



## University students' opinions of the meaning of leisure and their perceived freedom in leisure

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of university students towards leisure and perceived freedom in leisure on the basis of different variables. To this end, a total of 250 university students in total, 174 (69%) of whom are males and 78 (31%) of whom are females selected by random sampling have voluntarily attended the research study. The sample of the study consists of students studying at Istanbul University's Faculty of Sports Sciences. The data collection instruments of the study include the personal information form developed by the researcher, as well as the *Leisure Meanings Inventory* which was developed by Esteve et al. (1999) and adapted into Turkish by Gürbüz et al. (2007) and aims to determine the leisure perceptions of the participants. The *Perceived Freedom in Leisure Scale*, which was developed by Witt and Ellis (1985) and adapted into Turkish by Yerlisu, Lapa and Ağyar (2011) was used to determine the participants' perceived freedom levels in leisure. Additionally, frequency methods have been utilized to identify the distribution of the personal information of the participants and the Shapiro-Wilks normality test has been applied to identify whether data had normal distribution. Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests have been applied to determine the significant differences after it was determined that the data were suitable to non-parametric test conditions. According to the gender variable, no significant difference has been identified in the sub-dimension of the perceived freedom in leisure scale ( $p>0.05$ ). In the active-passive participation and goal orientation sub-dimensions in the leisure meanings inventory, the female participants were found to score more than male participants. Based on the age variable, there were no significant differences found in any sub-dimension of the perceived freedom scale ( $p<0.05$ ) or in the leisure meanings inventory ( $p>0.05$ ). In conclusion, the perceived leisure levels of the female participants were higher than the male while it was also seen that as age increases, the perceived freedom levels in leisure increases as well.

**Keywords:** Leisure; Leisure Meaning; Perceived Freedom in Leisure.

### Introduction

In a constantly changing world, the physical and mental features of humans have changed the least from the past to today. In this changing and developing world, the concepts of leisure and recreation have been one of the ways to maintain humans' mental and physical health. The recreation activities which people do in their spare times have become essential components of community life (Sevil et al.,1997). According to Kemp and Pearson, leisure is the time which is left over after excluding time spent working, sleeping, eating and other compulsory tasks (Kemp & Pearson, 1997).

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Another point of view concerning leisure is that it represents the time period apart from working and other compulsory activities we do, and it is claimed that leisure is the best way to learn about a culture (Cordes & İbrahim, 1999; Demirel, 2009). Leisure, which refers to the time in which an agent does not work or do other compulsory duties, but rather spends it as s/he wants (Karaküçük & Gürbüz, 2007; Atasoy et al., 2015; Esteve et al., 2007) is commonly claimed to contribute to positive participation which in turn promotes the development of healthy and self-realized young people (Balci et al., 2002). The concept of leisure allows for various definitions. It is generally thought to be the opposite of working, however, time spent working by one can be viewed as the leisure time of another, and many activities integrate the features of working and leisure together. Getting rid of obligations is often thought to be the primary attraction of leisure, but many activities outside of one's job - activities in the house, social, voluntary and community activities - include considerable obligations in themselves (Torkildsen, 2005). Thus, the definition of leisure is subjective in nature as well as its symbolic meaning. It means different things to different people (Madrigal, 2006, Gürbüz & Handerson, 2013, Demirel, 2009).

Considering the vast variations of preferences in the world, some people may want to spend their leisure time indoors or outdoors, actively or passively, in rural or in urban areas. Hence, a number of researches about the contribution of active participation in recreational activities to agents' positive feelings have been conducted. One of these positive emotions is freedom (Lapa & Ağyar, 2012). Perceived freedom in leisure refers to that agents choose the activity they want to do (Siegenthaler & O'Dell, 2000). Also, agents are expected to possess some characteristics such as adequate competency, the ability to control their experiences and internal motivation instead of external so that they can obtain maximum benefit from recreational activities (Lapa & Ağyar, 2012). Considering the fact that the experiences gained during childhood and youth would continue in the years following, it is of great importance to learn about the attitudes and behaviors playing a critical role in guiding the behaviors and decisions of young people (Çimen & Sarol, 2015). Thus, it is critical to examine young individuals, especially university students' leisure time behavior, its meaning for them, as well as their opinions towards perceived freedom level. To this end, the aim of this study is to examine the opinions of university students concerning the meaning of leisure and perceived freedom levels in leisure based on different variables.

## Methods

### Study Sample

The sample of this study consists of 252 university students (174 males and 78 females) attending Istanbul University with an average age of  $21.80 \pm 2.62$ .

### Data Collection Instrument

The form used in the study as a data collection instrument consists of three parts. The first part is the "Personal Information Form" which aims to determine students' gender, age, income and weekly leisure time. The second part, which aims to measure the perceived competency, control and internal motivation in leisure, is the "Perceived Freedom in Leisure Scale" which was developed by Witt and Ellis (1985) and adapted into Turkish by Yerlisu, Lapa and Ağyar (2011). It is a five-point Likert scale with 17 items and two sub-dimensions labelled *Knowledge and Skill* and *Excitement and Joy*. In the scale, the scores range from 1 (Definitely Disagree) to 5 (Definitely Agree). The third part aimed to determine the leisure perceptions of the participants by using the "Leisure Meanings Inventory" which was developed by Esteve et al. (1999) and adapted into Turkish by Gürbüz et al. (2007) by conducting its validity and reliability studies. It is a 6-point Likert scale including 35 items and eight sub-dimensions labeled perceived freedom, business relation, social interaction, the availability of leisure, active-passive participation, goal orientation, perceived competency and internal motivation. The scale scores range from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely Agree).

### Data Analysis Process

The data related to personal information was analyzed using frequency and percentage, both of which are descriptive analysis methods. With the aim of testing whether both instruments' sub-dimensions show a normal range, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted, and the results revealed that there was not a normal distribution among the sub-dimensions of both scales ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Mann Whitney U Test was then applied for the data with two variables, and the Kruskal Wallis Test was applied for more than two variables. The significance level was accepted as  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

### Finding

**Table 1.** The Distribution of the Participants in terms of Gender, Age, Monthly Income and Weekly Leisure

Variables		F	%
Gender	Male	174	69.1
	Female	78	30.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>
Age	17-20	147	58.3
	21-25	96	38.1
	26 and older	9	3.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>
Monthly Income	Very Low	22	8.7
	Low	41	16.3
	Medium	149	59.1
	High	35	13.9
	Very High	5	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>	
Weekly Leisure Time	1-5 Hours	65	25.8
	6-10 Hours	68	27.0
	11-15 Hours	56	22.2
	16 Hours or more	63	25.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the statistical findings concerning participants' gender, age, monthly income and weekly leisure time, 69.1% of the participants are male while 30.9% are female. The age of 58.3% of them ranges from 17 to 20, 59.1% of them have a "medium level" of monthly income, and 27% of them have "6-10 hours" weekly for leisure time.

**Table 2.** The Participants' Perceived Leisure Freedom Levels based on Gender

Sub-dimensions	Gender	N	Sequence Value Avg.	Z	p
Knowledge and Skill	Male	174	125.73	-.251	.802
	Female	78	128.22		
Excitement and Joy	Male	174	121.00	-1.792	.073
	Female	78	138.77		

Table 2 presents the Mann-Whitney U Test results conducted to test perceived freedom levels in leisure based on participants' genders. The results indicate no statistically significant difference between the scores of males and females ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 3.** The Participants' Levels of Leisure Meaning based on Gender

Sub-dimensions	Gender	N	Sequence Value Avg.	Z	p
Active-Passive Participation	Male	174	119.53	-1.746	<b>.013*</b>
	Female	78	142.04		
Social Interaction	Male	174	124.60	-.483	.342
	Female	78	130.74		
Perceived Competency	Male	174	124.14	-.584	.234
	Female	78	131.78		
Availability of Leisure	Male	174	121.81	-2.847	.432
	Female	78	134.74		
Perceived Freedom	Male	174	122.45	-1.645	.232
	Female	78	135.53		
Internal Motivation	Male	174	122.25	-1.324	.172
	Female	78	135.99		
Goal Orientation	Male	174	119.00	-2.455	<b>.014*</b>
	Female	78	143.23		
Business Relation	Male	174	124.36	-.696	.486
	Female	78	131.26		

Table 3 presents the Mann-Whitney U test results which was conducted to determine the participants' levels of leisure meaning based on gender. The results show that there is a significant difference in the sub-dimensions of "Active-Passive Participation" and "Goal Orientation" ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 4.** The Perceived Freedom Levels in Leisure based on Participants' Gender

Sub-dimensions	Age	N	Sequence Value Avg.	X <sup>2</sup>	p
Knowledge and Skills	17-20	147	113.70	10.918	<b>.004*</b>
	21-25	96	144.31		
	26 and older	9	145.61		
Excitement and Joy	17-20	147	114.58	9.477	<b>.009*</b>
	21-25	96	143.01		
	26 and older	9	145.17		

With the aim of testing the perceived freedom levels in leisure based on participants' gender, the Kruskal Wallis Test was conducted, and the results are shown in Table 4. The test results revealed that there are statistically significant differences in the sub-scales of "Knowledge and Skills" and "Excitement and Joy" ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Participants' Levels of Leisure Meaning based on Age

Sub-dimensions	Age	N	Sequence Value Avg.	X <sup>2</sup>	p
Active-Passive Participation	17-20	147	125.45	1.274	.273
	21-25	96	129.70		
	26 and older	9	109.56		
Social Interaction	17-20	147	124.52	.564	.435
	21-25	96	128.18		
	26 and older	9	140.94		
Perceived Competency	17-20	147	130.25	.748	.218
	21-25	96	120.52		
	26 and older	9	129.06		
The Availability of Leisure	17-20	147	127.16	1.327	.434
	21-25	96	123.75		
	26 and older	9	145.11		
Perceived Freedom	17-20	147	127.22	1.345	.245
	21-25	96	124.66		
	26 and older	9	134.44		

<b>Internal Motivation</b>	17-20	147	122.04	.847	.453
	21-25	96	130.27		
	26 and older	9	159.22		
<b>Goal Orientation</b>	17-20	147	126.31	.419	.811
	21-25	96	125.37		
	26 and older	9	141.67		
<b>Business Relation</b>	17-20	147	120.58	4.549	.103
	21-25	96	131.56		
	26 and older	9	159.66		

Table 5 illustrates the results of the Kruskal Wallis test which was applied to test the participants' leisure meaning levels based on their ages. According to the test results, there are no statistically meaningful differences between participants' ages and their leisure meaning levels ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 6.** The Relations among the Sub-dimensions of Perceived Freedom in Leisure Scale and the Leisure Meanings Inventory

<b>Sub-dimensions</b>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Knowledge and Skill</b>	r	1									
	p										
<b>Excitement and Joy</b>	r	.857	1								
	p	<b>0.03**</b>									
<b>Active-Passive Participation</b>	r	.545	.423	1							
	p	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.03**</b>								
<b>Social Interaction</b>	r	.284	.384	.804	1						
	p	<b>0.05**</b>	<b>0.05**</b>	<b>0.05**</b>							
<b>Perceived Competency</b>	r	.332	.365	.732	.792	1					
	p	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.05**</b>						
<b>The Availability of Leisure</b>	r	.322	.388	.432	.687	.721	1				
	p	<b>0.02**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>					
<b>Perceived Freedom</b>	r	.423	.333	.543	.473	.544	.555	1			
	p	<b>0.0**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>			
<b>Internal Motivation</b>	r	.442	.243	.545	.234	.545	.232	.542	1		
	p	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.03**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>	<b>0.02**</b>			
<b>Goal Orientation</b>	r	.324	.463	.432	.543	.436	.333	.554	.435	1	
	p	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	
<b>Business Relation</b>	r	.456	.432	.354	.234	.543	.454	.323	.234	.234	1
	p	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>	<b>0.04**</b>

The Spearman Correlation Test was applied to determine whether there are relationships among the sub-dimensions of Perceived Freedom in Leisure Scale and the Leisure Meanings Inventory. The test results are shown in Table 6. The results indicate statistically positive and significant relationships among the sub-dimensions of both scales ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the study is to examine the leisure constraints and perceived freedom in leisure of university students in terms of different variables. Considering the demographic features of the participants, it was found that 69.1% of the participants were males; 58.3% of them were between the ages of 17 and 20, 59.1% had a medium level of income and 27% of them had leisure time of 6-10 hours weekly. There were no significant differences between the sub-dimensions of "Knowledge and Skills" (.802) and "Excitement and Joy" (.073) in terms of perceived leisure levels based on gender. In the study of Lapa & Ağyar (2012) and Serdar (2016) which examined university students' perceived freedom in leisure based on their participation in recreational activities, it was shown that gender was not a significant variable in defining perceived freedom levels in leisure. However, in another study by Kodaş et al. (2015) measuring relationships between the perceived freedom in

leisure and leisure time satisfaction levels of workers in the catering sector, there were meaningful differences found in the perceived freedom levels in leisure in the "Knowledge and Skills" sub-dimension based on gender. Thus, the study by Kodaş et al. (2015) parallel to this study in terms of the "Knowledge and Skill" sub-dimension. Based on participants' age, there were again no meaningful differences found between perceived freedom in leisure and both sub-dimensions, which can be interpreted as that no matter what age the participants are, they care about the recreational activities they are involved in, and that as they get older, their interest in such activities does not change. Considering the leisure time and gender of the participants, there were significant differences found between the sub-dimensions of "Active-Passive Participation" and "Goal Orientation" ( $p < 0.05$ ) while there no meaningful differences in other sub-dimensions. The results of the study by Lakot (2015), which was conducted with physical education teacher candidates and the study by Demir et al. (2013) conducted with civil servants do not show parallelism with the current study results. This outcome can be interpreted as that the participants tend to perceive leisure time differently based on their genders. In terms of age, there were no significant differences found between the perceived leisure time meanings of the participants and sub-dimensions, which may mean that the perceived leisure time levels of the participants were close to each other regardless of any age difference. According to the Spearman Correlation Test results which was conducted to determine whether there were relationships among the sub-dimensions *Perceived Freedom in Leisure Scale* and *Leisure Meanings Inventory*, there are statistically positive and significant relationships among the sub-dimensions of both scales. Lastly, it was determined that gender is not a statistically significant factor in perceived freedom levels of the participants while age could be a meaningful variable. Additionally, in terms of the *Leisure Meanings Inventory*, there were meaningful differences between gender and the sub-dimensions of "Active-Passive Participation" and "Goal Orientation," while there were seen to be no differences between age and leisure meanings of the participants.

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