



**Sabri Kaya<sup>1</sup>, Bülent Gürbüz<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Kırıkkale University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Department of Recreation, Kırıkkale, Turkey

[sabrikaya@kku.edu.tr](mailto:sabrikaya@kku.edu.tr)

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## AN EXAMINATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEISURE ACTIVITIES

### *Abstract*

The aim of this study was to examine the university students' attitudes towards leisure activities and to compare the participants' attitudes levels according to different variables. In total, 259 (N<sub>female</sub>= 146; age=22.31, SD=2.80, N<sub>male</sub> =113; age=21.20, SD=2.21) university students that study in different universities in the Central Anatolia region participated in this study. "Leisure Attitudes Scale" (LAS) developed by Ragheb and Beard (1982) and adapted to Turkish by Akgül and Gürbüz (2010) was used in the study. The attitudes of the participants towards the leisure time activities are evaluated by the Likert type scale over 5. LAS is made up of 36 articles and 3 sub-dimensions such as cognitive (12), affective (12), and behavioral (12). In order to determine whether the attitude scores of the participants vary depending on the independent variables, t-test and MANOVA were used for independent groups in the analysis of the data. In the light of the findings of the study significant differences were detected in the attitude scores of the participants according to their sex and ages (p<.05). The scores of attitudes of the women and the participants between ages 18-22 are more on the positive side towards the leisure activities compared to the rest of the participants. Moreover, according to the results of the analysis, the attitudes of the individuals who take part in the physical activities are more positive than the one who do not. Overall, highest attitude scores of the participants towards leisure activities are on the cognitive aspect.

**Keywords:** Leisure, recreation, attitude, university students

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the phenomenon of leisure and using the leisure time has become an issue with multi-dimensional aspects and worth giving serious thought both for individuals and the societies. Thus, the researchers began to notice the importance of leisure time and participation in the activities and events to use leisure time; as a result of which a significant raise in the number of the studies in literature about the issue can be seen (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Trail et al., 2002; Henderson and Ainsworth, 2001; Ragheb, 1980; Iso-Ahola and Weissinger, 1990; Ragheb and Tate, 1993; Watson, 1996). The issue of leisure that has complicated meaning and functions for societies and individuals alike is usually studied with an aim to research the psychological and sociological reasons of participation in the leisure time activities (Haworth and Veal, 2004; Chen and Pang, 2012). Although changeable depending on the type and context, the leisure activities play an important role in the improvement of the individuals' social behaviors, creation of their social identity, relief from the stress caused by the work life, and help them feel better psychologically by satisfyingly the needs such as sense of belonging, expressing the self, and being sensitive (Karlı et al., 2008; Beggs et al., 2014). According to Edgington (2007) using the leisure time is one of the most important factors that increase and improve the individuals' quality of life in the modern societies thus contributing to the discovery, innovation and realization of the individual. The use of leisure time is important not only on the individual level but also on the social level as it plays an important role in enhancing the individual's experience in the global society while contributing to the communication and understanding between the cultures. In this context, the leisure activities provide the individual with the opportunity to discover their creativity and put their sense of discovery in action thus supporting and easing change. Additionally, as an aspect of leisure time, an increase in the interest and inclination in the participation in physical activities can be observed in recent years (Henderson and Ainsworth, 2001; Ragheb, 1980; Ragheb and Tate, 1993; Watson, 1996).

It was stated by Menec (2003) that levels of life satisfaction and happiness are in correlation with the participation of leisure activities. It can also be added that health and social skills are positively affected by the participation of leisure activities (Drakou et al., 2008; Driver et al., 1991). In the research by Davison and Lawson (2006) it was reported an individuals' taking part in physical leisure activities may enhance their life making it more active hence helping with better health conditions. It is claimed that in addition to the personal benefits participation in leisure activities provides the individuals with, it also aids the development of

identity, mental, physical development and improvement of language while helping the wrong, ill-intended or anti-social behaviors to decline. Considering the leisure activities also function as a tool of entertainment (Seçgin, 1996; Shaw et al., 1996, 276; Nippold et al., 2005), it is crucial that the new generation in Turkey, with its dense population of young individuals, learn using time effectively and productively in order to achieve both individual and social satisfaction and happiness (Soyer, 1997; Süzer, 1997; Doğanay et al., 2006; Selim, 2008; Dost, 2010, Doğan, 2013).

Accordingly, leisure activities are beneficial activities, done solely for the sake of doing the activity itself without consciously expecting any profits or returns than the activity itself, going with the flow in our leisure time, answering to spiritual wishes and needs, including opportunities for human development and done freely without force or pressure (Anderson, 1998). It was found that especially participation in outdoor activities ease the depressive symptoms (Ruuskanen and Ruopilla, 1995; Menec, 2003; Morgan & Bath, 1998) and increase the level of happiness and life satisfaction also improving health and social functions (Drakou et al., 2008; Driver et al, 1991). Moreover it was found that taking part in physical activities is in close association with an active lifestyle, and beneficial and motivational for health (Davison and Lawson, 2006).

There are many determinants active in participation in physical activities and other types of activities done in the leisure time. Of all these, ‘attitude’ is the most prominent concept. In his research Inceoglu (1993) states that everything in life depends on attitudes, known as motivational powers behind behaviors and attitudes are born from beliefs that we have about people and things. There are many definitions about the nature of attitude in the literature. In order to help understand the concept, it would be beneficial to briefly mention some of these definitions. As a generalization, attitude is a phenomenon achieved by learning, guiding an individual’s actions and capable of causing bias in the process of decision making (Erkuş, 2003). According to Smith (1968), on the other hand, attitude is a disposition attributed to an individual constantly forming their opinions, emotions and actions about a psychological object. According to Gardner (1985), attitude is the reaction of an individual towards a given object or concept based on their beliefs and ideas. While Papanastasiou (2002) defines attitude as: “attitude is an individual’s positive or negative emotional disposition towards things, people, places, events or ideas”, Ozguven (1998) defines it as: “individuals’ emotional predisposition or tendency to

accept or reject a certain thing, person, a group, an institution or idea". Sherif and Sherif (1996) defines attitude as a condition of being quite constantly ready to decide whether a positive or a negative response is to be given to a thing or a situation labeled by a moral judgment as a result of a psychological reasoning.

In the light of all the descriptions above, it is obvious that attitude shall be referred as a determinative factor for detecting tendencies in using leisure time, just as any other aspects of life. Neulinger (1981) defines that "leisure attitude a person's attitude toward leisure is his particular way of thinking about, feeling about, and acting toward leisure". Supporting this idea, Dzewaltowski (1989) determined in his study that there is a positive relation between intention to participate in the leisure activities, attitude and self-satisfaction. In the findings of their researches Ragheb, (1980); Crandall and Slivken, (1980); Watson (1996); it was found that there is a relation between attitude and participation in physical activities. The studies also showed that the factor of attitude affects the participation in physical activities as a means of using leisure time (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ragheb, 1980; Davis et al., 1984; Ragheb and Tate, 1993; Watson, 1996). It should also be mentioned that the relationship between participation in leisure time activities, contentment and attitude was researched by Ragheb (1980). It was recorded by Kaufman (1988) that there is a significant positive relationship between taking part in leisure time activities and satisfaction. Moreover, Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990) found negative relationships between boredom and leisure participation, motivation, attitude, and satisfaction.

Leisure has become one of the prominent concerns of college/university students in Turkey as a positive attitude towards leisure provides an indispensable opportunity to handle the boredom of their daily life. It may be said that the college is the ultimate formal education level for many individuals in Turkey and also the one where the students can structure the way they behave in their leisure time before their life begins in the workforce. Cheng (1998) states that when the social quality and the national productivity is concerned college/University students play a prominent role with by how much involvement they have in recreational activities and how physically fit they are. Being regarded as the national capital and indispensable support in scientific improvements of a country, the university students' attitude towards leisure time and their related needs is a field of study that will allow the society to properly understand and address those needs and attitudes in order to develop in any directions. The years of a young

individual in college is not solely constituted of course attendance, but also of new goals and directions in terms of recreational and leisure time activities. In their pursuit of such activities, recreational sports offer these students everything one may expect of a leisure time activity keeping them involved physically, mentally and socially (Cheng, 1995). It was established in the USA that students who participate in programs of using time consciously for a lifetime which aim to prevent wasting time or abusing time and to support the leisure activities, are more sensitive towards social events, more decisive and enterprising and open to new attractions and participation in sport events or events that take place in nature (Caldwell et al., 2004). In Turkey, the participation of University youth in leisure and recreational activities are facilitated in a semi-organized manner by the opportunities provided by the university during their education which enables the universities to offer guidance to students in how they can make better use of their leisure time remaining from their formal studies (Onat, 2001; Balcı, 2003).

Determining the attitudes of university students towards leisure activities is essential to enable the universities to undertake the responsibility of the position and cooperate with the other related institutions so that the programs on making better use of leisure time and related infrastructure can be provided. In the light of the reasons given above, the aim of this study is to determine the attitudes of the individuals who study in the university towards the leisure activities and compare these levels of attitudes in terms of certain variables (gender, age, participation in physical activities).

## **METHOD**

### Participants

Participants were drawn from a nonrandom convenience sample of students enrolled at two midsize universities, one state and one private university in the Central Anatolia region in Turkey. Participants voluntarily attended in this study. Of the total of participants (N= 259), 146 female (age M= 22.31, SD= 2.80), and 113 male (age M= 21.20, SD= 2.22). Study participants were asked to complete the Leisure Attitude Scale (LAS; Ragheb & Beard, 1982), and to provide demographic information such as age, gender, class, faculty, department and income. The self-administered questionnaire required approximately 20 minutes to complete. The overall questionnaire response rate was 86.3% (259 of 300).

## Measures

Leisure Attitude Scale (LAS; Rageb and Beard, 1982) was used to measure leisure attitudes in this study. The Turkish adaptation of LAS was prepared by Akgül and Gürbüz (2010). The LAS is a 36-item instrument consisting of three sub-scales that examine various aspects of attitude. The LAS is composed of 36 items, with 12 items measuring each of the three of leisure attitude components—cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The Cognitive sub-scale contains 12 items related to knowledge about leisure and beliefs about its value. The Affective sub-scale contains 12 items related to liking, disliking, and other feelings about leisure activities. The Behavioral sub-scale contains 12 items related to past, present, and intended actions with regard to leisure activities and experiences (Ragheb & Beard, 1982). Research indicates that this measure demonstrates a high level of reliability, with alpha reliability coefficient being .91 for the total scale, and .80, .76, and .78 for the cognitive, affective and behavioral scales, respectively.

## Data Analysis

The attitudes of the participants towards leisure activities was evaluated by a Likert type scale of 5 prepared with (1) I definitely do not agree, (2) I do not agree, (3) I am uncertain, (4) I agree, (5) I definitely agree. In order to examine the credibility of the scale for this study, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency co-efficiency was calculated. In consequence the internal consistency of the scale was calculated as (a) cognitive (.92), (b) affective (.91), and (c) behavioral (.89). In the analysis of the collected data, in addition to the standard tests such as frequency and average, t-test and Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used in order to test the statistical differences in the sub dimensions of the scale regarding the independent variables collected from the participants. To test the sub dimension consistency of the scale Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated. Also in order to decide on which statistical methods are to be used in the evaluations on demographical data, normality test was used so that the parametric appropriacy of the data was tested.

## FINDINGS

When the average of the scores of the factors consisting the sub dimensions of “Leisure Attitude Scale” LAS of participants were analyzed, the highest score was observed in *cognitive* ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.86) aspect and the lowest was in *behavioral* ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.46) Table 1).

**Table 1:** The participants' average scores of the scores of sub dimension of LAS and standard deviation values

Dimensions	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Cognitive	259	3.86	.80
Affective	259	3.78	.76
Behavioral	259	3.45	.78

The results of MANOVA indicate that the basic effect of gender [Wilks Lambda ( $\lambda$ ) = 0.895,  $F(3,249) = 9.72$ ,  $p < .00$ ] and age [Wilks Lambda ( $\lambda$ ) = 0.964,  $F(3,249) = 3.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ] variables on LAS sub factors is significant. Nonetheless it was observed that the interaction of gender and age variables do not have a significant effect [Wilks Lambda ( $\lambda$ ) = .003,  $F(3,249) = .22$ ,  $p > .05$ ].

ANOVA was conducted in order to determine which dependent variable contributes to the multi variable significance. In terms of gender variable, it was determined that in the "cognitive" [ $F(1,251) = 27.57$ ,  $p < .00$ ], "affective" [ $F(1,251) = 17.77$ ,  $p < .00$ ], and "behavioral" [ $F(1,251) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ], sub dimensions, the scores significantly differ depending on gender. In all sub dimensions where differences are recorded, the average attitude scores of women participants are higher than those of man. While the ANOVA analysis set forth that only in "affective" [ $F(1,251) = 4.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ] sub dimension of the scale, a significant statistical difference was present, it also indicated that the participants who are 23 years old or older scored lower than the other group (Table 2).

**Table 2:** The MANOVA results of the participants' scores in LAS regarding their age and gender

Sub-dimensions	Gender	Age	$\bar{X}$	SD
Cognitive	Female	18-22 age (n= 116)	4.10	.60
		23 age $\geq$ (n= 30)	4.10	.77
	Male	18-22 age (n= 74)	3.62	.75
		23 age $\geq$ (n= 39)	3.45	1.02
Affective	Female	18-22 age (n= 116)	4.00	.58
		23 age $\geq$ (n= 30)	3.85	.91
	Male	18-22 age (n= 74)	3.62	.70
		23 age $\geq$ (n= 39)	3.34	.97
Behavioral	Female	18-22 age (n= 116)	3.53	.76
		23 age $\geq$ (n= 30)	3.57	.84
	Male	18-22 age (n= 74)	3.36	.66
		23 age $\geq$ (n= 39)	3.27	.97



According to the results of t-test, the attitudes of the participants towards leisure activities indicate significant difference in the “*cognitive*” [ $t_{(257)} = 2.36, p < .05$ ] and “*affective*” [ $t_{(257)} = 2.94, p < .05$ ] sub dimensions of the scale in terms of participation in physical activities. In both sub dimensions the attitudes towards the leisure activities of the participants who participate in the physical activities are more positive than the others.

**Table 3:** T-test results of the scores of the participants in sub-dimensions of LAS regarding their participation in physical activities.

Sub-dimensions	Participation in Physical Activity	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Cognitive	Yes	72	4.05	.62
	No	187	3.79	.84
Affective	Yes	73	4.00	.61
	No	186	3.69	.78
Behavioral	Yes	75	3.60	.69
	No	184	3.39	.80

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

In this study conducted to analyze the attitudes of individuals towards leisure activities, the order of the scores have been observed as “cognitive”, “affective”, and “behavioral”. The results show parallelism with the results of the study by Teixeira and Freire (2013) in the literature. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the scores collected from all the participants are mostly on the cognitive and affective levels and do not significantly reflect in behaviors. The analysis shows that gender and age variables affect the individuals’ attitude scores. To give an example; according to the gender variable, the attitude of women towards leisure activities is higher compared to men. In other words, even though the male participants also have high attitude scores, the expected value to leisure activities are observed to be given by the female participants. This inferred result has similarity to the results of the study by Sarol et al (2012). Moreover, it was discovered that the attitude scores of the participants between ages 18-22 differ only in one sub-dimension and in others the average of both age groups are similar. It is considered here that there is difference in only one dimension between the age groups because there is a slight difference between the age groups.

One other finding of the study is; the scores of the individuals who take part it physical activities in their leisure time are, as expected, higher than the others. This may be interpreted as;



there is a significant relation between the attitudes towards the leisure activities and participation in physical activities. In the studies by Ragheb (1980), Feltz (1982, 1988) and McAuley and Courneya (1993) similar relationships were found. Relationships between participation in leisure activities, satisfaction and attitude towards the activities were previously studied by researchers. When the exercise behavior is concerned Dzewaltowski (1989) states that exercise behavior and intention, attitude and self-competence are positively correlated meaning that studies previously conducted (Crandall & Slivken, 1980; Watson, 1996; Chih Mou Hsieh, 1998; Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990); Hagger et al. (2001); Dzewaltowski et al., (1990) indicate that there is a significant relationship between attitude and participation in physical activity. In their study Crandall and Slivken (1980) reported that attitude and participation in physical activities do not have a significant effect on each other as individual do not always act on their attitudes due to some limitations or competition involved. However, it was stated by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) that attitudes have a general disposition rather than being specific hence they do not essentially work as proper tools to foresee specific behaviors.

The study also offers insight on the factors related to college students' participation in physical activities in their leisure time, its findings could be of great help for researchers, health educators and campus recreational professionals who are willing to work in the field of physical activities in leisure time and the attitudes of college students towards these activities. Moreover, in the light of the results taken from this study, it may be easier for the practitioners and professionals to develop strategies of marketing or education in order to direct students to a pursuit of leisure time activity behavior that has previously been projected for them. It is observed that all individuals of age 23 or older scored lower scores from the sub-scales of attitude. According to these results, more opportunities should be provided to this age group. The study results reveal that women score higher than men and the scores of male students are lower than the women; therefore, measures to encourage and motivate participation of male students should be taken. Developing and implementing strategies intended to escalate the participation in leisure time activities could be better guided and assisted by the appropriate perception of the attitudes of college students towards their leisure time.

The current system of education in Turkey brings individuals up not for the sake of being individuals but for the sake of others in its systematic pattern that reflects collective social norms and values. But in contradiction, the system of education should actually be able update itself

and modernize its structure as it plays an irreplaceable role in the bringing up of new generations as free, confident, mentally and physically healthy individuals of the society for they will restructure the future of Turkey. In the fast transition process of Turkey from a traditional agricultural society to an industrial society (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; 2002), the cultural values which also include the attitude towards and perception of leisure time, lag behind the changing social structure and the progress taking place (Fişek, 1982).

Therefore, a great responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the universities in improving of the leisure attitudes and behaviors. Not only universities but all institutions of education should undertake this responsibility within the limits of their capability. Result of this and other similar studies indicate that in order to use the leisure time effectively and appropriately, it is essential to conduct more effective strategies and implementations.

However, it should be noted that there are limitations to this study as it was limited to university students using a sample only from two big state Universities in Central Anatolia region in Turkey. This limited sample may restrain making generalizations about the population in general or college students from other environments. It may be stated that the participants of the study group being selected from a limited source is the prime limitation of the study. Hence, in order to achieve an inclusive perspective on the attitudes of young individuals of Turkey towards leisure activities, studies should be conducted with a larger sample inclusive of all Turkey. It is essential to include individuals with various demographical backgrounds in the researches to be made in the future to be able to generalize the findings for Turkey in general. Also, it may be suggested that, in order to analyze the main cause for the difference of attitudes of the young individuals in depth, the quantitative studies should be supported with qualitative studies.

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