Development of the spiritual and creative potential of future teachers in the school-university system

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to seek the opinions of teacher candidates in order to develop the spiritual and creative potential of future teachers in the 'school-university' system. This research was carried out using the qualitative research method. The participant group of the research consisted of 40 pre-service teachers who were studying at the faculty of education in the 2021–2022 academic year and agreed to participate in the study voluntarily. Research data were collected through the semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. As a result of the research, it has been determined that the spiritual well-being and creative potential of the teacher candidates are at a moderate level. In addition, pre-service teachers suggested that courses should be given in universities in order to develop their spiritual and creative potentials. Some of the teachers offered suggestions to make practices to develop their spiritual and creative potential in the school-university environment and to benefit from experienced teachers in this system. In addition, teacher candidates stated giving importance to personal development and participating in personal development seminars as suggestions for the development of their spiritual and creative potentials. In line with the results of the research, the necessity of carrying out applications for the development of the spiritual well-being and creative potential of teacher candidates in the school-university system has arisen.

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1. Introduction

Education, which directly or indirectly affects every aspect of life, is a lifelong process that begins with the birth of the individual. Teachers, who are accepted as an indispensable part of education, prepare students for life with the education they receive and the equipment they have. In this direction, the spiritual and creative potential of teachers plays an important role in both maintaining their professional commitment and contributing to the development of students in many ways. Developing the spiritual and creative potentials of teachers through their experiences in the school-university system is seen as an important part of the understanding of education that meets the requirements of the age.

1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Spirituality has been studied by many researchers recently and there has been controversy regarding its definition. Helminiak (2001) defined spirituality as the pursuit of being the best one can do and the presupposition that the guiding person is within the individual. According to this definition, the power to find the meaning of life is within the person. Spiritual well-being is defined as the desire to search for the meaning and purpose of human existence, to question everything and to understand intangible things that cannot be easily explained or understood. It is thought that people who are in a spiritual state of well-being maintain a balance between the forces within and outside themselves (Eksi & Kardas, 2017). Spirituality is an existential aspect of the human being, which includes the belief that there is an existence outside of the visible physical face of life and the feeling of being connected to nature in wholeness (Myers et al., 2000).

Spirituality is often used synonymously with religious belief; however, spirituality is a broader and more comprehensive definition that helps people to add ultimate meaning to their lives and gives meaning to life according to their personal values (Bekelman et al., 2007). In their studies on spirituality, researchers agree that it is associated with religion in their studies. However, religion and spirituality have different meanings. Religion is a fire of man's spiritual pursuit, and the fact that both concepts have common features does not mean that they mean the same thing. The phenomenon of religion, which emerged as a result of people's spiritual pursuits, is a dogmatic and mostly rigid structure. Spirituality, on the other hand, is far from a material structure. It is a spirit-related essence that cannot be explained by the five senses of sight, hearing, hearing, touch and taste, and is experienced with emotions. Spirituality offers people positive experiences, such as happiness, joy and peace, or negative experiences, such as hate and anger (Lowder, 2006). Spirituality accompanies the feeling of doing good and life satisfaction arising from the relationship between one's self and God (Brome et al., 2000).

One of the skills expected from the individual of the 21st century is creative thinking. Creativity skill needs educational environments that are open to new ideas, encourage questioning, have a high degree of trust, value patience and allow learning from mistakes. These skills, like other skills, can be developed through education (Trilling & Fadel, 2010). A creative teacher is a person who can solve problems, adapt and meet the expectations of his students by bringing materials and different ideas to the educational environment. It also provides an engaging and stimulating learning environment (Soykurt and Uzunboylu, 2017). He tries to make learning meaningful for his students by planning the entire course environment in his mind. He is constantly innovating in order to make the lesson interesting for the students in his class. It tries to make every event a motivating environment. It encourages students to think and act creatively. It also allows the student to see that they can be creative (Schreglmann & Kazanci, 2016).

It is inevitable to experience change and development in education and training practices, as in all areas of life. The university at school model, which is proposed to restructure teacher education,

carries scientific research and theoretical studies to the workplace, combines theoretical models with practice, traditional and scientific. With this model, the 'university at school' model is created by moving the 'university', which represents research, theory and science, to the 'school', which is the centre of teachers' workplace and practice. From another perspective, this model is the application of the concept of 'university at work' to teacher education (Ozcan, 2012).

The world is changing rapidly and in the global information society, almost all sectors, including education, are evaluated according to international standards. These standards reveal the importance of teacher training policies. In this direction, this research, in which the opinions of prospective teachers about the development of spiritual and creative potentials of teacher candidates in the school-university system, is considered important.

1.2. Related research

Holder, Coleman and Wallace (2010) studied the relationship between spirituality and happiness and included 320 children aged 8–12 years. In the study, it was concluded that the happiness rates of the students with high spiritual levels were also high. Yoon et al. (2015) studied the relationship between spirituality and subjective and psychological well-being and spirituality and included 450 adults from the United States. In line with the findings obtained from the research, it was concluded that spirituality positively affects subjective and psychological well-being. In addition, some other studies have revealed that spiritual well-being is positively related to physical health, well-being, forgiveness, social and psychological well-being (Ellison & Fan, 2008).

When the studies in the field are examined, it is seen that there are many studies conducted with teachers and pre-service teachers regarding creativity as well as spiritual well-being (Liu & Lin, 2014; Shanahan and Nieswandt, 2009; Cheung & Leung, 2014). In their research on the foundations of creativity, Beghetto and Kaufman (2013) examined the ways in which educators could encourage students' creativity and five foundations that would help increase academic learning. The first of these foundations is that creativity is much more than originality; the second is that creativity can be at different levels; the third is what the source of creativity is; the fourth is that creativity has a value; and the last foundation is that there is a time and place for creativity. Boz and Yilmaz (2018) evaluated the views of 70 classroom teachers on creative thinking skills in their study in which they examined the opinions of classroom teachers on creative thinking skills. As a result of the research, it is seen that classroom teachers define creative thinking skills from different perspectives according to their seniority and gender.

In their study, Isenler and Kucuk (2013) evaluated the creative thinking tendencies of teacher candidates in line with different variables. According to the findings, while there was no significant difference between the verbal fluency, verbal flexibility and verbal originality scores in the verbal part of the creative thinking test in terms of the gender of the pre-service teachers, a significant difference was found in favour of the classroom teacher candidates for each of the departments.

In their study, Tunc-Pekkan et al. (2019) evaluated the contribution of the university model to teacher education in practice. This study examines three different experiences. These are the achievements of the prospective teachers within the scope of the introductory mathematics teaching course, the achievements of an academician who is a mathematics educator by teaching within the scope of the sixth-grade mathematics course, and the teaching carried out by the senior English teacher candidates and the lecturer in the third-grade English course of the primary school. The difficulties observed and experienced in these different experiences and the approaches created to overcome these difficulties are revealed.

1.3. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to seek the opinions of teacher candidates in order to develop the spiritual and creative potential of future teachers in the 'school-university' system. In this direction, the following sub-objectives have been determined:

1. What is the evaluation of teacher candidates regarding their spiritual potential?

2. What is the evaluation of teacher candidates regarding their creative potential?

3. What are the suggestions of teacher candidates regarding the development of their spiritual and creative potentials?

2. Method and Materials

This section includes information about the method used in the research, the data collection tool, the study group from which the data will be collected and how the data will be evaluated.

2.1. Research method

This research was carried out with the qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a method that inquires about the problem it examines, interprets and tries to understand the form of the problem in its natural environment. In the process of designing and conducting qualitative research, the researchers have a flexible and dynamic workspace. Flexibility, which is expressed as the ability of researchers to develop new methods and approaches at every step of the research process and to make new arrangements that will increase the impact of the research, is one of the main features of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Due to these features, it was deemed appropriate to use the qualitative method in order to get the opinions of prospective teachers to develop the spiritual and creative potentials of future teachers in the 'school-university' system.

2.2. Participants

In contrast to the nature of quantitative research, which requires working with evidence-seeking identity and large sample groups, qualitative research is conducted with small samples or small study groups (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). For this reason, in this study, 40 pre-service teachers were studied in order to conduct an in-depth analysis in the evaluation of the data. The participant group of the research consisted of teacher candidates who are studying at the faculty of education in the 2021–2022 academic year and who voluntarily agree to participate in the study. The characteristics of the pre-service teachers participating in the research are as given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of teacher candidates

Demographic features		F	%
Department of Education	Primary school teaching	23	57,5
	Preschool teaching	11	27,5
	Math teaching	4	10
	Geography teaching	2	5
Gender	Female	27	67,5
	Male	13	32,5
Class of Study	4th year	40	100
Sum		40	100

In Table 1, the department the student attends, the class they study in and the gender distribution of the prospective teachers participating in the research are given. Of the pre-service teachers, 23 are studying in primary school teaching, 11 in preschool teaching, 4 in mathematics teaching and 2 in geography teaching. All the teacher candidates are studying in the 4th year. In addition, 27 teacher candidates participating in the research are female and 13 are male.

2.3. Data collection tools

Research data were collected through the semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. During the preparation of the semi-structured interview form, literature review was conducted and researches in the field were examined. The form questions prepared in this direction were sent to three experts for their opinions to be taken. The questions were arranged in line with the expert opinions. Afterwards, the created form was applied to four pre-service teachers in order to test the clarity of the questions. As a result of the application, it was determined that the questions prepared were understandable and a semi-structured interview form was made ready. Annex-1 presents the semi-structured interview form used in the research.

2.4. Data collection process

The semi-structured interview form prepared to collect the data was applied to the teacher candidates participating in the research through face-to-face interviews. The interviews with the pre-service teachers were held in a quiet environment where the researcher and the pre-service teacher could meet comfortably, and permission was requested from the pre-service teachers to take audio recordings. During the interviews, the questions in the semi-structured interview form were asked to the teacher candidates participating in the research in the same order and in a way that they were careful not to direct them. The interview process took about 3 months to complete because the prospective teachers were studying at different universities and in different departments.

2.5. Data collection analysis

After the interviews with all teacher candidates were completed and the research data were collected, the researcher transferred the audio recordings taken during the interviews to the semi-structured interview form. After the necessary controls were made, 40 semi-structured interview forms were converted into findings by content analysis. Content analysis focuses on collected data. Codes are extracted from the events and facts that are frequently repeated in the data set or that the participant emphasises heavily. One can go to the categories from codes and to the themes from categories. In short, data (codes) that are found to be similar and related to each other are interpreted by bringing them together within the framework of certain concepts (categories) and themes. In content analysis, the content of participants' views is systematically separated (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In accordance with the content analysis, some sections in the semi-structured interview form were categorised beforehand and directed to the teacher candidates in a closed-ended 3-point Likert format. The findings are given in tables and presented with frequency percentage and mean calculations. While classifying the answers given by the pre-service teachers to the Likert-type questions, the item value ranges were determined and the average was taken. When calculating item intervals, it is assumed that the intervals are equal. The arithmetic mean score intervals were found to be 0.66. The highest value and the lowest value were calculated as (3-1)/3=2/3=0.66 in the score range calculated as 3. In this direction, low (1.00–1.66), medium (1.67–2.32) and high (2.33–3.00) values were accepted. The answers of the pre-service teachers to the open-ended questions prepared in support of the closed-ended questions were presented to the readers by making direct quotations under the tables. For each of the pre-service teachers, coding was done as TC-1, TC-2, TC-3, etc.

3. Results

The answers given by the pre-service teachers to the open-ended and closed-ended questions in the semi-structured interview form are categorised in this section.

Table 2 shows the evaluations of the teacher candidates participating in the research on their spiritual well-being.

Table 2. Evaluations of teacher candidates regarding their spiritual well-being

Spiritual well-being of teacher candidates	Low		Middle		High		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Belief in a divine power	7	17,5	25	62,5	8	20	2,02
Enjoying life	11	27,5	19	47,5	10	25	1,97
Seeing yourself as part of nature	23	27,5	9	22,5	8	20	1,62
Determining the purpose of life	10	25	17	42,5	13	32,5	2,07
Ability to deal with adversity	9	22,5	28	70	3	7,5	1,85
Adopting the principle of living life happily	4	10	31	77,5	5	12,5	2,02
Self-knowledge and development	6	15	11	27,5	23	57,5	2,42
Overall Average							1,99

In Table 2, the spiritual well-being of the teacher candidates participating in the research is evaluated in seven categories. Teacher candidates' level of seeing themselves as a part of nature is low. It was found that the pre-service teachers' levels of believing in a divine power, enjoying life, determining the purpose of life, struggling with negativities and adopting a happy life as a principle were found to be average. Teacher candidates' self-recognition and development levels were found to be high. It has been determined that the teacher candidates' spiritual well-being in general is at a moderate level.

The opinions of some pre-service teachers who participated in the research on their spiritual well-being are as follows:

I feel unhappy at times. There are times when I am reluctant and very low on motivation (TC-3). My belief in a divine power is very low. Sometimes I don't know how to explain the negative things that happen to me (TC-9). I don't think I can find the meaning of life. I don't know what I live for (TC-14). I am a positive person who tries to be happy, but sometimes I can be lazy about improving myself and doing something (TC-17). The area where my spiritual well-being is highest is that I have a combative personality (TC-25). I feel good, happy and hopeful for the future (TC-30). Spiritual well-being is high in certain periods of my life and low in certain periods. I've been feeling discouraged lately (TC-33). Actually, I know the value of life, but when something bad happens to me, I collapse quickly (TC-39).

Table 3 shows the opinions of the pre-service teachers who participated in the research on their creative potential.

Table 3. Opinions of pre-service teachers about their creative potential

Creative potential of teacher candidates	Low		Middle		High		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	

Use your imagination	3	7,5	29	72,5	8	20	2,12
Developing talents and skills	5	12,5	19	47,5	16	40	2,27
Being open to innovations	8	20	22	61,6	10	25	2,05
Multidimensional thinking	28	70	11	27,5	1	2,5	1,32
Ability to develop new ideas	26	65	12	30	2	5	1,40
Ability to express oneself boldly	4	10	9	22,5	27	67,5	2,57
Overall Average							1,95

In Table 3, the opinions of the pre-service teachers participating in the research on their creative potential are evaluated in six categories. Pre-service teachers found themselves at a low level in the areas of multidimensional thinking and developing new ideas. Pre-service teachers found themselves at a moderate level in the categories of using their imagination, developing talents and skills and being open to innovations. Pre-service teachers evaluated themselves at a high level in the category of being able to express themselves boldly. It has been determined that the creative potentials of the teacher candidates are generally at a medium level.

The views of some of the pre-service teachers participating in the research on their creative potential are as follows:

Although I don't dream much, I can clearly say what I think (TC-5). I don't spend much time developing myself and my skills (TC-8). I do not describe myself as a creative person (TC-11). I am enthusiastic about coming up with new ideas. I like to evaluate events from different perspectives (23). I strive to develop my creative potential. A teacher's creativity is also very important for his students in terms of both their academic success and personal development (TC-29). I find my creative potential at medium level. I'm open to new ideas, but I can be a little lazy about implementation (TC-31). Due to our profession, we must always try to increase our creative potential. Like adopting lifelong learning as a principle. However, I do not find myself very successful in this regard (TC-34).

In Table 4, there are suggestions for the development of the spiritual and creative potentials of the teacher candidates participating in the research.

Table 4. Suggestions of teacher candidates regarding the development of their spiritual and creative potentials

Category	F	%
Giving lectures on spiritual well-being at universities	36	90
Giving courses to develop creativity in universities	35	87,5
Making practices to improve spiritual well-being in the school-university environment	32	80
Making practices to develop creativity in the school-university environment	30	75
Benefiting from experienced teachers to improve spiritual well-being in the practices to be carried out in the school-university environment	25	62,5
Benefiting from experienced teachers to develop creativity in the applications to be made in the school-university environment	21	52,5

Giving importance to personal development	14	35
Attending personal development seminars	9	22,5

In Table 4, the suggestions of the teacher candidates participating in the research on the development of their spiritual and creative potentials were evaluated in eight categories. 90% of the teacher candidates stated that they should give lectures on spiritual well-being in universities. 87.5% of teacher candidates stated that they should give courses to develop creativity in universities. While 80% of the pre-service teachers stated that practices should be carried out to improve spiritual well-being in the school-university environment, 75% of them stated that practices should be carried out to develop creativity in the school-university environment. 62.5% of teacher candidates stated that experienced teachers should be used to improve moral well-being in the practices to be carried out in the school-university environment. 52.5% of the teacher candidates stated that experienced teachers should be used to develop creativity in the applications to be made in the school-university environment. 35% of the pre-service teachers gave importance to personal development and 22.5% of the pre-service teachers offered to participate in personal development seminars as suggestions for the development of their spiritual and creative potential.

The suggestions of some pre-service teachers participating in the research regarding the development of their spiritual and creative potential are as follows:

In the school-university system, there should be practices to develop spiritual well-being and creative potential. I think it would be very useful (TC-11). Lessons should be given to improve the spiritual well-being of teacher training programmes (TC-16). Both spiritual well-being and creativity should be developed for teacher candidates in universities. Curriculum should be arranged accordingly (TC-20). Experienced teachers can be used in the school-university system. Their guiding attitudes will also enable pre-service teachers to develop (TC-24). Our spiritual and creative potentials should be developed both in universities and in the school-university environment. In addition, pre-service teachers should strive to give importance to personal development (TC-30). I think that courses should be given in universities, and teacher candidates should attend personal development seminars. Applications for this can also be made in the school-university environment (TC-40).

4. Discussion

The spiritual well-being of the teacher candidates participating in the research was evaluated in the categories of believing in a divine power, enjoying life, seeing oneself as a part of nature, determining the purpose of life, struggling with negativities, adopting a happy life as a principle and self-knowledge and development. In this direction, it has been determined that the spiritual well-being of the teacher candidates participating in the research is at a moderate level. The creative potential of the pre-service teachers involved in the research was evaluated in the categories of using their imagination, developing talents and skills, being open to innovations, being able to think multi-dimensionally, developing new ideas and expressing themselves boldly. In this direction, it has been determined that the creative potential of the teacher candidates participating in the research is at a medium level. When the studies conducted in the field are examined, it has been determined that although there are no studies that discuss the spiritual well-being and creative potential of teacher candidates together, they are handled separately or in association with different concepts. Capri et al. (2012) investigated the relationships between university students' self-efficacy beliefs, life satisfaction and burnout levels. As a result of the research, it was stated that there are statistically significant relationships between general self-efficacy beliefs, life satisfaction and burnout. Celik (2016) discussed the relationship between university students' meaning in life and life goals in his study. As a result of the research, it has been revealed that there is a positive correlation between the students' meaning in life variable and life goals, which is accepted as an indicator of psychological

health. Kamy (2000) revealed that there is a significant relationship between the two variables in his research between university students' psychological resilience and their level of spiritual well-being. Erol (2020) examined the spiritual orientation levels of counsellors. As a result of the research, it was determined that the spiritual orientation of the guidance teachers is above the average. Broinowski's (2002) study revealed that there is a positive relationship between the intuition and imagination of preschool teachers and a preschool education programme based on creative thinking. Aslan and Cansever (2009) stated in their research that teacher training programmes do not have a rich enough content to develop students' creativity, and that the creativity levels of teacher candidates are below what is expected.

The majority of teacher candidates participating in the research on the development of their spiritual and creative potential stated that it is necessary to give lectures to develop their spiritual and creative potentials at universities, and to implement practices to develop their spiritual and creative potentials in the school-university environment. Pre-service teachers emphasised the importance of benefiting from experienced teachers in order to develop their spiritual well-being and creative potential in the practices to be carried out in the school-university environment. In addition, teacher candidates gave importance to personal development and participating in personal development seminars as suggestions for the development of their spiritual and creative potential. When the researches in the field are examined, there are studies that make suggestions for the development of spiritual and creative potential. It is among the suggestions that teacher candidates benefit from national and international student exchange programmes, participate in social responsibility projects, develop themselves in creative thinking and develop students with the richness of the course content of universities (Fisher, 2005; Meador, 2003; Barnes & Shirley, 2007).

5. Conclusion

Teachers play an active role in the process of integrating individuals into society. Accordingly, teachers are expected to have characteristics that are prone to educating students in many ways. Spiritual well-being and creativity are at the forefront of these characteristics. Developing the creative potentials of teacher candidates in the school-university system is important for them to provide multifaceted benefits to students in the future. Therefore, in this research, in order to develop the spiritual and creative potential of future teachers in the school-university system, the opinions of pre-service teachers were taken. As a result of the research, it has been determined that the spiritual well-being and creative potential of the teacher candidates are at a moderate level. In addition, pre-service teachers suggested that courses should be given in universities in order to develop their spiritual and creative potentials. Some of the teachers offered suggestions to make practices to develop their spiritual and creative potential in the school-university environment and to benefit from experienced teachers in this system. In addition, teacher candidates stated giving importance to personal development and participating in personal development seminars as suggestions for the development of their spiritual and creative potentials.

6. Recommendations

When the results of the research are evaluated, the following suggestions have been developed in order to develop the spiritual and creative potential of future teachers in the school-university system:

1. In universities, lectures and seminars should be organised for teacher candidates to develop their spiritual and creative potential.

2. In the school-university system, applications should be made to improve the spiritual well-being and creative potential of teacher candidates and the support of experienced teachers should be sought.

3. Teacher candidates are also expected to make personal efforts to develop their spiritual and creative potential.

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Annex-1 Teacher Candidates' Semi-Structured Interview Form

Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

Department of Education:			
Class of Study:			
Gender:	Female ( )	Male ( )	

Questions Regarding the Development of Spiritual and Creative Potential

1. What are your views on your spiritual well-being?

…….

Evaluate the following situations regarding your spiritual well-being.	Low	Middle	High
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Belief in a divine power			
Enjoying life			
Seeing yourself as part of nature			
Determining the purpose of life			
Ability to deal with adversity			
Adopting the principle of living life happily			
Self-knowledge and development			

2. What are your views on your creative potential?

……

Evaluate the following situations regarding your creative potential.	Low	Middle	High
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Use your imagination			
Developing talents and skills			
Being open to innovations			
Multidimensional thinking			
Ability to develop new ideas			
Ability to express oneself boldly			

3. What are your suggestions for the development of your spiritual and creative potential?

……
……