubomirsky, Tkach & DiMatteo, 2006). Hope is related to self-esteem and self-esteem and extroversion are predictors of hopelessness (Mutlu, Balbag & Cemrek, 2010). Research done on adolescents between the ages of 11 and 20, it has been determined that hopelessness and self-esteem lead to emotional distress. It has been observed that adolescents with low self-esteem experience more emotional distress; and that emotional distress significantly predicts hopelessness (Fanaj, Melonashi & Shkembi, 2015).

In addition to these results, it has been observed that self-esteem and communication skill have a positive correlation, thus confirming H2. This negative correlation is the result of different the scoring systems of the data collection tools. A high score in the self-esteem scale indicates low self-esteem, while a high communication skill rating indicates efficient communication skills. It has been observed that there is a positive correlation and that participants with high self-esteem have better communication skills. Similar results can be found in the literature. Research shows that adolescents with high self-esteem perceive more social support (Cakar & Karatas, 2012), are less lonely and can

efficiently form relationships (McWhirter, 1997; Thoresen, 2015; Yoyen, 2017). Loneliness was determined as one of the predictive variables of the self-esteem (Erozkan, 2009). Social support, humour and self-esteem play intermediary roles in the relation between loneliness and shyness (Zhao, Kong & Wang, 2013; Zhao, Kong & Wang, 2012). These variables may be thought to be correlated to communication skills (McCroskey, Richmond, Daly & Falcione, 1977). It has been found that individuals who view their relations with their peers positively are more apt at self-expression, are able to form positive and empathetic relationships and that their self-esteem is supported (Mota & Matos, 2013). The individuals who have problems to create effective relations and communication became to be lonely and this could lead to pessimism (Davis, Miller, Johnson, McAuley & Dinges, 1992). Individuals with low self-esteem perceive themselves as unhappy, show low levels of sociality and difficulty in communication, it could be said this caused them to be lonely (Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014). High self-esteem, through its positive effect on social problem-solving skills, reduces unwanted behaviour, such as anger and hostility (D'zurilla, Chang & Sanna, 2003; Hamarta, 2009). Individuals with better communication skills have more self-esteem (Calsyn, Quicke & Harris, 1980). Furthermore, they experience less social isolation (Thompson, 2017). It has been observed that self-esteem, which has been determined to be correlated with emotional intelligence (interpersonal skills), is a significant predictor of loneliness (Yılmaz, Hamarta, Arslan & Deniz, 2013), and that social skill is correlated with self-esteem (Losa-Iglesias, Lopez Lopez, Rodriguez Vazquez & Becerro de Bengoa-Vallejo, 2018; Riggio, Throckmorton & Depaola, 1990). In addition to all of these, a significant negative correlation has been observed between verbal aggression and the three aspects of self-esteem (self-development, moral validation and likeability) (Rancer, Kosberg & Silvestri, 1992).

Hopelessness and communication skills have shown a significant negative correlation, therefore confirming H3. It has been observed that teacher candidates who experience more hopelessness are less skilled in communication. Various studies have shown that students who have comparatively less social problem-solving skills experience more hopelessness. Furthermore, it has been found that students who seek less social support have high levels of hopelessness (Cakar & Karatas, 2012; Kilic et al., 2011). Social self-sufficiency and participation in group activities are correlated with students' life satisfaction (Rad & Mahdian, 2014). It can be stated that students who are less efficient in social relationships are less apt at communication and participate less frequently in group activities. Likewise, it can be stated that the lonelier an individual is, the more hopeless they are (Baran et al., 2015; Girgin, 2009). Because, as a result of the research done, loneliness and negative life experiences were found to be related to hopelessness (Chang, Sanna, Hirsch & Jeglic, 2010). In particular, people with few friends have a high level of hopelessness (Girgin, 2009). Individuals' social relationships, that is, their low level of loneliness and satisfaction with their relationships with their friends are predictors of their happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2006). Social skills are negatively correlated with loneliness (Ozben, 2013). Students, who do not have efficient communication skills, have problems joining friend groups and who experience loneliness are less apt at coping with negative situations. This, in turn, leads to more hopelessness (Sezer & Kezer, 2017), which makes it harder to find social support (Bas & Kabasakal, 2013) and life satisfaction is low due to the loneliness they experience (Dost, 2007).

Regression analysis' results show that teacher candidates' level of hopelessness significantly predict their communication skills. Furthermore, it has been observed that self-esteem also significantly predicts communication skill, and that hopelessness along with self-esteem explains 31.6% of communication skills. When self-esteem is also accounted for as a variable, hopelessness no longer has a significant effect. Another important finding is that self-esteem acts in an intermediary role in the relation between teacher candidates' level of hopelessness and their communication skills. These finding confirm H4. This intermediary role can be interpreted as eliminating the negative effects of hopelessness on communication skill, or increasing them. In literature, a multitude of studies define self-esteem as an intermediary variable in various relations. Cevik and Yildiz (2016) have found that self-esteem acts in an intermediary role in the relation between hopelessness and unhappiness, that self-esteem has an effect on said relation, and that self-esteem has an important role in explaining happiness. In studies done with university students and adolescents, it has been determined that self-

esteem mediates the relation between loneliness and life satisfaction (Civitci & Civitci, 2009; Kapikiran, 2013; Yildiz & Karadas, 2017). It has also been found that self-esteem plays an intermediary role in the relation between shyness and loneliness (Zhao et al., 2012). In another study done with university students, it has been found that self-esteem mediates the relation between perfectionism and life satisfaction, and that it reduces the negative effects of stress on life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2017). Self-esteem, along with family relations, has a direct positive effect on individuals' happiness. It has a negative correlation with depression and it mediates the relation between extroversion and neuroticism (Cheng & Furnham, 2003).

As one can see, self-esteem plays an intermediary role in such relations as hopelessness and happiness, shyness and loneliness, perfectionism and life satisfaction, extroversion and neuroticism. Self-esteem is a dynamic construct (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002). From infanthood until death, the chief duty of physical, mental and emotional health is to build positive self-esteem (Macdonald, 1994 cited in Mann et al., 2004). Low self-esteem is seen as the strongest indicator of emotional and behavioral problems. Compared to individuals with high self-esteem, those with low self-esteem tend to be more anxious, depressive, jealous, shy, lonely and generally unhappy. At the same time, they are less competitive and less prone to form close friendships (Leary, Schreindorfer & Haupt, 1995). Therefore, self-esteem plays an important role on the emergence of depression in stressful situations. People with low self-esteem may avoid dealing with negative emotions stemming from a low sense of self-worth (Eisenbarth, 2012). Self-esteem, which also has an effect on decision-making (Avsaroglu & Omer, 2007), has an impact on the flexibility (psychological sturdiness) that is needed to physically, mentally and emotionally adapt to different situations (Karatas & Cakar, 2011). Self-esteem is seen as an important factor in both physical and mental health. For this reason, it must be a focal point in improving an individual's wellbeing, particularly their mental health (Mann et al., 2004). Self-esteem, which has a plethora of impacts on one's life, has been determined to mediate the relation between hopelessness and communication skill, which confirms the study's hypothesis.

The most outstanding reason for choosing preschool teacher candidates in this study was that preschool teachers are, apart from parents, the biggest role models in early childhood. They are the primary adults to meet outside of the family for the child (Oktay, 1991). Early childhood education institutions have both home-like and school-like qualities (Kim & Kim, 2010). These institutions are very different from other education institutions. In preschool education institutions, there are children who develop faster in many different ways. There is constant communication and cooperation between the parents and the teachers. The teachers that work there should provide education and care comparable to a home environment. Furthermore, they must form secure attachments with the children (Chang, Muckelroy & Pulido-Tobiassen, 1996). In addition, it is especially important that staff working in institutions are compatible (Podmore & Meade, 2000). A review of teacher characteristics is crucial for determining the relationship teachers have with children (Gerber, Whitebook & Weinstein, 2007). Considering research findings, the personal traits and mental wellbeing of preschool teachers is as important as their expertise and competence. Teachers are at the heart of educational development (Hopkins & Stern, 1996). The success of the education system depends on the success of the teacher, and the latter depends on the teachers' self-sufficiency (Yılmaz, Köseoglu, Gercek & Soran, 2004). Highly qualified teachers often display traits such as commitment, a love of children, expertise in their field, an ability to use multiple teaching models, cooperation with other teachers and an ability for projection (Hopkins & Stern, 1996). Effective preschool education depends on the competence of personnel, and the number of qualified teachers. Interaction in these institutions determines whether a negative or positive effect on child development takes place (Podmore & Meade, 2000). Research shows that the personality of preschool teachers are correlated with the quality of education and the success of the students (Guo, Piasta, Justice & Kaderavek, 2010).

Preschool teachers set down the sources of stress in the school as time pressure, providing for the children, extra-curricular duties, pursuing early childhood theory and practice, personal needs, working with children and their parents, interpersonal relations, and attitudes towards and perception of early childhood education (Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995). Research shows that teachers with self-

confidence successfully deal with stress. These teachers are also found to have low levels of stress (Ekici, 2017).

5. Recommendations and conclusion

The climate in early childhood education institutions is linked with depression. The severity of teachers' depression negatively impacts their self-sufficiency (Kim & Kim, 2010). In a research done with 1,217 early childhood education professionals, it has been found that depending on the severity of the depression a teacher is suffering from, they become less sensitive but shyer (Hamre & Pianta, 2004). Furthermore, both personality traits and their stress levels determine teachers' job satisfaction (Mazur & Lynch, 1989). Supporting self-esteem, which is found to be correlated with job satisfaction, has the effect of lowering teachers' stress levels (Abouserie, 1994). In a study comparing 'more effective' and 'less effective' teacher candidates in terms of their personality traits and of productive education, it has been shown that personality traits explain 57% of preventive, interactive productive education. More effective teacher candidates are found to be more productive, more mature and more open to innovation, compared to their peers (Kourilsky, Ksfandiari & Wittrock, 1996). In this research, the causal relation between teacher candidates' self-esteem, hopelessness and communication skills underlines the importance of supporting self-esteem in teacher candidates. Considering the fact that self-esteem is correlated with mental wellbeing and social problem-solving (Mann et al., 2004), it can be stated that teachers' professional competence depends on having high self-esteem. Therefore, it may be stated that by increasing the amount of classes and experiences that support their self-esteem, it will be possible to equip teachers with better coping skills in stressful situations, thereby reinforcing their self-sufficiency.

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