

The Mediation Role of Subjective Vitality in the Effect of Hope on Job-Finding Pressure

Umudun İş Bulma Baskısına Etkisinde Öznel Zindeliğin Aracılık Rolü

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Maritime and Port Management,
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Purpose: This study aims to examine the mediating role of subjective vitality in the effect of hope on job-finding pressure among students studying in maritime transportation and port management associate degree programs.

Method: The research was conducted with data obtained from 205 associate degree students studying at four different universities. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings: The findings revealed that the negative relationship between hope and job-finding pressure lost its significance when subjective vitality was included in the model. This result indicates that subjective vitality has a full mediating role in the relationship between hope and job-finding pressure.

Results: The results of the study demonstrate that hope has an indirect effect on reducing students' job-finding pressure. Hope contributes to lower perceptions of job-finding pressure by increasing students' levels of subjective vitality. The findings also support the importance of psychological resources in helping students cope with career-related stress.

Originality/Value: This study is one of the limited number of studies examining the relationships between hope, subjective vitality, and job-finding pressure among maritime transportation and port management students. In addition, by revealing the full mediating role of subjective vitality, the study contributes to the literature and explains the effect of students' psychological resources on job-finding pressure within the context of Conservation of Resources Theory.

ÖZ

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Deniz ve Liman
İşletmeciliği, Ön Lisans,
Umut, Öznel Zindelik,
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Araştırma Makalesi

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, deniz ve liman işletmeciliği öğrencilerinde umudun iş bulma baskısına etkisinde öznel zindeliğin aracılık rolünü incelemektir.

Yöntem: Araştırma, dört farklı üniversitede öğrenim gören 205 önlisans öğrencisinden elde edilen verilerle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler yapısal eşitlik modeli ile analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Bulgular, umut ile iş bulma baskısı arasındaki negatif ilişkinin, modele öznel zindelik dahil edildiğinde anlamını kaybettiğini göstermektedir. Bu durum, öznel zindeliğin tam aracılık rolüne sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç: Araştırma sonuçları, öğrencilerin iş bulma baskısını azaltmada umudun dolaylı bir etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Umut, öğrencilerin öznel zindelik düzeylerini artırarak iş bulma sürecine ilişkin baskıyı daha düşük hissetmelerine katkı sağlamaktadır. Bulgular, psikolojik kaynakların öğrencilerin kariyer süreçlerindeki stresle başa çıkmalarında önemli olduğunu desteklemektedir.

Özgün Değer: Çalışma, deniz ve liman işletmeciliği öğrencilerinde umut, öznel zindelik ve iş bulma baskısı arasındaki ilişkileri birlikte inceleyen sınırlı sayıda çalışmalardan biridir. Ayrıca öznel zindeliğin tam aracılık rolünü ortaya koyarak literatüre katkı sunmakta ve kaynakların korunması teorisin bağlamında öğrencilerin psikolojik kaynaklarının iş bulma baskısı üzerindeki etkisini açıklamaktadır.

a) ETİK ONAY: Bu araştırma için Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurul'undan 29.04.2022 tarihli ve 4 nolu toplantısında 2022-386 sıra sayılı kararı ile izin alınmıştır.

b) This study is the extended version of the abstract paper presented at the Ege 5th International Conference on Social Sciences, held on May 21–22, 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

Maritime transportation represents one of the fundamental pillars of the global economy, characterized by its multidimensional structure and the involvement of numerous stakeholders. Beyond the core activity of transportation, this sector encompasses a wide range of related services, including port operations, ship management, logistics, and other complementary fields (Demirel, 2023). As a vital component of the global supply chain, maritime transportation plays a central role in sustaining international trade. Within this complex system, a diverse set of actors operate, ranging from shipping companies and port operators to ship agencies and logistics providers. Among these, human resource providers hold a particularly strategic position, as they ensure the availability of a qualified workforce to meet the evolving needs of the sector.

Educational institutions are at the forefront of these efforts, delivering programs at secondary, associate, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels, as well as through private sector training initiatives. These programs offer opportunities for students to pursue careers across different segments of the maritime industry, with the primary aim of supplying qualified human capital at every level of the sector (Demirel, 2023). Historically, however, maritime education initially focused on preparing seafaring personnel, while training for shore-based roles—particularly in port management, ship agency services, and ship operations—remained limited.

Research by Karataş and Arabelen (2012) highlights this imbalance, showing that higher education opportunities in port management within Türkiye have been insufficient, leading to a shortage of qualified professionals in the field. Addressing this gap in human resources is closely tied to Türkiye's broader logistics vision and objectives, which require both the expansion of maritime education and the establishment of high-quality undergraduate and associate degree programs tailored to the sector (Karaoğlu et al., 2023). Encouragingly, in recent years, universities in Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) have expanded their academic offerings in maritime and port management, leading to significant progress. Over the past decade, new associate and undergraduate programs have been established, and existing programs have been diversified. For instance, the Maritime and Port Management associate degree program is now offered at 23 universities in Türkiye and at several universities in the TRNC.

According to data from the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) Atlas, placement rates in Maritime and Port Management associate degree programs at 17 public universities reached nearly 100% in 2024, with only two exceptions. This suggests a strong student demand and reflects the growing importance of maritime education. However, despite these promising enrollment rates, the employability of graduates remains disproportionately low. Observations indicate that many graduates struggle to secure positions within their field of study, revealing a clear mismatch between the labor market's demands and the qualifications provided by current programs. This misalignment underscores the limited job opportunities within the sector and signals a contraction in the labor market.

Maritime and Port Management associate degree students are primarily trained as intermediate-level staff. Nevertheless, their employment opportunities are highly restricted, with recruitment through the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) limited to only a few institutions. Adding to these challenges, rapid technological transformation and digitalization in the sector have redefined traditional job descriptions and employment opportunities, further complicating the employment landscape. Consequently, many graduates with maritime training face considerable difficulties in securing sustainable employment.

The scarcity of job opportunities places additional pressure on students, heightening their concerns about the future and negatively influencing their subjective vitality. At the same time, advancements in transportation and maritime industries, particularly in maritime transport and port operations, offer potential sources of optimism. Developments such as digital transformation, the green transition, and the expansion of global trade present new opportunities for employment and professional growth in the sector. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the impact of hope and subjective vitality on the job-search pressure experienced by Maritime and Port Management associate degree

students.

The study model was evaluated within the framework of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) was developed by the American psychologist Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989. This theory represents an important motivational approach designed to understand individuals' processes of coping with stress (Hobfoll, 1989).

According to the theory, individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources that they value. These resources include personal, social, and material elements such as time, energy, status, social support, self-esteem, and health. When individuals lose these resources or perceive a threat of loss, they experience stress. Conversely, gaining or increasing resources enhances psychological well-being (Hobfoll, 1989).

Moreover, the absence of prior research specifically addressing this student population highlights a notable gap in the literature. This deficiency not only restricts scholarly understanding but also impedes policymakers and stakeholders in making well-informed evaluations of maritime education. Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this void, offering contributions that are both academically relevant and practically significant for the future of the maritime sector.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Hope

Throughout their lives, individuals need an emotional resource that enables them to develop a positive outlook toward the future in order to cope with challenges and difficulties. Among such emotions, hope stands out as a central factor. Hope provides a meaningful perspective on current behavior by focusing on future expectations, goals, and planning (Margalit, 2010). The Turkish Language Association (TDK) defines hope as “the feeling arising from expectation, the anticipation of something that is desired or believed to occur” (TDK, 2022).

In another study, hope is conceptualized as a cognitive construct that reflects an individual's perception of their capacity to make goal-directed decisions, plan pathways toward these goals, and motivate themselves to pursue the planned pathways (Irving et al., 1998). The concept of hope was first introduced into scientific research by C. Rick Snyder (Erkuş & Fındıklı, 2013, p. 305).

Individuals with high levels of hope are more confident, determined, creative in generating alternative pathways, and effective in setting and achieving their goals compared to those with low levels of hope (Cheavens, 2000). Lopez (2010) argues that hopeful individuals are generally more energetic, less fearful of difficulties, more inclined to generate alternative plans, more willing to seek support when necessary, less stressed and anxious, more proactive in planning for the future, and more excited about what lies ahead. In organizational contexts, hopeful individuals are more successful in achieving positive outcomes, and higher levels of hope are associated with stronger self-efficacy and self-esteem (Griggs & Crawford, 2017).

The literature indicates that hope has been examined in relation to a variety of psychological constructs. For example, Folkman (2010) associates the close relationship between hope and stress with their contextual, meaning-based, and dynamic nature, as well as their shared capacity to foster well-being under difficult circumstances. Demirhan et. al. (2019) found a strong relationship between job-related hope and locus of control among university students. Taş and Alparslan (2020) reported that hope positively influences career adaptability among undergraduate students from different faculties, while Şen-Baz (2019) demonstrated that hope positively predicts life satisfaction in undergraduate populations.

2.2. Subjective Vitality

Subjective vitality can be defined as the state of feeling energetic, alive, and free from fatigue or exhaustion. It is considered an essential component of full functioning and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). According to Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008), subjective vitality is conceptualized as a robust construct associated with both the physical and mental dimensions of performance, reflecting the extent to which an individual feels lively, vigorous, and energetic.

Subjective vitality represents a form of achievement for individuals who combine psychological vitality with a healthy lifestyle (Romeo et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2008). Individuals with high levels of subjective vitality are more willing to participate in activities, remain alert, and sustain energy. Moreover, they are more likely to engage in meaningful activities, cope effectively with stressful life events, and achieve better psychological health (Uğur et al., 2019). Conversely, when subjective vitality declines, individuals may neglect responsibilities, encounter difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and seek the relationships and happiness they need in online environments (Widyanto & McMurran, 2004).

2.3. Job-Finding Pressure

The environment in which an individual lives shapes their expectations regarding the job-search process, and the pressure stemming from these expectations is defined as “job-finding pressure.” This pressure is also linked to the stress experienced when individuals are unable to secure the type of employment they desire under prevailing labor market conditions.

For university students, one of the most critical challenges is the difficulty of securing employment after graduation. Rapid economic and social transformations contribute to job-search stress, particularly among students at the early stages of their careers. Thus, post-graduation job-search anxiety and pressure represent major concerns in students’ lives (Yam, 2020). Job-finding pressure is also regarded as a component of career stress in the literature. Wheeler (2007) notes that stress, originally a physics term referring to the amount of force exerted on an object, metaphorically describes the adverse effects of external pressures on human life.

In their study, Türköz et al. (2021) reported that 40% of graduate students stated their job-search anxiety would persist until they found employment, highlighting that even advanced-level students experience significant pressure and anxiety about future employment. This suggests that job-finding pressure is a challenge faced at all educational levels.

University students encounter various stressors, including academic difficulties, financial concerns, social relationships, and career-related issues. Among these, career-related concerns are often prioritized. Thus, the university years constitute a critical period during which students establish goals and formulate career plans for the post-graduation phase. However, a considerable proportion of students face difficulties in career planning, exhibiting higher levels of anxiety and depression and lower levels of psychological well-being compared to the general population (Fouad et al., 2006).

Research suggests that studying in departments directly linked to specific professions may reduce career stress and associated job-finding pressure. Nevertheless, such an outcome depends on the development of career identity and satisfaction with the chosen academic program (Jung, 2019).

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1. The Relationship Between Hope and Job-Finding Pressure

Hope serves as both a protective factor for mental and physical health and a motivational element that guides individuals in career planning, an important aspect of life (Sarı & Tunç, 2016). Individuals with high levels of hope tend to be achievement-oriented (Alnıaçık et al., 2021). Previous studies have found that hope positively influences perceptions of career future (Alnıaçık et al., 2021),

reduces stress (Sucan, 2019), and lowers career-related stress (Demirtaş, 2019; Gültekin, 2022). Since job-finding pressure is a subdimension of career stress, it is hypothesized that hope negatively affects job-finding pressure.

H1. Hope negatively affects job-finding pressure.

3.2. The Relationship Between Hope and Subjective Vitality

Hope and subjective vitality are positively related constructs. Among university students, those who are hopeful about the future are generally more energetic and vigorous. Empirical studies support the positive relationship between hope and subjective vitality in student populations (Cernas-Ortiz, 2018; Muyan-Yılık & Bakalim, 2022; Satıcı, 2020). While hope enhances energy levels, hopelessness tends to exacerbate depression (Dilbaz & Seber, 1993). Therefore, hope is considered a crucial factor for university students to remain energetic and vital. Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Hope positively affects subjective vitality.

3.3. The Relationship Between Subjective Vitality and Job-Finding Pressure

Individuals with high levels of subjective vitality are typically motivated, alert, and energetic in engaging in activities. Subjective vitality plays a critical role in initiating action and pursuing activities in life (Arslan et al., 2022). As one of the positive affective states, subjective vitality has not yet been directly studied in relation to job-finding pressure. However, given that subjective vitality is a positive construct, it is reasonable to assume that it negatively influences job-finding pressure, a negative attitude. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3. Subjective vitality negatively affects job-finding pressure.

3.4. The Mediating Role of Subjective Vitality in the Relationship Between Hope and Job-Finding Pressure

It is anticipated that both hope and subjective vitality influence job-finding pressure among university students. However, no study has been identified in the literature that examines these three variables simultaneously. This gap highlights the originality of the present research. In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed to investigate whether subjective vitality mediates the relationship between hope and job-finding pressure:

H4. Subjective vitality mediates the effect of hope on job-finding pressure.

The research model developed on the basis of the literature review is presented in Figure 1.

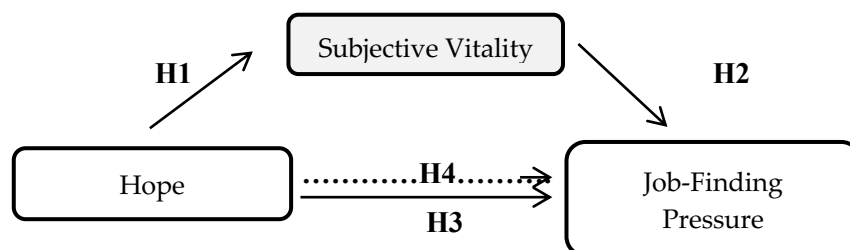


Figure 1: Research Model

4. METHOD

4.1. Sample and Data Collection

The sample of this study consisted of students enrolled in associate degree programs in maritime and port management at four vocational schools in four universities in Türkiye. Approximately 400 questionnaires were distributed to students online using convenience sampling. A total of 205 responses were received. To calculate the required sample size, the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013, p. 123) was used: $N \geq 104 + m$, where m represents the number of independent variables. Since the study included two independent variables, the number of valid responses was sufficient to represent the population.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Ondokuz Mayıs University (Decision No: 2022/386, dated 29.04.2022)

4.2. Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized previously validated and reliable scales. Permission to use the Turkish adaptations of the scales was obtained from the researchers who had conducted the adaptations. The instruments are described below:

Hope Scale. To measure students' levels of hope, the six-item "Hope Scale," a subdimension of the 24-item Psychological Capital Scale developed by Luthans, Avolio, Avey and Norman (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Çetin and Basım (2012), was used. This instrument is based on a five-point Likert scale.

Subjective Vitality Scale. To assess students' subjective vitality, the seven-item scale developed by Ryan and Frederick (1997) and adapted into Turkish by Uysal, Satıcı and Akın (2013) was employed. This instrument uses a seven-point Likert scale.

Job-Finding Pressure Scale. To measure students' perceived job-finding pressure, the six-item subdimension of the 20-item Career Stress Scale developed by Choi et al. (2011) and adapted into Turkish by Özden and Sertel-Berk (2017) was used. This instrument is also designed on a five-point Likert scale.

4.3. Data Analysis

This research employed a cross-sectional design, one of the quantitative research methods. Initially, normality tests were conducted to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test construct validity. Composite reliability (CR) coefficients and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the reliability of the scales. In addition, mean and standard deviation values were computed.

To identify relationships among the variables, correlation coefficients were examined, and regression analyses were conducted to test the effects of the variables on one another. The analyses were performed using SPSS and AMOS software.

4.4. Validity and Reliability Analyses of the Scales

To evaluate the fit of the measurement model with the data, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The goodness-of-fit indices examined included χ^2/df , RMSEA, SRMR, TLI, CFI, NFI and GFI.

In the first step of the analysis, t-values were examined. t-values indicate whether the relationships between latent and observed variables are statistically significant. These values must exceed 1.96 at the .05 significance level and 2.576 at the .01 level (Çelik & Yılmaz, 2013, p. 150). No issues were identified regarding t-values.

Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analyses were conducted for the scales. Factor loadings, goodness-of-fit values, and reliability coefficients obtained from the CFA are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: CFA Factor Loadings and Reliability Coefficients of the Scales

	Items	Factor Loading	(α)	CR
Hope	Hope6	.738	.80	.80
	Hope5	.693		
	Hope4	.589		
	Hope3	.598		
	Hope2	.649		
	Hope1	.534		
Job-Finding Pressure	JFP6	.796	.86	.86
	JFP5	.817		
	JFP4	.725		
	JFP3	.602		
	JFP2	.702		
	JFP1	.648		
Subjective Vitality	SV7	.939	.85	.86
	SV6	.62		
	SV5	.712		
	SV4	.802		
	SV3	.626		
	SV2	.343		
	SV1	.745		

As presented in Table 1, factor loadings were assessed against a minimum threshold of .30 (Harrington, 2009). All factor loadings exceeded this criterion, and consequently, no items were eliminated from the scales. On the other hand, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981, p. 46), the composite reliability coefficient (CR) should be .70 or higher. Similarly, in the social sciences, Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) should exceed .70 (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2015, p. 315). The results indicated that all scales used in this study met the reliability criteria. The goodness-of-fit indices for all scales are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Goodness-of-Fit Values of the Measurement Instruments

	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	GFI	NFI	CFI
Total Scales	1.891	0,066	0.061	0.90	0.87	0.85	0.92
Good fit*	≤ 3	<0.05	<0.05	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.95
Acceptable fit*	≤ 5	<0.08	<0.08	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.85

*Simon vd.,2010; Gürbüz ve Şahin (2015)

As shown in Table 2, the goodness-of-fit values are within the acceptable threshold levels.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Findings on the Demographic Characteristics of Participants

This study was conducted with students enrolled in the associate degree program in Maritime and Port Management. Approximately 400 students were invited to complete the online survey, and 205

valid responses were obtained. Since the Google Forms survey required all items to be answered, no incomplete or invalid responses were recorded, and all questionnaires were included in the analysis.

Of the participants, 70.2% were male, and 60% were second-year students. In addition to demographic information, students were asked: “What kind of job would you like to pursue after graduation?” Their responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Information on Students’ Career Preferences After Graduation

Career Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Working in port operations	50	24.4
Working in a shipping agency	8	3.9
Working in any maritime-related business	49	23.9
Taking the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS)	21	10.2
Pursuing vertical transfer to complete a bachelor’s degree	44	21.5
Continuing the family business	3	1.5
Working in any available job without career preference	15	7.3
Starting their own business	15	7.3
Toplam	205	100,0

As shown in Table 3, 24.4% of students indicated that they wished to work in port operations, while 23.9% expressed interest in working in any maritime-related enterprise. Additionally, 21.5% of students reported plans to pursue vertical transfer in order to complete a bachelor’s degree. These findings suggest that students in maritime and port management programs generally make deliberate career choices and aim to build a professional future in their field.

5.2. Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

Before testing the study’s hypotheses, descriptive statistics were examined, followed by correlation analysis to test the relationships among variables. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Hope	Job-finding Pressure	Vitality
Hope	3.7049	.04672	-0.564	1.156	1	-	-
Job-finding Pressure	3.2138	.06290	-0.506	0.016	-.206**	1	-
Vitality	4.8885	.07106	-0.751	0.712	.326**	-.215**	1

Note. $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 5, students reported relatively high levels of subjective vitality, moderate levels of hope, and ambivalence regarding job-finding pressure. The skewness and kurtosis values fall within the ± 1.5 range suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), indicating normal distribution.

Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between hope and subjective vitality ($r = .326, p < .001$), a significant negative relationship between hope and job-finding pressure ($r = -.206, p < .001$), and a significant negative relationship between subjective vitality and job-finding pressure ($r = -.215, p < .001$).

5.3. Hypothesis Testing

In this stage of the study, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the direct effects among variables and to examine the mediating role of subjective vitality.

Before conducting the mediation analysis, multicollinearity among independent variables was assessed. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined and found to be below 4, which is within the acceptable threshold recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham. (2013). This indicates that multicollinearity was not a concern in the model. The structural equation model of the research is presented in Figure 2.

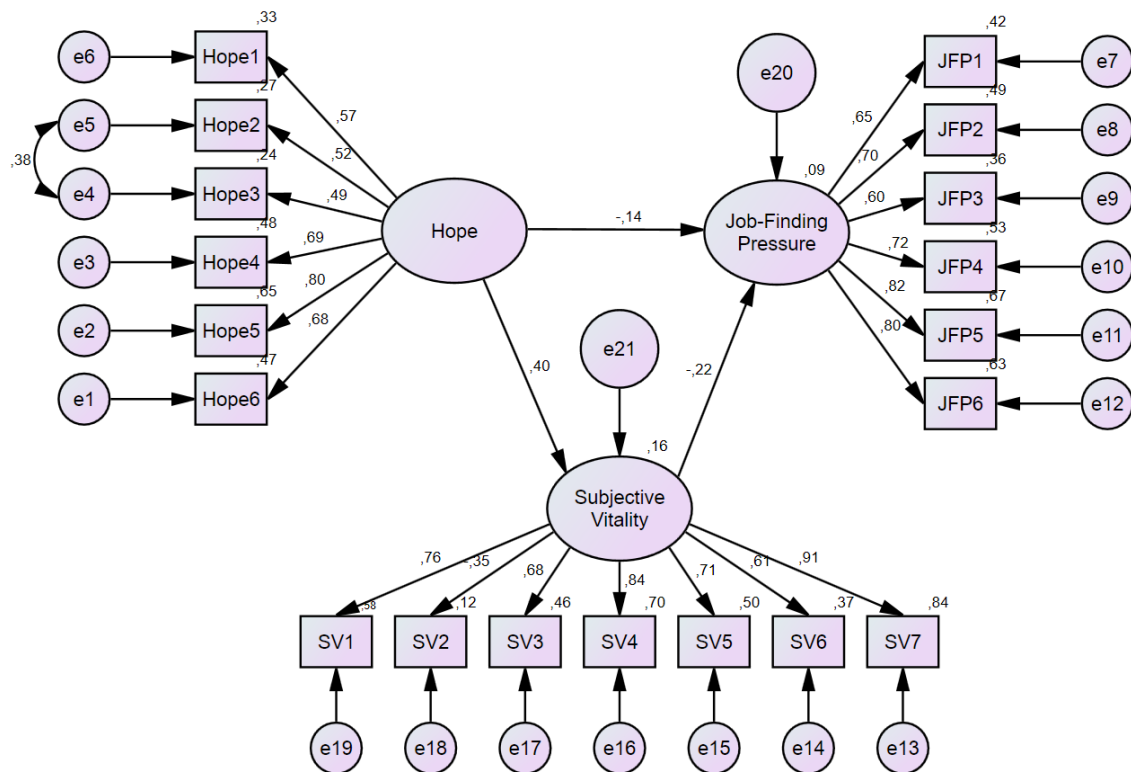


Figure 2: Structural Model Depicted

As shown in Figure 2, the path analysis indicates a significant and positive effect of hope on subjective vitality (path a), a significant and negative effect of subjective vitality on job-finding pressure (path b), and the direct effect of hope on job-finding pressure (path c'). The model fit indices for the structural model depicted in Figure 2 are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Fit Indices of the Structural Equation Model

Scale	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	GFI	CFI	NFI
Model Fit	1.727	0.060	0.059	0.92	0.88	0.93	0.85
Excellent Fit	≤ 3	<0.05	<0.05	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.95
Acceptable Fit	≤ 5	<0.08	<0.08	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.85	≥ 0.80

* Note. Adapted from Simon et al. (2010), Gürbüz ve Şahin (2015)

The results in Table 5 indicate that the structural model demonstrates acceptable fit indices, providing sufficient evidence for the model's structural adequacy. To assess the mediating role of subjective vitality in the relationship between hope and job-finding pressure, the results of the simple mediation model are reported in Table 6.

Table 6: Mediating Role of Subjective Vitality in the Effect of Hope on Job-Finding Pressure

Predictor Variables	Outcome Variables					
	Subjective Vitality			Job-Finding Pressure		
	β	SH	P	β	SH	P
Hope (c Path)	-	-	-	-0,229*	0,115	0.007
R²	-	-	-	0,053		
Hope (a Path)	,398*	0,213	< 0.001	-	-	-
R²	,158			-	-	-
Hope (c' Path)	-	-	-	-0,143*	0,117	0,113
Subjective Vitality (b Path)	-	-	-	-0,221*	0,045	< 0.001
R²	-	-	-	0,094		
Indirect Effect	-	-	-	-0,119* (-0,221; -0,027)		

As shown in Table 6, hope was found to have a significant negative effect on job- finding pressure (path c; $\beta = -0.229$, $p = .007$), supporting Hypothesis 1. A significant positive effect of hope on subjective vitality was also observed (path a; $\beta = .398$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Moreover, subjective vitality negatively predicted job-finding pressure (path b; $\beta = -0.221$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3.

Finally, the mediation analysis demonstrated that subjective vitality fully mediated the relationship between hope and job-finding pressure. To determine whether the indirect effect was significant, the bootstrap method was applied. Results confirmed a significant indirect effect of hope on job-finding pressure through subjective vitality ($\beta = -0.119$, $p < .001$; 95% CI [-0.221, -0.027]). Because the confidence interval did not include zero (MacKinnon et al., 2004), the indirect effect was deemed significant. However, the direct effect of hope on job-finding pressure (path c'; $\beta = -0.143$, $p = .113$) became nonsignificant when subjective vitality was included, indicating full mediation. Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 was supported. The R² values show that hope explained 5.3% of the variance in job-finding pressure and 15.8% of the variance in subjective vitality, while subjective vitality explained 9.4% of the variance in job-finding pressure.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the mediating role of subjective vitality in the effect of hope on job-finding pressure by testing four hypotheses. The sample consisted of students enrolled in maritime and port management programs, which are offered at only 20 universities in Turkey and graduate approximately 1,000 students annually. A key reason for selecting this population is the limited employment opportunities available to program graduates. Specifically, their chances of securing public-sector employment are minimal, while their opportunities in the maritime industry remain constrained, thereby contributing to elevated job-finding pressure. Additional factors influencing this pressure include competition from graduates of related programs (e.g., logistics, international trade), the international nature of the maritime industry, the importance of foreign language proficiency, and employers' heightened expectations in this regard. Given these challenges, this study examined the protective roles of hope and subjective vitality.

Previous research has demonstrated that hope positively influences career outlook (Almıaçık et al., 2021), reduces stress (Sücan, 2019), and alleviates career-related stress (Demirtaş, 2019; Gültekin, 2022). Consistent with this literature, the present findings confirmed the negative effect of hope on job-finding pressure, supporting Hypothesis 1. Hope explains 5.3% of the variance in job-finding pressure. In this context, only a small proportion of job-finding pressure is explained by hope, indicating a limited effect size. Thus, hope cannot be considered a strong standalone predictor of job-finding pressure. Nevertheless, it appears to function as a protective psychological resource that alleviates perceived pressure, particularly under challenging labor market conditions. Although the increasing number of graduates from maritime and port management programs and similar fields contributes to heightened job-finding pressure, higher levels of hope mitigate this effect.

Further, studies with university students have consistently reported a positive association between hope and subjective vitality (Cernas-Ortiz, 2018; Muyan-Yılık & Bakalım, 2022; Satıcı, 2020). In line with these findings, this study demonstrated that hope significantly and positively influenced subjective vitality, supporting Hypothesis 2. Within this sample, hope accounted for approximately 10% of the variance in subjective vitality, suggesting that students with greater hope experience higher levels of energy and vitality.

Subjective vitality plays a crucial role in engaging with life and carrying out daily activities (Arslan et al., 2022). Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that greater vitality can reduce perceived job-finding pressure. Consistent with this expectation, the present study found a significant negative effect of subjective vitality on job-finding pressure, supporting Hypothesis 3.

Most importantly, the findings revealed that subjective vitality fully mediated the relationship between hope and job-finding pressure, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4. These results indicate that while hope influences job-finding pressure, its effect is indirect, operating entirely through subjective vitality. Students with higher levels of hope report greater vitality, which in turn reduces their perceived job-finding pressure. This underscores the role of psychological resources (e.g., hope) in influencing employment-related stressors through internal personal resources such as subjective energy, vitality, and well-being.

According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory developed by Stevan E. Hobfoll (1989), individuals tend to acquire, protect, and maintain the resources they value. These resources encompass the individual's physical, psychological, social, and material assets. The theory conceptualizes stress as a process that arises when these valued resources are threatened, lost, or when expected resource gains fail to materialize.

From this perspective, hope is considered an important psychological resource that reflects an individual's belief in and determination to achieve future goals. Individuals with higher levels of hope are more capable of utilizing their internal resources effectively when facing uncertainties and challenges in the job-finding process. Conversely, subjective vitality refers to a person's sense of being energetic, lively, and psychologically strong. Within the framework of COR theory, subjective vitality can be viewed as an indicator of an individual's energy and psychological resilience.

Therefore, it plays a central role in both the preservation and regeneration of resources. The finding of full mediation in this study indicates that hope does not directly reduce job-search pressure; rather, it decreases this pressure indirectly by enhancing individuals' subjective vitality. This outcome aligns with the "resource gain spiral" principle of COR theory. In this sense, hope, as a primary psychological resource, strengthens subjective vitality (a secondary resource), which in turn diminishes perceptions of stress and pressure, thereby breaking the cycle of resource loss. In conclusion, the findings obtained from associate degree students support the core assumption of the

Conservation of Resources Theory: as individuals' psychological resources (hope and vitality) increase, the negative effects of external stressors (such as job-search pressure) decrease, thereby helping to maintain overall well-being (Hobfoll, 1989).

This study has several limitations. The research was conducted exclusively with students from four vocational schools offering maritime and port management programs, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies with larger and more diverse samples may yield different results. Testing the model across students from different associate degree programs could also enhance generalizability. Furthermore, future research may examine how personal resources such as personality traits, perseverance (grit), career awareness, perceived employability, career adaptability, and self-efficacy explain job-finding pressure among university students. Investigating these variables may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and career-related mechanisms underlying employment-related stress.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Funding Information: This study did not receive any support from any organization, such as public, commercial, or not-for-profit organizations.

Conflict of Interest: On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Ondokuz Mayıs University (Decision No: 2022/386, dated 29.04.2022).

Informed Consent: Informed consent forms were obtained from all individual participants participating in the study.

Author Contribution Declaration: The contribution of the 1. author is 50%, and the contribution of the 2. author is 50%.

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