THE MEDIATORY ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM IN THE EFFECT OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS ON FUTURE ANXIETY: A RESEARCH ON FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS[1]

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the mediator role of self-esteem in the effect of learned helplessness on future anxiety. In addition, it was aimed to examine whether the mentioned variables varied according to the demographic characteristics of the participants. The sample group of the research consisted of students of the faculty of health sciences of a public university in the 2022-2023 academic year (n=287). This study was designed as a causal screening research, one of the quantitative research methods. The data were collected using the Learned Helplessness Scale, Future Anxiety Scale and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. The descriptive and cross-sectional data were analyzed using the SPSS 22 program. Independent sample t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Post Hoc Tukey test were used in the evaluation of learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem according to demographic characteristics, and in determining the difference between groups. Hayes' Process Macro (Model 4) and bootstrap (5000 bootstrap samples) were used in the mediator variable model. According to the results of the mediation test analysis; when the direct effects were examined, it was found that learned helplessness had a significant and negative effect on self-esteem (β= -,543), and a significant and positive effect on future anxiety (β= ,347). When the indirect effects were examined by including self-esteem in the model, the indirect effect of learned helplessness on future anxiety (β= ,170) was determined to be significant and positive.

Keywords: Learned helplessness, Future anxiety, Self-esteem.

Öğrenilmiş Çaresizliğin Gelecek Kaygısı Üzerindeki Etkisinde Benlik Saygısının Aracı Rolü: Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı öğrenilmiş çaresizliğin gelecek kaygısı üzerindeki etkisinde benlik saygısının aracı rolünü belirlemektir. Ek olarak söz konusu değişkenlerin katılımcıların demografik özelliklerine göre farklılık gösterip göstermediğinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklem grubunu 2022-2023 eğitim öğretim yılında bir devlet üniversitesinin sağlık bilimleri fakültesi öğrencileri (n=287) oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olan nedensel tarama araştırması olarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın verileri Öğrenilmiş Çaresizlik, Gelecek Kaygısı ve Rosenberg Benlik Saygısı ölçekleri kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Tanımlayıcı ve kesitsel olarak tasarlanan veriler SPSS 22 programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Öğrenilmiş çaresizlik, gelecek kaygısı ve benlik saygısının demografik özelliklere göre değerlendirilmesinde bağımsız örneklem t testi, tek yönlü varyans analizi (ANOVA) ve gruplararası farklılığı belirlemede Pos Hoc Tukey testi tercih edilmiştir. Aracı değişken modelinde Hayes'in Process Macro (Model 4) ve bootstrap (5000 bootstrap samples) kullanılmıştır. Aracılık testi analizi sonucuna göre; doğrudan etkiler incelendiğinde öğrenilmiş çaresizliğin benlik saygısı üzerinde anlamlı ve negatif yönlü bir etkisinin olduğu (β= -,543), gelecek kaygısı üzerinde ise anlamlı ve pozitif yönlü (β= ,347) bir etkisinin olduğu saptanmıştır. Dolaylı etkiler incelendiğinde; benlik saygısının modele dâhil edilmesiyle, öğrenilmiş çaresizliğin gelecek kaygısı üzerindeki dolaylı etkisi (β= ,170) anlamlı ve pozitif yönlü olarak tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğrenilmiş çaresizlik, Gelecek kaygısı, Benlik saygısı.

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1. Introduction

The learning process begins at a very early stage of life for individuals. Failure is a possible situation throughout this process. However, for most individuals, the failure(s) that may occur are perceived as a negative outcome that undermines the learning process. These negative experiences lead them to learned helplessness in the face of events they cannot control. It also adversely affects their expectations for the future. They, thus, remain passive in the face of events that they think cannot change the outcome. Although some of the research on learned helplessness is associated with "aging", which is considered a worldwide problem (Wen et al., 2020), studies conducted on students who are trying to build their future and putting effort for it, also occupy an important place in the literature (Barutçu & Çöllü, 2020; Hsu, 2011; Keskin, 2019; Valas, 2001).

The concept of learned helplessness, which was determined as the independent variable of our research, was introduced to the literature for the first time as a result of the experiment conducted by Martin Seligman and Steven Maier at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1960s (Seligman & Maier, 1967). Another well-known experiment related to learned helplessness is "*The Five Monkeys Experiment*" conducted by Gordon R. Stephenson in 1967. The first experiment in which learned helplessness was tested on humans was conducted by a team led by Donald Hiroto in 1974. A two-stage experiment was performed on 15 individuals divided into the *escape group, no-escape group* and *control group*. In the experiment, it was aimed to measure the reaction that people would give if they were exposed to severe noise. As a result of the experiment, it was found that all subjects in the escape group and the control group found a way to get rid of the noise in a short period, while those in the no-escape group made much less effort and accepted the state of helplessness they were in (Hiroto, 1974). The experiments that have been conducted on learned helplessness have generally revealed two results. Firstly, when living beings are unable to change the outcome of the situation that they encounter and cannot control, they accept helplessness and reflect it to the general. Secondly, living beings do not show any reaction after learning helplessness, even if there is an opportunity to change the current situation (Tutar, 2007).

When the definitions were examined, Hall et al. defined the concept of learned helplessness as a psychological state in which individuals begin to believe that they are deprived of control over a negative situation, that their efforts are pointless and that they are helpless (Hall et al., 2008). Firmin et al. have expressed learned helplessness as a situation that occurs when individuals cannot control failure in any attempt, causing them to exhibit a tendency to give up easily in their next attempts and to fail even in simple tasks (Firmin et al., 2004). Au et al., on the other hand, describe learned helplessness as hopelessness behaviors that include low academic achievement, maladaptive passivity, decreased perseverance and deteriorating academic performance (Au et al., 2010). Many reasons have been suggested for the occurrence of learned helplessness behavior. Marks, for instance, listed the reasons for learned helplessness, which can be seen in all living beings, as lack of initiation, the thought of failure to succeed, motivational deficiency and uncontrollability (Marks, 1998). The reasons for learned helplessness set forth by Marks are associated with individuals themselves. In addition to the individual reasons that push people to learned helplessness behavior, the influence of the environment should not be ignored. Peterson and Seligman stated that learned helplessness is caused by external factors as well as individual ones, and that such unresponsive behavior, which is seriously problematic, is essentially a passive form of resistance to change (Peterson & Seligman, 1987). Similarly, Valas argues that helplessness is not innate; *yet is learned through a chain of assumed events such as objective contingency, perceived past and current improbability, attribution for past and current improbability, and expectation of future improbability* (Valas, 2001). In a society that welcomes innovations and in which efforts are made to change the current conditions, individuals are not expected to exhibit learned

helplessness behavior, while it is the opposite in a society that is conservative and where the current conditions are accepted (Aktan & Yay, 2016). Butkowsky and Willows listed the symptoms of learned helplessness as "*not asking for help, frustration, giving up, lack of effort, lack of self-confidence, passivity, poor motivation and procrastination behavior*" (Butkowsky & Willows, 1980). Abramson et al., who have conducted important studies on the elimination of learned helplessness, have emphasized the importance of change in order to eliminate learned helplessness behavior in individuals (Abramson et al., 1978). In summary, when living beings believe that their behavior has no effect on the outcome of an event or situation, they show a learned helplessness reaction (Norman, 1988; Schueller & Seligman, 2008). In some cases, such reactions may cause anxiety, depression, or both. Particularly during childhood, when individuals feel that they do not have control over the past events they have experienced, they think that forthcoming events will be uncontrollable, and may remain passive (Hammack et al., 2012). In the literature, the concept of learned helplessness is examined with variables such as irrational beliefs (Ulusoy & Duy, 2013), motivation (Barutçu & Çöllü, 2020; Ghasemi, 2021), career planning (Gönül & Demir, 2020), passive resistance to change (Aktan & Yay, 2016), learned prevalence (Teodorescu & Erev, 2014), low academic self-confidence (Firmin et al., 2004), perceived restriction (Wen et al., 2020), and depression and psychological resilience (Trindade et al., 2020).

Future anxiety, one of the variables of our research topic, is considered to have a close relationship with learned helplessness. In the Dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution, *anxiety* is defined as "*a feeling of tension that usually arises with the thought that something bad is going to happen and the cause of which is unknown*" (TDK, 2023). Anxiety is a natural part of life since all individuals suffer from the cognitive emotion (anxiety) in question in various challenging situations they face. In this case, it is considered as a natural reaction since it creates a motive for individuals to take appropriate behavioral measures to face their current situation (Al-Momani & Naeem, 2013). Future anxiety is defined as a structure that includes both cognitive and emotional processes in which negative processes exceed positive ones and the fear that future threats are stronger than hope settles (Zaleski, 1996). Price defined future anxiety as a negative and worrying reflection of the perceived future, including anxiety, uncertainty, fear and hopelessness against negative changes and uncontrollability of future consequences (Price, 2009). Future anxiety is caused by irrational thoughts and conceptions that may cause the individual to misinterpret the facts, situations and events that are happening around them. This situation can create a state of fear and a constant stream of anxiety that causes them to lose control over their emotions, and real and rational thoughts (Jabr, 2012). If the anxiety is at a controllable level, it can have positive outcomes for the individual and allows them to use this energy to convert it into high performance by generating energy for taking action. However, if the current level of anxiety has reached an uncontrollable level, that is, it is interpreted as a chronic feeling of constant anxiety (Bartikowski et al., 2019), which prevents the individual from using their energy efficiently and paying their attention to their work (Yiğit et al., 2011), and may be associated with behavioral disorders in the later stages (Al-Momani & Naeem, 2013). In the literature, future anxiety is examined in combination of the factors such as psychological stability (Dursun & Özkan, 2019), post-traumatic stress (Al-Adl, 2021), life satisfaction (Turaç & Bayın Donar, 2017), exam anxiety (Oral Kara et al., 2020; Karakaş, 2013), occupational anxiety (Nazlı & Aktaş, 2018), job insecurity (Tellioğlu, 2021), entrepreneurial behavior tendency (Yemenici et al., 2023), self-esteem (Al Jindi & Desouki, 2017) and hopelessness and intolerance to uncertainty (Bozkur et al., 2020).

Self-esteem is another variable of the research. Rosenberg defined the concept of self-esteem as "*the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings about themselves*" and stated that evaluating a person's self-esteem as low means that they do not respect themselves, consider themselves worthless and inadequate (Rosenberg, 1979). Self-esteem is considered one of the basic elements that make individuals feel better psychologically (Crocker & Park, 2004), and it is defined as the state of

acceptance of self and satisfaction with it in an existential sense as a result of the individual's evaluation towards themselves (Eriş & İkiz, 2013). There are various parameters that affect whether an individual has low or high self-esteem. It has also been revealed as a result of the research that many issues such as the family environment, parental attitudes and behaviors (Gençtan, 1990), social environment such as school and friends, the fact that the marriage between parents ended in divorce or continued in conflict, physical appearance and health status, school achievement, the relationship between the actual self and the ideal self, gender, the socio-economic status of the family, the number of siblings or birth order, educational and occupational status, and social factors, etc. affect self-esteem (Kımter, 2012).

Low or high self-esteem is reflected in the individual's behavior. People with high self-esteem have a desire to protect and strengthen their place in society and their level of respect (Burger, 2016). They also have more ambition and perseverance towards achievement. It is known that individuals with high self-esteem are emotionally more robust, difficult to convince, have a more positive outlook on life and have a more holistic self-concept (Hogg & Vaughan, 2007). They also have the motivation to gather strength as soon as they face any failure and pick up where they left off. In general, they accept it when they make mistakes and do not prefer to blame others for their own mistakes (Yavuzer, 2000). However, individuals with low self-esteem do not want to stand out too much in society since they act with a sense of self-protection and are afraid of being despised and humiliated in front of their social circles (Burger, 2016). Low self-esteem is seen as a major obstacle for individuals to overcome the problems they face (Yıldız, 2012). According to the literature, the concept of self-esteem is examined with variables such as subjective well-being (Akduman & Karahan, 2022), depression and anxiety (Özcan et al., 2013; Kıvrak & Altın, 2019), academic failure (Au et al., 2010), moral commitment and self-esteem (Clucas, 2020), risk (Baderin & Barnes, 2020), social media addiction (Yüksel Şahin & Öztoprak, 2019), self-efficacy (Yıldırım & Atilla, 2020), social appearance anxiety (Korkmaz & Uslu, 2020), and social support (Koç & Arslan, 2019).

In this study, the effect of university students' perceived learned helplessness on forthcoming concerns and the mediating role of self-esteem levels on this effect were examined. In addition, it was examined whether there was a significant difference between the variables and demographic factors. In the field literature, there have been studies in which these variables have been addressed with different variables. However, the fact that there is no study examining three variables together and determining the mediating role of self-esteem reveals the originality of the current research, and it is theoretically considered to contribute to the literature.

2. Inter-Conceptual Relations and Research Hypotheses

Attribution theory, which is an important theory of social psychology, was introduced to the literature by Fritz Heider (1920). According to the theory, individuals examine the past (internal and external) reasons to determine the behavior of themselves and others (Weiner, 2010). The theory predicts that if an individual encounters a negative event, they attribute their helplessness to a cause. When faced with a negative situation, the individual may associate it with a lack of ability, lack of effort, the task being too difficult, or bad luck (Luse & Burkman, 2022). People who have learned helplessness show passive resistance in the face of change. This situation, as stated above, can be associated with both individuals themselves and their environment. In order for an individual to eliminate learned helplessness, it is necessary to form a belief in change and feel that they are able to achieve change. On the other hand, individuals' lack of clear goals for life and their failure to set goals cause future anxiety (Heisel & Flett, 2004). Future anxiety is one of the behavioral variables that affect an individual's behavior, a sign of their humanity and existence, a fact of life, a dynamic aspect of character building and one of the behavioral variables. The most important causes of future anxiety are listed as the stresses of political, economic and social life, negative self-perception, fear, pessimism and feelings of

insecurity, inability to adapt and make decisions, and alienation (Al-Jindi & Desouki, 2017). Self-esteem plays an important role at many points from individuals' emotional states to their adaptation to general life difficulties and their struggle against lifelong stress (Lazarević et al., 2017). High self-esteem means that one's opinions and attitudes about themselves are strong and positive, while having a low self indicates that a person perceives themselves with negative characteristics and being in acceptance (Campbell & Lavallee, 1993). Today, not every individual reacts in the same way to similar experiences. Some individuals are more likely to experience learned helplessness in the face of uncontrollable events, often caused by biological and psychological factors. Children, for instance, raised by desperate parents are more likely to experience learned helplessness (Cherry, 2023).

This study was conducted on the faculty of health sciences students. For reasons such as both the increase in the number of universities and the inability to find a place in the market due to the professional equivalent of the departments (placement, etc.), students continue to be concerned about the future, even if they get into the university. Bandura (1994) states that the feeling of helplessness can play a negative role in influencing the lifelong learning tendencies of students. Jarvis (2006), on the other hand, emphasizes that experiences affect an individual's ability to learn throughout life, and negative experiences, in particular, reduce learning opportunities in the later stages of life. It is known that the feeling of helplessness, which leads to deterioration in psychological harmony in the following processes, is caused by repeated academic failures (Valas, 2001). Hsu (2011) states that students who experience learned helplessness do not have the confidence to control their learning processes after failure and giving up, which explains the lack of motivation, and learned helplessness stems from this. In another research, it is concluded that if the learned helplessness behavior is neglected, the students who experience learned helplessness influence others and lead them to similar behaviors. Au, Watkins and Hattie (2010) state that if students are faced with long-term academic failures, they may face consequences such as low self-esteem, ineffective use of learning strategies and deteriorating performance. Tough competition, increasing needs and changing expectations make the healthcare sector even more important every day. Healthcare organizations must have high-performing employees in order to overcome these challenges and provide high-quality healthcare services. In order for future health professional candidates to be able to provide quality health services, their individual well-being must first be achieved and assured. The faculty of health sciences, where the future midwives, nurses, dietitians, health managers and social workers are trained, has been considered a suitable population for the study of relevant variables.

It is of great importance both for the individual and for the society in which the individual lives to maintain a healthy level of self-esteem in this helplessness and anxiety, and not to be overly worried about their future while trying to build it with the guidance of their family and their environment during childhood, and voluntarily in later life, not to get caught up in the feeling of helplessness learned in every failure they experience, and to keep their self-esteem at a healthy level. Due to the contradictions experienced both between individuals and between countries, armed conflicts, political and economic problems, pressures and lack of career opportunities of students graduating from university, the current era is described as the "*age of anxiety*" (Al-Jindi & Desouki, 2017). Therefore, it is considered that university students, in particular, experience greater anxiety in this era.

In this study, the concepts of learned helplessness seen in all living beings, future anxiety seen only in humans, and self-esteem were examined. Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the literature in terms of determining the reflection of learned helplessness perceived by university students on their future anxiety and the mediating role of self-esteem. In addition, the outputs are expected to help educators and other researchers (psychology, sociology, behavioral fields, etc.) and shed light on new research on this subject. In addition, it was aimed to determine whether there is a significant

difference between the demographic variables with learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem in order to contribute to the literature. The research hypotheses were presented.

H₁: The perception of learned helplessness has a significant effect on self-esteem.

H₂: The perception of learned helplessness has a significant effect on future anxiety.

H₃: Self-esteem has a significant effect on future anxiety.

**H₄:** There is a mediating role of self-esteem in the effect of perceived learned helplessness on future anxiety.

H₅: The participants' perceptions of learned helplessness vary according to demographic variables.

H₆: The perception levels of future anxiety of the participants vary according to demographic variables.

H₇: The self-esteem perceptions of the participants vary according to demographic variables.

3. Methodology

This study was designed as a causal screening research, one of the quantitative research methods. Causal screening research is research conducted without any pressure or intervention on individuals to determine the causes of an emerging situation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2023). In this type of research design, the researcher generally attempts to examine antecedent variables that predict a dependent variable, possible successors (consequences) of a variable, or both. Additionally, mediator and moderator effects between two variables can also be investigated (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). This research was planned as a cross-sectional type of study. The research model (Figure 1) were presented.
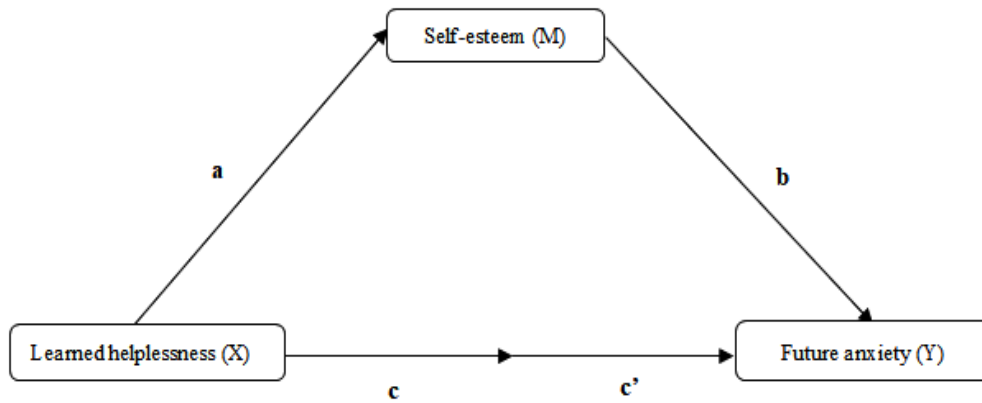
Figure 1. *The Research model*

3.1. The Research Population and Sample

The universe of the research consists of faculty of health sciences students at a public university. Out of 1060 students in the research universe, 287 students were included in the study. In the sample selection, the purposeful sampling method was used, in which participants who had certain characteristics that the researcher thought was suitable for the research problem based on their own personal observations were selected (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). The socio-demographic characteristics of the students were shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics of the students (N:287)*

Socio-demographic variables		N	%	Socio-demographic variables		N	%
Gender	Female	246	85,7	Income Level	Low	33	11,5
	Male	41	14,3		Middle	197	68,6
Age	18-22	257	89,5		High	57	19,9
	23 and above	30	10,5				
	Nutrition and Dietetics	54	18,8	Longest place of residence	Metropolis	14	4,9
	Midwifery	76	26,5		City	194	67,6
Department	Nursing	73	25,4		Town	31	10,8
	Health Management	63	22		Village	48	16,7
	Social Service	21	7,3				

It was found that 85.7% of the students were female, 89.5% were aged between 18-22, 26.5% were midwifery students, 36.9% were freshmen, 68.6% had middle-level income, while the longest place of residence of 67.6% was city (Table 1).

3.2. Research Process

The data related to the research were collected from the students of the faculty of health sciences of a public university in the 2022-2023 academic year. The online questionnaire form was sent via WhatsApp in December 2022 to all students who actively attended classes, and they were asked to fill out the relevant form. Taking into account the confidence level of the research and acceptable error rates, feedback was obtained from 287 participants within the 95% confidence interval with an acceptable margin of error of 5%. Since all of the surveys that were responded were scientifically usable, they were included in the analysis of the study.

3.3. Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire used in the research consisted of four parts. In the first part, the scale containing expressions related to the level of learned helplessness was included, while the second part included the scale containing expressions related to the level of self-esteem, the third part included the scale containing expressions related to the perception of future anxiety, and finally, the fourth part, included the expressions related to determining the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The Learned Helplessness Scale: In the research, the Hopelessness, Helplessness, and Haplessness Scale developed by Lester (1998), which was adapted to Turkish by Gençöz et al. (2006), was used to determine the participants' perception of learned helplessness. The scale consisted of a total of 30 items. Among them, 10 items measured hopelessness, 10 items measured helplessness and 10 items measured haplessness. In the study, a 6-item Likert-type (1- strongly disagree, 6-strongly agree) helplessness scale consisting of 10 items in one dimension was used to determine the participants' learned helplessness levels. In the validity and reliability study conducted by Gençöz et al. (2006), Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be 0.81. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.75 (Table 3).

The Future Anxiety Scale: In the research, the Future Anxiety Scale developed by Geylani and Çiriş Yıldız (2022) was used to determine the perceived level of future anxiety of the participants. This two-dimensional (*Future Fear* and *Despair of the Future*) scale is rated on a 5-point Likert type chart (1- Never, 5-Always) consisting of 19 items. In the validity and reliability study conducted by Geylani and Çiriş Yıldız (2022), Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be 0.91. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.88 (Table 3).

The Self-Esteem Scale: In the research, the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, developed by Rosenberg (1965) and adapted to Turkish by Çuhadaroğlu (1986), was used to measure the participants' level of self-esteem. The first subscale, consisting of the first 10 items of the self-assessment scale of 63 multiple choice questions and 12 subcategories, developed by Rosenberg was used to measure self-esteem in accordance with the purpose of the research. In the validity and reliability study conducted by Çuhadaroğlu (1986), Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be 0.81. The scale consisted of 4 Likert response (Very true, true, false, very false). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.82 (Table 3).

In the last part of the research, a 6-question personal information form was used to determine gender, age, department, grade, income level and the longest place of residency.

3.4. Analysis of the Data

In this study, the data obtained from 287 students were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) package program. In determining the analysis methods to be used, it was taken into account whether the scale variables showed a normal distribution. It was found that learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem were between (-1.5) and (+1.5) of Skewness and Kurtosis values. The fact that the Skewness and Kurtosis values of the related variables are between (-1.5) and (+1.5) indicates conformity to normal distribution (Tabachnick et al., 2019; Table 2). The analysis methods used in the evaluation of the data were descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum frequencies (n) and percentages), while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the scales. Independent sample t test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test were used in the evaluation of learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem according to demographic variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the scale variables. Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) and bootstrap (5000 bootstrap samples) were used in the mediator variable model (Hayes and Scharkow, 2013). As a result of the mediator variable analysis, the confidence interval was evaluated as 95%, which did not contain zero. Accordingly, it was observed that it had a statistically significant effect set at $p<0.05$.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The compliance of the research with ethical principles was evaluated by the Osmaniye Korkut Ata University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board and approved by the decision dated 27.10.2022 and numbered 2022/18/9. In addition, the study did not contain any data that would reveal the identities of the participants, and participation was based entirely on a voluntary basis.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation between Variables

Pearson's correlation analysis and mean score statistics between learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Pearson's correlation analysis and mean score statistics between learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem (N:287)*

Variables	Min-Max	Avg.	Learned helplessness	Future anxiety	Future fear	Despair of the future	Self-esteem
Learned helplessness	1-6	2,73±0,73	1	,518** ,000	,387** ,000	,397** ,000	-,544** ,000
Future anxiety	1-5	2,82±0,59	,518** ,000	1	,765** ,000	,747** ,000	-,502** ,000
Future fear	1-5	3,27±0,80	,387**	,765**	1	,144*	-,355**

			,000	,000		,015	,000
Despair of the future	1-5	2,38±0,77	,397**	,747**	,144*	1	-,405**
			,000	,000	,015		,000
Self-esteem	1-4	2,96±0,49	-,544**	-,502**	,355**	,405**	1
			,000	,000	,000	,000	
Cronbach's Alpha			,756	,883	,912	,844	,827
Skewness			0,667	0,170	-0,364	0,932	-0,027
Kurtosis			0,517	0,849	0,337	1,088	0,055

**p<0,01 *p<0,05

The mean score of learned helplessness was 2,73±0,73; future anxiety was 2,82±0,59; fear of the future was 3,27±0,80; despair of the future was 2,38±0,77, and self-esteem was 2,96±0,49. It was determined that there was a significant and positive relationship between learned helplessness and future anxiety (r:,518); a significant and negative relationship between learned helplessness and self-esteem (r:,544); a significant and negative relationship between self-esteem and future anxiety (r:,502) (Table 2).

4.2. Testing the Mediating Effect of Self-Esteem

The results of the mediation test analysis conducted to determine the mediation role of self-esteem in the effect of learned helplessness on future anxiety were shown in Table 3. When the direct effects were examined, it was seen that learned helplessness had a significant and negative effect on self-esteem (β= -,543). Therefore, the Hypothesis$_1$ "*The perception of learned helplessness has a significant effect on self-esteem.*" was accepted. The R^2 value indicating the explained variance value of learned helplessness on self-esteem was 295. It was found that self-esteem had a significant and negative effect on future anxiety (β= -,312), while learned helplessness had a significant and positive effect (β= ,347). The R^2 value indicating the explained variance value of learned helplessness and self-esteem on future anxiety was ,337. Therefore, the Hypothesis$_2$ "*The perception of learned helplessness has a significant effect on future anxiety.*" and the Hypothesis$_3$ "*Self-esteem has a significant effect on future anxiety.*" were accepted.

Table 3. *The Mediating role of self-esteem on the effect of future anxiety on learned helplessness*

Direct Effect			Non-Standardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients (β)	Standard error	Test statistical value	P	R^2	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
SE	<---	LH	-,368	-,543	,033	-10,931	,000	,295	-,434	-,302
FA	<---	SE	-,375	-,312	,069	-5,435	,000	,337	-,511	-,239
FA	<---	LH	,282	,347	,046	6,039	,000		,190	,374
Indirect Effect										
FA	<---	LH	,138	,170	,039	3,538	,000		,097	,253
Total Effect										
FA	<---	LH	,420	,517	,041	10,214	,000	,268	,339	,502

LH: Learned Helplessness, BS: Self-Esteem, FA: Future Anxiety

When the indirect effects were examined; the indirect effect of learned helplessness on future anxiety (β= ,170) was significant and positive. It was found that self-esteem had the direct (β= ,347) and indirect effects when included in the model (β= ,170). The total effect of learned helplessness on future

anxiety was (β= ,517) and the explained variance value was R^2 ,268. When all the data were taken into consideration, it was determined that self-esteem showed a statistically significant partial mediating role in the effect of learned helplessness on future anxiety (Figure 2; Table 3). Therefore, the Hypothesis[4] "*There is a mediating role of self-esteem in the effect of the perceived learned helplessness on future anxiety.*" was accepted.
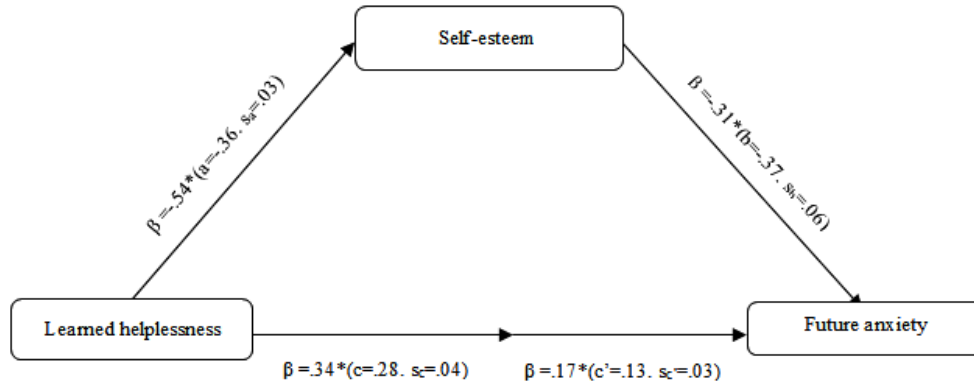

Figure 2. *Research model analysis results*

4.3. Difference Analysis

The parametric test results between the demographic variables learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem were shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Evaluation of learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem according to demographic variables*

	Variables	N	Learned helplessness	Future anxiety	Self-esteem
Gender**	Female	246	2,75±0,72	2,81±0,60	2,95±0,49
	Male	41	2,64±0,77	2,87±0,52	3,02±0,49
	Test value		*T: 0,884*	*T: -0,594*	*T: -0,834*
	P value		*P: 0,378*	*P: 0,553*	*P: 0,405*
Age**	18-22	257	2,74±0,73	2,82±0,59	2,96±0,49
	23 and above	30	2,71±0,74	2,85±0,58	2,97±0,49
	Test value		*T: 0,218*	*T: -0,297*	*T: -0,103*
	P value		*P: 0,828*	*P: 0,766*	*P: 0,918*
Department***	Nutrition and Dietetics	54	2,76±0,75	2,97±0,63	2,99±0,52
	Midwifery	76	2,84±0,78	2,76±0,66	2,97±0,52
	Nursing	73	2,65±0,72	2,76±0,60	2,96±0,51
	Health Management	63	2,62±0,60	2,79±0,44	3,00±0,42
	Social Service	21	2,92±0,82	3,00±0,54	2,74±0,46
	Test value		*F:1,414*	*F:1,753*	*F:1,156*
	P value		*P: 0,229*	*P: 0,138*	*P: 0,331*
Grade***	Freshmen	106	2,82±0,73	2,85±0,70	2,91±0,51
	Sophomore	86	2,77±0,75	2,85±0,57	2,95±0,53
	Junior	65	2,64±0,70	2,76±0,45	3,02±0,39
	Senior	30	2,54±0,69	2,80±0,53	3,02±0,50
	Test value		*F:1,599*	*F:0,394*	*F:0,775*

		P: 0,190	P: 0,758	P: 0,509
P value				
Low	33	2,91±0,86	3,01±0,65	2,79±0,59
Middle	197	2,74±0,70	2,79±0,55	2,96±0,47
High	57	2,59±0,72	2,82±0,68	3,06±0,49
Test value		F:2,001	F:2,006	F:3,271
P value		P: 0,137	P: 0,136	P: 0,039*
Difference between groups				3>2
Metropolis	14	2,88±0,43	2,71±0,45	3,05±0,55
City	194	3,07±0,66	2,80±0,62	2,96±0,50
Town	31	3,32±0,93	3,03±0,64	2,83±0,42
Village	48	2,82±0,70	2,79±0,43	3,02±0,49
Test value		F:3,684	F:1,528	F:1,074
P value		P:0,012*	P: 0,207	P: 0,361
Difference between groups		3>1,2,4		

(Left labels: **Income Level*****, **The longest place of residence*****)

*p<0.05; **Independent Sample T Test; ***One-way variance (ANOVA) analysis

It was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between learned helplessness and gender, age, department, grade and income level (p>0,05). It was revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between learned helplessness and the longest place of residence (p:0,012). In the Post Hoc Tukey Test analysis conducted to determine the difference between the groups; *w* in the sub-variables of the longest place of residence, the mean score difference between those living in the town and those living in the metropolis, city and village was found to be statistically significant in favor of those living in the city (Table 4). The learned helplessness was significantly higher in those who lived in the city. Therefore, the Hypothesis[5] "*The participants' perceptions of learned helplessness differ according to demographic variables.*" was partially accepted.

There was no statistically significant difference between future anxiety and gender, age, department, grade, income level and longest place of residence (p>0.05; Table 4). Therefore, the Hypothesis[6] "*The perceived level of future anxiety of the participants differ according to demographic variables.*" was rejected.

There was no significant difference between self-esteem and gender, age, department, grade and longest place of residence (p>0,05). It was found that there was a significant difference between self-esteem and income level of the participants (p:0,039). As a result of the Post Hoc Tukey test, in the self-esteem sub-variables, mean score difference between those with a high level of income and those with a low level of income was found to be significant in favor of those with a good mean score difference (Table 4). Self-esteem was significantly higher in those with high income levels. Therefore, the Hypothesis[7] "*The perceived self-esteem levels of the participants differ according to demographic variables.*" was partially accepted.

5. Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

In this study, it was aimed to determine the mediating role of self-esteem in the effect of perceived learned helplessness on future anxiety. In addition, it was examined whether the perceptions of learned helplessness, future anxiety and self-esteem differed according to the demographic characteristics of the participants.

According to the results of the mediation test analysis performed to test the research hypotheses; when the direct effects were examined, it was found that learned helplessness had a significant and negative effect on self-esteem; self-esteem had a significant and negative effect on future anxiety; learned helplessness had a significant and positive effect on future anxiety. In other words, with the increase of the perceived learned helplessness in individuals, a decrease in self-esteem and an increase in future anxiety are expected. When the indirect effects were examined, it was determined that self-esteem showed a statistically significant partial mediating role in the effect of learned helplessness on future anxiety. One of the measures to be taken to help students manage their anxiety levels correctly is to increase their self-esteem. High self-esteem enables individuals to have a more positive outlook on life, to be respected in the society they are a part of, as well as to be in the desire to empower and strengthen it. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, is seen as a major obstacle for individuals in solving the problems they encounter. According to the findings, it was seen that the participants' perceived learned helplessness scores did not vary according to gender, age, department, grade and income level (p>0.05). This finding supports some studies in the literature (Barutçu & Çöllü, 2020; Kaplan, 2019; Keskin, 2019; Tuna, 2018). This finding shows that it is possible to experience learned helplessness regardless of gender, at any age and regardless of financial power, to the extent of the economic, political, technological, etc. opportunities of the society in which the individual lives. As stated at the beginning of the study, learned helplessness is related to the inability to control the outcomes of the situations that individuals are in. On the other hand, it was found that there was a difference between the participants' perceptions of learned helplessness and the longest place of residence, and it was found that the participants who lived in the city had higher learned helplessness scores compared to others. While it is considered that this result is consistent with some previous studies (Gençöz et al., 2006), it differs from those concluding that the longest place of residence does not have an effect on learned helplessness (Barutçu & Çöllü, 2020). In this study, it was revealed that the longest place of residence had an effect on their level of learned helplessness. It is considered that the perceptions of learned helplessness of students who spend their lives mostly in the town are more dominant due to the fact that they have fewer opportunities for observation and experience compared to other students. There was no statistically significant difference between future anxiety and gender, age, department, grade, income level and longest place of residence. This result is consistent with the study of Al-Taher (2010), which examined the relationship between future anxiety and psychological stress sources on graduate students, and the study of Al-Adl (2021), which examined the relationship between post-traumatic stress and future anxiety of university students after the pandemic. Rapidly developing technology and social changes increase the uncertainty that may arise in the plans of individuals for their future. Factors such as work, education, social life, future plans, and limitation of cultural and economic opportunities constitute future anxiety at any age. The uncertainty process encountered during periods of crisis and the subsequent economic difficulties, for instance, may have negative consequences on the mental health of individuals (Ganson et al., 2021). However, it is also possible to reach studies in the literature reporting that future anxiety varies according to gender (Abu-Alkeshek, 2020; Al-Momani & Naeem, 2013). It is considered that the differences obtained in the aforementioned studies stem from the cultural structures in the societies where the research samples are located and the differences in accepted social roles. For instance, while women's future anxiety is lower due to the conservative culture prevailing in some closed societies, it is predicted that men's future anxiety levels will be higher due to the responsibility they assume in providing financial resources to help their families and livelihoods. Finally, no significant difference was found between the participants' self-esteem levels and gender, age, department, grade and longest place of residence. This finding is consistent with some studies conducted (Gelbal et al., 2010). On the other hand, it was observed that there was a significant difference between self-esteem and income level of the participants. As a result of the Post Hoc Tukey test, in the self-

esteem sub-variables, the mean score difference between those with a high level of income and those with a low level of income was found to be significant in favor of those with a high level of income. This finding is supported in the literature (Kımter, 2012). It can be concluded that the income status of individuals has an impact on their self-esteem.

Humans, who have the ability to think among living beings, may also experience anxiety about different aspects about their future due to this ability (economic, security, education, etc.). In some cases, the issue that causes this anxiety situation is associated with the negative situations that the individual personally experiences, while sometimes it may be due to the inferences that others make for their own share as a result of sharing their experiences. At this point, individuals may have a more pessimistic, anxious and negative outlook on the future related to many adverse events they have experienced or observed. In order to eliminate this situation, it is of great importance to keep the level of self-esteem in balance, which is influenced by the individuals' characteristics and the environment they are in, as mentioned in the introduction of the study. Although the environment in which the individual lives is variable and challenging, they will be able to keep the level of future anxiety under control with high self-esteem with a positive approach towards learning and change throughout their life.

Consequently, it is the reaction of the individual towards failure that improves learning and makes it sustainable. Disbelief in success will lead to a lack of motivation and effort to continue, hence learned helplessness. Therefore, no matter at what stage of life each individual should accept that the failure caused by any attempt is at least as enlightening and important as the achievement. Exam anxiety, achievement anxiety and many concerns related to failure that arise in students before entering the university are replaced by factors such as distance from family, standing on their own feet, starting a new life in another city, getting to know new people, housing, security, financial freedom and the adequacy or inadequacy of financial opportunities. In addition, after graduating from university, students are faced with many factors that cause future anxiety, such as choosing a job, the fear of being unemployed, stepping into real life and the roles and responsibilities they will assume in real life. The situation is similar for the society in which the individual lives. The way to get rid of learning helplessness is to create a culture of adaptation to change in society. Even if learned helplessness is a part of social culture or one of the immutable rules of society, a good change process can eliminate this situation (North, 2010). Future anxiety is considered to be a result of economic and social changes and is a state of feeling that is increasingly emerging among university students not only due to fear of failure, but also due to fear of being deprived of job opportunities or those in their specialized fields. Natural disasters, terrorism, political processes and viral epidemics are also situations that create future anxiety (Paredes et al., 2021). The fact that future anxiety is a phenomenon that adversely affects students' perceptions, abilities and future-oriented motivations, makes them vulnerable to psychological and behavioral disorders, and unable to adapt to the environment they are in is supported by previous studies conducted on the concept in the literature. Future anxiety arises as a result of the pressures and frustrations that university students may experience in constant anxiety. Therefore, it is important to study the aspects that improve their ability to face pressure and difficulties and to be psychological well-being, particularly in the era of speed and global change that we are in.

According to these results, psychosocial intervention programs can be prepared within the scope of psychological counseling and guidance practices in educational institutions in order to reduce the future concerns of individuals. In addition, it is considered that it will be beneficial to conduct awareness studies aimed at self-realization in accordance with human structure and nature, revealing the existing potential of each individual. In a study by Price, it is stated that increasing students' awareness and activity level for the future reduces the level of anxiety they experience (Price, 2009). In addition, it is considered that conducting awareness activities for self-actualization that reveal the existing potential

of each individual constituting the society and that are suitable for human structure and nature will contribute to the increase of self-esteem. Self-esteem affects students' attitudes towards learning. Students should be guided and encouraged to develop realistic and sound perceptions about themselves. It is reported that early detection of potential learned helplessness will allow individuals to gain more successful experiences. In particular, it will be useful to create special seminars and programs aimed at creating a harmonious, balanced personality that can cope with the difficulties of life for students.

The present research is the first study to address the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship of learned helplessness and future anxiety as far as it can be reached. Although it is considered to contribute to the field in this respect, it also has some limitations. The first of these is that the data were collected using the cross-sectional method, which reflected the momentary feelings of individuals and ignored the thoughts of individuals over time. The second limitation of the research is that the study was conducted on faculty of health sciences students at a public university. Future research can be carried out with a wider population to reach more generalized conclusions. Another limitation of the research is that the study was conducted on three variables. The research model can be developed by adding new variables that may have a direct, indirect or mediatory effect on the nature of learned helplessness in different sectors in the research planned to be carried out in the future. In addition, it is considered that it would be useful to support research with qualitative data in order to collect in-depth information for better understanding of the variables that may affect individuals' perception of learned helplessness.

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