

## A Study on Social Support and Motivation

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**ABSTRACT** This paper analyzes whether there is a correlation between student motivation and perceived social support. The determination of the effects of the perceived social support provided by the students' families, friends, and other important people on the students' motivations will contribute to an explanation of the motivation to learn. This study was conducted with a total of 716 student teachers. The "Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support" was used to determine social support perceived by the student teachers and the "Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire" was used to determine motivation. Results indicate that there was a correlation between the elements of social support and the levels of use of motivational strategies by the student teachers. The study showed that there was a positive correlation amongst the levels of external motivation, internal motivation, and motivation for subject value of the individuals who received sufficient social support from their environment.

### INTRODUCTION

Motivation is defined as a process that is instrumental in the introduction and continuation of activities intended for a specific purpose (Randhawa and Gupta 2000; Pintrich et al. 2008; Wigfield et al. 2015). Academically, motivation describes a student's desire, need, aspiration and obligation to participate in the learning process and become successful (Bomia et al. 1997: 1). Academic achievement is influenced by the objectives of the students or their reasons for going to school. On the other hand, motivation provides a basis for the objectives of the students. Attending school regularly plays a significant role in determining whether students perform certain tasks, become active learners, and impacts academic achievement, interests, and objectives of students (Mega et al. 2014; Levy and Campbell 2008; Wentzel 1998). Studies indicate that motivation is a key factor in initiating and maintaining the learning process of the students in

education (Randhawa and Gupta 2000; Wigfield, 2015).

Although different variables (Deci et al. 1991; High and Scharp 2015; Kressler 2003) have an impact on the motivation of each individual, certain factors are known to be influential in the desire to increase an individual's performance. According to both content-oriented and process-oriented motivational theories, an individual's behavior is determined by the stimuli that motivate the individual (Deci et al. 1991; Pintrich et al. 2008), which may be internal or external in origin (Deci 1971). Internal motivation can be defined as the participation of an individual in an activity because of individual enjoyment or interest in the activity without expecting an external reward. In other words, it is not based on an external stimulus (Deci and Ryan 1994; Deci et al. 1991). Internal motivation is about an action taken by an individual by an internal natural interest without an external driving force. On the other hand, external motivation is associated with an individual's participation in an activity to receive a reward (Atnafu 2012; Pintrich et al. 1991; Ryan and Deci 2000). External motivation can be explained by such reasons as receiving a reward, acquiring status, being favored by others, or avoiding punishment. The incentive for the learning process is also external. This incentive is not artificial. It should be built upon the current natural reactions or tendencies. This indicates that

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a favorable objective organization, reward application, and a supportive social network are important to achieve external motivation (Chen 2015; Bomia et al. 1997; Ryan and Deci 2000). Deci and Ryan (1994) stated that both internal and external motivations were determined by social factors. Factors like families, teachers, friends, and peers with whom an individual interacts are significant promoters of the integration of external and internal motivations (Deci and Ryan 1994; Muller and Palekic 2005; Weiner 1985). Although the social support provided for individuals is associated with external motivation, it also has potential for internalization (Anderman and Anderman 1999; Deci and Ryan 1994; Ryan and Deci 2000).

Weiner (1985) emphasized that the perceived social support promotes the motivation required to achieve success. Whether the support received from other people with whom individuals interact is positive or negative affects their motivation (Ersoy-Kart and Guldu 2008; Garavandi et al. 2015). Individuals often require support from others in order to overcome challenges encountered during their education and social life and to continue their lives so as to maintain a successful life. These support elements are referred to as social support elements in the literature (Atnafu 2012; Zimet et al. 1988). These elements can be the individuals' families, friends, or a special person in their lives. Sarason et al. (1990: 110) defined this perceived social support as "a set of emotions that an individual likes, appreciates, and unconditionally accepts." Social support can also be defined as an individual feeling a sense of belonging to a certain group. The support received by the individual in that group allows the individual to suffer less due to stressful circumstances and to encounter less threatening life events (Boyle et al. 1991). Social support includes emotional, mental, and physical security received from families, friends, and people special to the individual (Forehand et al. 1998; Garavandi et al. 2015; Mega et al. 2014; Sarason et al. 1995). Mutual respect among the members of a group allows for the support of individuals who have relatively less skill or competence in a certain area and helps them feel worthy. Social support provided by the teacher in class, the family at home, or by peers or friends in the environment empowers success-oriented and risk-taking behavior among students (Birch and Ladd 1998; Deci and Ryan 1994). Mutual respect among

all members of a group accounts for social support in class, family, and other social circles.

When teachers and families understand that both internal motivation and elements of external motivation support learning (Ryan and Deci 2000), they can be better positioned to offer efficient guidance. In addition, which elements of external support account for a source of motivation may also form a basis for efficient guidance. Both perceived and actual social support behaviors contribute to the students' wellbeing, optimistic outlook (Vieno et al. 2007), and positive images of self-respect (Hoffman et al. 1988). This is significant because it contributes to the internalization of social support elements. Social support has the potential to affect the motivation of the students' learning process. In this context, the objective of this study was to determine the correlation between the motivation of university students and the social support they received. The effects of the perceived social support received by the students from their families, friends, and people who are special to them on their motivations will contribute to the explanation of the nature of the motivation to learn. Moreover, the results of the study may also contribute to the efforts of the families and teachers for the design of a learning environment for students during the learning process. It may also help teachers and administrators develop efficient design strategies to overcome the problems encountered during the learning process. In this respect, the following hypotheses have been analyzed with an aim to determine which elements of social support perceived by the students are the variables to affect motivation.

**H<sub>1</sub>: There Will Be a Significant Positive Correlation between the Motivations of the Students and the Family Support Perceived by the Students**

This would occur provided that the students have a strong relationship with their families, the families support the learning process of the students and thus contribute to the students' decisions to prioritize learning (Chen 2015; Crone and MacKay 2007). Family support includes financial support to maintain the individual's educational life, psychological support, opportunities, and other help in overcoming problems. It has been suggested that the support, appreciation, and praise received by the students from their

parents and their inner circle may increase the levels of motivation and academic achievement (Atnafu 2012; High and Scharp 2015; Unger et al. 2000; Forehand et al. 1998). In this framework, it was stated that the social support received by the individual had a significant effect on dealing with stressful events and suffering from less harm (Boyle et al. 1991; Holahan et al. 1995). On the other hand, it has been emphasized that lack of this support would lead to such behaviors as being unable to deal with the requirements of a task and thus giving up on the task, which is similar to burnout (Demerouti et al. 2001; Garavandi et al. 2015). Weiner (1985) stated that family support, as an element of social support, promoted motivation for success among students. Based on these findings, there is a significant positive correlation between the family support perceived by students and their level of motivation.

**H<sub>2</sub>: There Will Be a Significant Positive Correlation between the Motivations of the Students and the Friend Support Perceived by the Students**

Another source of social support in the individuals' lives is their circle of friends, which is sometimes even more effective than family. Previous research has indicated that support from friends had a significant role in academic achievement and motivation, and that the support from friends and friendships were closely associated with academic achievement, socialization, social objectives, self-image, and emotional conditions as motivational outcomes (Eldeleklioglu 2008; Jiang et al. 2015; Uzman 2004; Wentzel 1998; Yildirim 2007). This information shows that a circle of friends can have a significant role in an individual's academic life. The students' positive and supportive relations with their friends contribute to their motivation and engagement in school (Pierce et al. 1991; Randhawa and Gupta 2000). In addition, the support from friends, included within the elements of social support, is more prominent during certain developmental periods like adolescence, when the support from friends tends to be more important than that of many others.

The study indicated that as long as mothers receive social support from their friends while raising a child, they would treat their children more responsibly and develop a more positive attitude towards them. Also, such mothers support their children more and tend to display controlling behaviors towards their children less of-

ten (Jennings et al. 1991). Considering that the friend support received by students has a significant role in being favored and appreciated, this support may have an effect on an individual to show a good performance in an activity.

**H<sub>3</sub>: There Will Be a Significant Positive Correlation between the Motivations of the Students and the Support from a Person Perceived as Special by Them**

In addition to relatives like parents and siblings, other special people like boyfriends or girlfriends, teachers, coaches, and other role models have a significant place in a student's life. These special people may be found in the circle of friends of the individual and may also be found in various other groups. Whereas a teacher may sometimes become a special person for a student, a close neighbor may also play this role in a student's life from time to time (Brophy 2004; Greene et al. 2004). The support received from such special people during the course of life may have an effect on the individuals' perspectives and their decision-making. It has been found that this intimate support has a protective aspect against suicidal tendencies displayed by individuals (Cole et al. 1992; Forehand et al. 1998; Unger et al. 2000). Students' perceptions about the support from a teacher are associated with having stronger emotions about social support and a sense of belonging to school. Showing strong emotions about a sense of belonging to school is a factor that promotes academic concentration and motivation. Social support provided by the teacher enables the students to develop high expectations in class. These high expectations strengthen students' risk-taking behaviors to complete academic studies. Results from previous research have indicated that the support provided by the teacher is effective in predicting academic achievement and motivation in school (Birch and Ladd 1998; Deci et al. 1999; Juvonen and Wentzel 1996; Malecki and Demaray 2006; Mata et al. 2012; Wentzel 1998). In this context, the social support provided by special people is associated with the motivation levels of the individuals. The support provided by the teachers can be said to increase the motivation levels of the students (Brophy 2004; Greene et al. 2004). Furthermore, a review of the literature revealed that the support provided by a teacher to prevent burnout among students was more effective than that provided by families or friends (Kutsal and Bilge 2012). The support received

from a special person may also serve as a model to display a certain behavior. From this point of view, a significant positive correlation exists between the support from a special person and the motivation of students.

**H<sub>4</sub>: The Social Support (Provided By Families, Friends and Special People) Perceived by the Students will be Used to Predict Their Motivations**

Different variables may have an effect on the motivation levels of students. Research has indicated that the support provided by families and teachers had a significant effect, particularly on the external motivation of students (Brophy 2004; Greene et al. 2004). In addition, other research has found that social support was a significant variable in predicting the academic achievement and motivation of the students (Atnafu 2012; Garavandi et al. 2015; Gottfried et al. 1994; Kim 2002; Paul et al. 2015; Holahan et al. 1995; Wentzel 1998). Furthermore, social support was included among the sources that prevent stress and burnout (Bakker et al. 2003), while teacher and family support perceived by the students played an important role in coping with anger in the school environment. Mata et al. (2012) indicated that the support provided by teachers and friends had a significant positive effect on the motivation of the students. Similarly, Juvonen and Wentzel (1996) revealed that social support and other types of support provided by families, teachers, and friends were effective in increasing the motivations of primary and secondary school students. Weiner (1985) and Atnafu (2012) stated that social support perceived by the students generally promoted the motivations of the students in terms of academic achievement. Based on the idea that these variables have an important effect on motivation, the elements of social support perceived by the students can have a significant positive effect on the motivations of the students.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The study group was composed of 716 student teachers from the Faculty of Education at Balikesir University in the 2013-2014 academic year. The sample group consisted of 482 female

(67.3%) and 234 male (32.7%) student teachers between the ages of 20 and 35 years, and it consisted of 66 (9.2%) married, 643 (89.8%) single and 2 (0.3%) divorced individuals. A simple random sampling method was used in the study. During the process of the study, 800 student teachers present in the classrooms and included in the study based on voluntary participation were provided a scale to complete. Some participants completed the data collection tools incompletely or incorrectly, so the statistical analysis was performed on the data obtained from 716 student teachers.

### Instruments

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (SS) and the Motivational Strategies Scale, as part of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) scale, were used as data collection tools. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support is a likert scale developed by Zimet et al. (1988), and adapted to Turkish by Eker and Arkar (1995), consisting of 12 items that can be scored from 1 to 7. The minimum score that can be obtained from the scale is 12 and the maximum score is 84. High scores reflect that the perceived social support is high. Cronbach's alpha value calculated for the scale used in this study was found to be 0.72.

The MSLQ scale developed by Pintrich et al. (1991) is composed of two main sections, of which the "Motivational Strategies Scale (MSS)" section was used in this study. MSS is a likert scale adapted to Turkish by Altun (2005), consisting of 31 items that can be scored from 1 to 7. The scores that can be obtained from the scale vary between 31 and 217. High scores indicate that the motivation for learning is high. Cronbach's alpha value calculated for the scale used in this study was found to be 0.92.

### Data Analysis

Within the scope of data analysis, correlation analysis was carried out to determine the correlations among the perceived social support from families, friends, and special people and the motivation levels of the students, and a multiple linear regression analysis was carried out by using the stepwise method to determine which elements of the social support predicted motivation in addition to the application of descriptive

statistics such as mean values and standard deviations.

## RESULTS

The opinions of the participants about motivation and social support were calculated based on 7-point likert scale. The descriptive analysis results of the data obtained from the scale are provided in Table 1.

The results of the analyses indicated that the motivation levels of the students ( $M=5.49$ ) were high. The highest scores among the elements of the perceived social support were obtained from family support ( $M=5.67$ ), followed by support from friends ( $M=5.31$ ), and the perceived social support from a special person ( $M= 5.10$ ).

### Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was carried out to determine whether the motivation levels of the students were associated with the support from families, special people, or friends, contained within the elements of the perceived social support. The results of the analysis are provided in Table 2.

The results of correlation analysis indicated that the highest positive correlation with motivation was family support ( $r= .45$ ), followed by support from friends ( $r=.42$ ), and support from special people ( $r=.38$ ). These results were consistent with the hypotheses stated as H1, H2 and H3. There was a significant positive correlation among the dimensions of the perceived social support. The highest level of positive corre-

lation was between family support and friend support ( $r=0.46$ ). It was also found that autocorrelation did not exist among the independent variables and that all independent variables were associated with the dependent variable.

### Results of Regression Analysis

A forced order hierarchical regression analysis and stepwise method were applied to determine which variables served as predictors for the motivation of students. In this analysis, motivation was the dependent variable. The predictor variables included in the equation were as follows: the first block consisted of demographic variables followed by gender and marital status as dummy variables, and the second block consisted of the support from families, friends, and special people. The results are presented in Table 3.

The results of the analysis indicated that demographic variables account for approximately three percent variance of motivation. The perceived family support contributes to demographic variables by eighteen percent, whereas the contribution of the perceived support from a special person was found to be seven percent. Finally, the support from friends contributes to demographic variables and other perceived social support by four percent. The model as a whole accounts for thirty-two percent variance of motivation.

A stepwise regression analysis was conducted to determine the best predictor variable for motivation. The results showed that the best

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics results**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Motivation	716	5.49	.79	-.517	.890
Social support family	716	5.67	1.22	-.996	.858
Social support special person	716	5.10	1.69	-.742	-.202
Social support friend	716	5.31	1.19	-.678	.496

**Table 2: Correlation results**

	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>SS family</i>	<i>SS special people</i>	<i>SS friend</i>
SS family	.446**			
SS special people	.383**	.261**		
SS friend	.419**	.458**	.272**	
Gender	-.125**	-.143**	-.070	.011
Study Field (Social –Science)	.077*	-.062	.008	-.072

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$



**Table 3: Regression analysis results**

Step 1	Variables	B	Std. error	$\hat{A}$	t	p
Step 1	Constant	5.349	.051		104.224	.000*
	Gender	.462	.041	.125	11.249	.001*
	R=.125	R <sup>2</sup> =.016	ÄR <sup>2</sup> =.016	F <sub>(1, 714)</sub> =11.278*		
Step 2	Constant	5.588	.101		55.507	.000*
	Gender	.213	.062	.126	3.413	.001*
	Marital status	-.267	.097	-.102	-2.754	.006*
Step 3	R=.161	R <sup>2</sup> =.026	ÄR <sup>2</sup> =.010	F <sub>(2, 713)</sub> =7.584*		
	Constant	4.024	.152		26.485	.000*
	Gender	.108	.057	.064	1.899	.058***
Step 4	Marital status	-.215	.008	-.082	-2.454	.014*
	SS family	.280	.022	.433	12.836	.000*
	R=.457	R <sup>2</sup> =.209	ÄR <sup>2</sup> =.183	F <sub>(3, 712)</sub> =164.761*		
	Constant	3.602	.153		104.224*	.000*
	Gender	.092	.054	.054	1.693**	.091***
Step 5	Marital status	-.190	.084	-.072	-2.268*	.024**
	SS family	.234	.021	.361	10.876*	.000*
	SS special person	.132	.015	.282	8.569*	.000*
	R=.532	R <sup>2</sup> =.283	ÄR <sup>2</sup> =.074	F <sub>(4, 711)</sub> =73.425		
	Constant	3.260	.158		20.633	.000*
Step 5	Gender	.086	.053	.051	1.638	.102***
	Marital status	-.213	.081	-.081	-2.613	.009*
	SS family	.173	.023	.267	7.526	.000*
	SS special person	.115	.015	.245	7.522	.000*
	SS friend	.151	.023	.227	6.421	.000*
	R=.568	R <sup>2</sup> =.322	ÄR <sup>2</sup> =.039	F <sub>(5, 710)</sub> =41.233*		

\*p<.01; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p>.05; Dependent variable: Motivation

predictor variable was Family Support ( $\beta=0.27, p<0.01$ ) followed by Support from a Special Person ( $\beta=0.25, p<0.01$ ), and Friend Support ( $\beta=0.23, p<0.01$ ), respectively. It was also found that marital status contained in the demographic variables significantly contributed to the variance ( $\beta=-0.08, p<0.01$ ), whereas gender did not have a significant contribution ( $\beta=0.05, p>0.05$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

The main objective of the study was to understand the role of the perceived social support (from families, friends, and special people) in the motivations of the students for learning. The findings of the study indicated that the motivation levels of the students for learning as well as the values for the dimensions of the perceived social support were significantly high. The family support was found as the highest perceived social support. This finding was not unexpected, especially for university students. Financial and psychological support (that is, providing moral support) and opportunities provided by the students' families play an important role in the admission of the students to a university after a

series of examinations, thus allowing them to continue their education.

The results of the correlation analysis showed that there was a positive interrelation at moderate levels between motivation and the support provided by families, friends, and special people as the sub-dimensions of the perceived social support. In other words, it can be said that there was a significant positive correlation between the social support provided by the families or social circles and the motivation levels of students. The results obtained from this study are also in line with other research (Akinsanya et al. 2014; Atnafu 2012; Gottfried et al. 1994; Kim 2002). The support, appreciation, and compliments received from parents and the inner circle, in particular, increase the motivation and academic achievement levels of students. The perceived social support from families, friends, special people, and teachers received by the students is associated with and contributes to such motivational outcomes as expanding the students' social behaviors, sharing responsibilities, developing values in educational activities and developing objectives for the self (Chen 2015; Mata et al. 2012; Wenzel 1998).

Considering that the motivational elements that depend on an external stimulus have potential for internalization (Deci 1971; Deci and Ryan 1994), this perceived social support also has the potential to be internalized. At least social support does not decrease the internal motivation as material elements (Deci 1999). The social support from friends as well as teachers and friends perceived by the students may encourage the students to take responsibilities on assignments and activities in school and to achieve success with such assignments.

Based on the results of the regression analysis, the family support, as an element of social support, was found to be the variable with the highest contribution to motivation, followed by the support from a special person, and friend support, respectively. The findings suggest that the social support provided by the family holds a significant place in the motivation of students for learning in education. Results also suggest that the effect of family is quite a significant predictor of the motivation of the students even during graduate education. The finding is supported by previous work by Atnafu (2012) and Gottfried et al. (1994), who found that student perception of family support was associated with motivation. These findings highlight the need for family support in learning activities. Considering that the motivation of students is a variable that is very closely associated with the learning process (Delgado et al. 2014; High and Scharp 2015; Randhawa and Gupta 2000), raising awareness of families about their responsibilities to increase the motivation of students can be beneficial.

The results of this study, which analyzed the role of the perceived teacher support on the motivations of students, and others in the literature (Brophy 2004; Delgado 2014; Greene et al. 2004; Perry et al. 2015) indicated that teacher support had a positive effect on increasing motivation. These findings show that the external social support to be provided to students contributes by increasing their eagerness to learn (Akinsanya et al. 2014; Atnafu 2012; High and Scharp 2015). It should also be noted that the support from friends, classified as one of the elements of the external social support, plays a significant role. Friendships and support from friends are closely associated with the academic achievement, socialization, and emotional state of students. The perceived support from a friend

has a significant effect on students to overcome a number of negative circumstances such as suicide (Cole et al. 1992; Greene et al. 2004; Jiang et al. 2015).

As a matter of fact, contemporary education requires the family, social circle, and school management to promote learning and academic achievement, since the teacher may not be a sufficient substitute for all such components in this regard. The results of the study crucially indicate the significance of these elements of social support to ensure that students maintain a successful educational life.

## CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the relationship between perceived social support and motivation levels of the students during the learning process. Results indicate that the motivation levels of the students for learning and the values for the dimensions of the perceived social support were significantly high. The results of the correlation analysis showed that there was a positive moderate relationship between motivation and the support provided by families, friends, and special people as sub-dimensions of the perceived social support. Based on the results of the regression analysis, family support was found to be the variable with the highest contribution to motivation, followed by support from a special person, and support from friends, respectively. As a result, the support from families and special people for the motivation of the students during the learning and teaching process in schools contributes to increasing the motivation for learning in class and increasing academic achievement. The results support hypothesis stated as H1, H2 and H3 and partially support hypothesis H4. Perceived support from both, teachers and parents is an important buffer against the general declines in motivation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted on students in the faculty of education. Carrying out a similar study in elementary and secondary schools would contribute to the generalization of these results. Determining whether social support gives rise to similar results at different levels of education would clarify whether this support is based on the need for a sense of belonging as

referenced in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The study indicated that family support was a significant source of motivation, even at the graduate level in Turkish culture. This finding necessitates the determination of whether this family support is a result of the family structure in Turkish culture or if a similar condition also exists in other cultures. Consequently, a cross-cultural comparison would be beneficial. In addition, only the effects of the elements of social support on motivation were examined in the study. In terms of motivation and achievement, positive social support from classmates, teacher and family is one of the most important factors. Therefore, it would be useful to inform stakeholders, especially teachers and a student's family, about the benefits of this social support.

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