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BASE FOR ELECTRONIC EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

ISSN: 2718-0107

Base for Electronic Educational Sciences, 5(2), 1-17; 2024

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Psychological Counselor Candidates' Leadership Self-Efficacy: Personality Traits, Cognitive Flexibility, and Emotional Intelligence

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APA Citation:

Duru, H. & Günçavdı-Alabay, G. (2024). Psychological counselor candidates' leadership self-efficacy: personality traits, cognitive flexibility, and emotional intelligence. *Base for Electronic Educational Sciences*, 5(2), 1-17.

Submission Date: 07/04/2024

Acceptance Date: 16/07/2024

Abstract

The existing studies show that there are relationships among personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. The leadership self-efficacy, which is considered as a dimension of overall self-efficacy, is yet to be studied with these dimensions. Also, there are not any studies that analyze the relationship among these four variables. To fill in this gap in the literature, the aim of this study is to understand the relationship among the personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence and leadership self-efficacy of the psychological counselor candidates. The participants are 359 students who study psychological counseling and guidance at a state university in Turkey. The results of path analysis show that there are significant direct and mediator relations among the variables personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence and leadership self-efficacy.

Keywords: Psychological counselor candidates, leadership self-efficacy, personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence



Introduction

Considering the characteristics and requirements of the period, the 21st century emerges as a period that requires individuals to have new skills to survive. These skills bring with them new qualities that differ in various professions. It is possible to say that individuals who choose psychological counseling as a profession in which human relations are important must have various qualities. These features include five-factor personality traits (Bakker et al., 2006; Çivitçi & Arıcıoğlu, 2012; Sarı & Çakır, 2020; Ye et al., 2019), cognitive flexibility (Aydın & Odacı, 2020; Buyruk-Genç, 2019; Malkoç & Aydın-Sünbül, 2020), emotional intelligence (Gutierrez & Mullen, 2016; Martin et al., 2004; Odacı et al., 2017; Young Kaelber & Schwartz, 2014) and leadership self-efficacy (Mason & McMahon, 2009; Miller, 2017; Mullen et al., 2019; Yıldız, 2021). The fact that these concepts are important for psychological counselors to carry out a successful and effective counseling process has made it important to understand whether there is a relationship between them. Therefore, within the scope of this research, we will try to understand the relationship between the perceptions of the psychological counselor candidates regarding the four variables, by considering their mediating roles. Before discussing the existence of relations between the mentioned concepts, we will briefly explain the concepts mentioned in the research.

The beginning of the theories regarding the five-factor personality traits is based on the psycholexical study by Allport and Odbert (1936). Allport and Odbert (1936) examined the words related to personality in the English dictionary in their study and reached four basic categories of personality in their analysis. These categories are personality traits, temporary states and moods, evaluative judgments of personal conduct, and physical characteristics and capacities with talents. Research on personality traits revealed by Allport and Odbert (1936) was shaped by Goldberg (1981), and Big-Five personality traits emerged. The five personality traits included in the mentioned model are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Extraversion is defined as a personality trait that expresses people who show sociability, determination, and talkativeness, love to work with people, and have an energetic approach toward the social world (Gerber et al., 2011; Komarraju et al., 2011; Zhang, 2002). While agreeableness expresses being helpful, cooperative, and sympathetic towards others (Komarraju et al., 2011), conscientiousness is a personality trait that emphasizes an individual's duty-conscious, orderly and reliable (Schmitt et al., 2007). Neuroticism is a feature that has a negative effect on these personality traits and causes individuals to be nervous and depressed (Sümer et al., 2005). Big-five personality traits final feature is openness. Openness refers to being open to innovation and diversity, and loving to try new things (Komarraju et al., 2011). The Big Five personality traits have always been of interest to psychologists interested in personality. Psychological counselors should also consider these features. In addition, the relationship of the Big Five personality traits model with other variables is among the interesting areas of study for psychologists. Cognitive flexibility is one of the mentioned variables and the first of the variables that we consider in this study.

Cognitive flexibility is an important feature in terms of adapting to the situations and environments that the individual is in and continues to change. There are also studies showing that cognitive flexibility can affect

the professional success and job satisfaction of counselors and counselor candidates (Aydin & Odaci, 2020; Hsi & Boman, 2022). The reason for this is that psychological counselors need cognitive flexibility to effectively manage and evaluate the different situations they encounter, and by doing this they can develop their professional identities. The concept of cognitive flexibility, which is important for psychological counselors, was discussed by Gabrys et al. (2018) in two dimensions as cognitive control over emotion and appraisal and coping flexibility. While the cognitive control over emotion dimension expresses that individuals use their attention to solve the stressful situation when they encounter negative cognitive and emotional problems, the appraisal and coping flexibility dimension focuses on the individual's ability to choose the right strategy to cope with a stressful situation and to make a detailed assessment of the current situation to achieve this.

When cognitive flexibility is examined, it is seen that emotions are an important factor in providing cognitive flexibility. This situation reveals the importance of the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is defined by Mayer et al. (1997) as the ability to perceive and show emotions, assimilate emotions in thought, understand emotion, and evaluate emotion in oneself and others. The concept of emotional intelligence emerged as a result of the desire to fill the deficiency in IQ's ability to fully and comprehensively evaluate people's achievements. Mayer et al. (1997) stated that the necessity of evaluating mental abilities and personality traits together led to the emergence of the concept of emotional intelligence. Mayer et al. (1997) stated that emotional intelligence is sometimes confused with personality traits, but these two concepts should be defined separately, even though they affect each other. There are different classifications of emotional intelligence within the inclusive version of IQ. Goleman (1995) mentioned knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships as dimensions of emotional intelligence. Bar-On (1997) emphasized that intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability scales, stress-management scales, and a person's general mood dimensions of emotional intelligence are important for understanding this concept. The model we base on in this study is the emotional intelligence model developed by Pekaar et al. (2017). This model consists of four dimensions. The factors included in this model are self-focused emotion appraisal, other-focused emotion appraisal, self-focused emotion regulation, and other-focused emotion regulation. The self-focused emotion appraisal dimension is related to an individual's ability to recognize their own emotions, distinguish their emotions from each other, and explain the reasons for the emotions they feel. The second dimension, the other-focused emotion appraisal dimension, covers the individual's ability to understand, explain and distinguish the emotions of others. While the self-focused emotion regulation dimension is defined by Pekaar et al. (2017) as the ability to control one's emotions and display their emotions appropriately according to place and time, the other-focused emotion appraisal dimension is explained as the ability of an individual to control and influence the emotions of others with whom s/he is in communication. Emotional intelligence, which is obviously important in terms of human relations when its dimensions are examined, is among the competencies that psychological counselors should have (Cejudo, 2016). Studies in the literature reveal that emotional intelligence affects the

psychological well-being, work stress, and self-efficacy of counselors (Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008; Lee & Song, 2010).

The concept of self-efficacy is defined as the competencies to be possessed in different professional fields in the literature. It is possible to come across concepts such as teacher self-efficacy and self-efficacy regarding the use of technology in the literature (Cansoy & Polatcan, 2018). Leadership self-efficacy, which is counted among the self-efficacy of individuals, has been defined as a concept that affects the success of the individual in leadership (McCormick, 2001), distinguishes the individual from individuals who do not show leadership characteristics, and positively affects the performance of the leader (McCormick et al., 2002). While defining the concept of leadership self-efficacy, Bobbio and Manganelli (2009) define the characteristics of a leader as initiating and managing change processes, choosing effective followers and assigning responsibility, establishing and managing effective interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, and self-confidence, motivating those in the group s/he leads, and to ensure consensus among his/her followers. It is possible to say that these features are also important for psychological counselors, whose field of study is human. There are studies on this subject in the literature. Finding studies examining school counselors' self-efficacy (Barnes, 2004; Tang, 2020) and leadership skills (Anita & Julia, 2015) reveals that leadership self-efficacy should be among the characteristics that counselor candidates should have.

As we have explained in detail above, studies in the literature have revealed that there are relationships between cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence, and leadership self-efficacy, which can be counted among the competencies that psychological counselor candidates should have, and five-factor personality traits. We will explain these relationships under the heading below.

The Relationship among Big Five Personality Traits, Cognitive Flexibility, Emotional Intelligence, and Leadership Self-efficacy

The five-factor personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence, and leadership self-efficacy that we have mentioned among the skills that will facilitate the existence of individuals in social and professional life, seem to affect each other directly or through a mediator role in studies in the literature. When we examine the studies, the five-factor personality traits affect cognitive flexibility (Çekici, 2019; Odacı & Cikrikci, 2019; Smith & Konik, 2022; Van Bost et al., 2022), emotional intelligence (Andi, 2012; Athota et al., 2009; Dehghanan & Rezaei, 2014; Grehan et al., 2011) and leadership self-efficacy (Huszczko & Endres, 2014). In addition, studies have shown that emotional intelligence affects cognitive flexibility (Yazdi et al., 2018) and leadership self-efficacy (Halliwell et al., 2022) to a certain extent.

Some studies have addressed the relationships between mentioned variables in terms of their mediating role (Çekici, 2019; Odacı & Cikrikci, 2019; Szcześniak et al., 2020). For example, Çekici (2019) searched the mediating effect of cognitive flexibility on the big five personality traits and attitudes of mental health counselor candidates towards seeking professional psychological help and found out that cognitive flexibility has a mediator role between these two variables. Odacı and Cikrikci (2019) also studied the mediator effect of cognitive flexibility between the big five

personality traits and life satisfaction. The results of their study showed that cognitive flexibility is a significant mediator between these two variables. When it comes to the mediating role of leadership self-efficacy, Halliwell et al. (2022) found out that there is little support for the mediating role of leadership self-efficacy between emotional intelligence and task-oriented leadership behavior. Even though the mediating effect is little, there is a mediating role of leadership self-efficacy. Thus, together with these results, it is possible to say that the four variables discussed above have direct or indirect correlations among them.

As revealed by these studies, the four factors, personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence and leadership self-efficacy that psychological counselors should have (Barbee et al., 2003; Kozina et al., 2010; Leach et al., 1997), are considered among the 21st-century skills and it is important to understand the relationships among these variables within the scope of psychological counseling. To understand the relationships mentioned in this study in terms of psychological counselor candidates, the following hypotheses were determined.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The personality traits explain psychological counselor candidates' leadership self-efficacy significantly.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional intelligence has a mediator effect on the relationship between the personality traits of psychological counselor candidates and their leadership self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3: Cognitive flexibility has a mediator effect on the relationship between the personality traits of psychological counselor candidates and their leadership self-efficacy.

Method

Participants

We collected the data from undergraduate students who are studying psychological counseling and guidance at a state university in Turkey. A total of 359 undergraduate students participated in the study, 87 of them were male and 272 were female. Average age of students were 21.89 years old, with a percentage of 28,7%. 38,5% of students were freshmen, 23% of students were sophomores, 22,1% of students were juniors and 16,4% were senior students.

Procedure

We prepared the four questionnaires online by using Google Form, and we sent links to the students during class time. After we collected data, we examined the data for missing values, outliers, normality, multicollinearity; and we used descriptive statistics, correlations, and path analysis for data analysis. After the Mahalanobis distance value was calculated in an outlier analysis, 7 data were removed from the data set.

Data Collection Tools

The Big Five Inventory. We used The Big Five Inventory, developed by Benet-Martinez and John (1998) and adapted to Turkish by Sümer et al. (2005) to measure psychological counselors' big five personality traits. This inventory includes 44 items, and it is a 5-Likert-type questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha values are 0.735 for extraversion, 0.831 for

agreeableness, 0.631 for conscientiousness, 0.730 for neuroticism, and 0.773 for openness. Since this scale tries to identify which personality trait is dominant in a person, the overall score cannot be calculated.

Cognitive Control and Flexibility Scale. We used the Cognitive Control and Flexibility Scale developed by Gabrys et al. (2018) and adapted to Turkish by Demirtaş (2019) to measure the cognitive flexibility level of psychological counselors. The scale is a 7-Likert-type and has 18 items total. The scale has two sub-dimensions, which are *cognitive control over emotion* and *appraisal and coping flexibility*. The overall Cronbach Alpha value of the scale 0.909. The Cronbach Alpha value of the sub-dimension *cognitive control over emotion* is 0.888, and of the sub-dimension *appraisal and coping flexibility* is 0.926.

Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale. We used Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Pekaar et al. (2017) and adapted to Turkish by Tanrıöğen and Türker (2019) to measure the level of psychological counselors' emotional intelligence. The scale has 28 items and it is 5-Likert type. The scale consists of four sub-dimensions which are *self-focused emotion appraisal*, *other-focused emotion appraisal*, *self-focused emotion regulation*, and *other-focused emotion regulation*. The overall Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale is 0.933. The Cronbach's Alpha value for sub-dimension *self-focused emotion appraisal* is 0.913, for *other-focused emotion appraisal* is 0.914, for *self-focused emotion regulation* is 0.835, and for *other-focused emotion regulation* is 0.920.

Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale. We used Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Bobbio and Manganelli (2009) and adapted to Turkish by Cansoy and Polatcan (2018). The scale has 19 items and it is 7-Likert type. In the original form, the scale has 6 subdimension. However, in the Turkish form, the scale has one dimension. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale is 0.969.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, we used SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 28.0. Firstly, we analyzed descriptive statistics. Then, we examined correlational coefficients among variables. Thirdly, we conducted path analysis to test our hypotheses which include analyzing the direct and indirect relationships between personality traits, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence, and leadership self-efficacy. We used the bootstrapping mediation technique with 5000 resamples and bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals to understand the significance of the mediating roles (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results

Pearson Product Moments Correlation was used to determine the relationships between personality traits, emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, and leadership self-efficacy. The results of correlation analysis and descriptive statistics are given in Table 1.

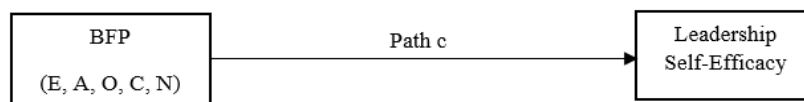
Table 1. Correlation Values Between Variables and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Extroversion	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Agreeableness	.21**	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Openness	.35**	.26**	1	-	-	-	-	-
4. Conscientiousness	.18**	.30**	.26**	1	-	-	-	-
5. Neuroticism	-.31**	-.40**	-.23**	-.31**	1	-	-	-
6. Cognitive Flexibility	.30**	.33**	.41**	.40**	-.65**	1	-	-
7. Emotional Intelligence	.38**	.27**	.47**	.32**	-.30**	.51**	1	-
8. Leadership Self-Efficacy	.43**	.30**	.47**	.51**	-.26**	.49**	.66**	1
X	28.23	32.01	37.22	33.19	23.26	85.50	105.89	106.77
Ss	6.37	4.39	6.23	5.95	5.95	17.49	16.42	20.99
Skewness	-.46	-.27	-.47	-.47	-.06	-.06	-.23	-1.04
Kurtosis	-.11	-.19	-.19	-.29	-.32	-.02	.01	.80

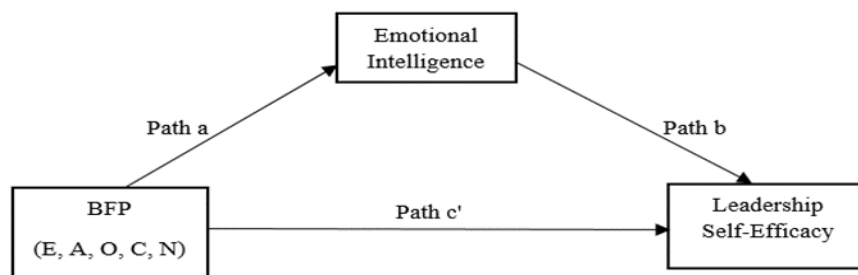
*p<.05, **p<.001

Mediating Analysis Findings

In line with the hypotheses stated in the research, the relations between the variables were examined by path analysis. The effect of personality traits on leadership self-efficacy is given in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Personality Traits Predicting Leadership Self-Efficacy.

As a result of the path analysis, it was determined that Extroversion ($R^2 = .19$), agreeableness ($R^2 = .09$), openness ($R^2 = .22$), conscientiousness ($R^2 = .26$) and Neuroticism ($R^2 = .07$) significantly predicted leadership self-efficacy ($p < .001$), (Figure 1 and Table 2). Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. The emotional intelligence variable was added to the model to test the second hypothesis (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

When the emotional intelligence variable was added to the model, it was found that extraversion ($c'=.21$, $p<.001$: $a=.38$, $b=.59$, $p<.001$), agreeableness ($c'=.13$, $p<.05$: $a=-.27$, $b=.63$, $p<.001$), openness ($c'=.20$, $p<.001$: $a=.47$, $b=.57$, $p<.001$), and conscientiousness ($c'=.33$, $p<.001$: $a=.32$, $b=.56$, $p<.001$) on leadership self-efficacy decreased. In addition, the effect of neuroticism on leadership self-efficacy was not significant ($c'=-.07$, $p>.05$: $a=-.30$, $b=.65$, $p<.001$). Emotional intelligence partially mediates extroversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness, and leadership self-efficacy. Bootstrap analysis revealed that extraversion [(CI) =.16, .28], agreeableness [(CI) =.11, .23], openness [(CI) =.21, .33], conscientiousness [(CI) =.12, .23] and neuroticism [(CI) =-.26, -.13] showed an indirect effect on leadership self-efficacy (95% confidence interval). As a result of the mediation analysis, extroversion and emotional intelligence 48%, agreeableness, and emotional intelligence 46%, openness and emotional intelligence 48%, and conscientiousness and emotional intelligence 55% explain the variance in leadership self-efficacy ($p<.001$). Hypothesis 2 has been confirmed. (Figure 2 and Table 2).

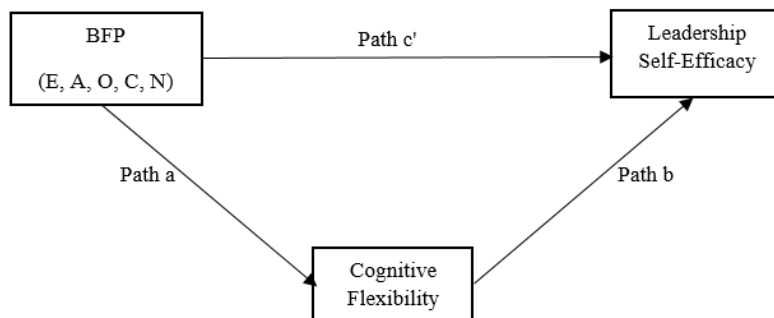


Figure 3. *The Mediating Role of Cognitive Flexibility*

When the cognitive flexibility variable is added to the model, it is seen that extraversion ($c'=.32$, $p<.001$: $a=.30$, $b=.40$, $p<.05$), agreeableness ($c'=.15$, $p<.05$: $a=.33$, $b=.44$, $p<.001$), openness ($c'=.32$, $p<.001$: $a=.42$, $b=.36$, $p<.001$) conscientiousness ($c'=.37$, $p<.001$: $a=.41$, $b=.34$, $p<.001$) on leadership self-efficacy decreased. In addition, the effect of neuroticism on leadership self-efficacy was not significant ($c'=.09$, $p>.05$: $a=-.65$, $b=.55$, $p<.001$). Cognitive flexibility partially mediates extroversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness, and leadership self-efficacy. Bootstrap analysis revealed that extraversion [(CI) =.07, .17], agreeableness [(CI) =.10, .20], openness [(CI) =.10, .20], conscientiousness [(CI) =.09, .19] and neuroticism [(CI) =-.45, -.27] have an indirect effect on leadership self-efficacy (95% confidence interval). As a result of the mediation analysis, extraversion and cognitive flexibility 33%, agreeableness and cognitive flexibility 26%, openness and cognitive flexibility 33%, and conscientiousness and cognitive flexibility 36% explain the total variance in leadership self-efficacy ($p<.001$) (Figure 3 and Table 2). Hypothesis 3 has been confirmed.

	Emotional Intelligence Mediation Results						Cognitive Flexibility Mediation Results					
	95%CI		<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c'</i>	95%CI		<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c'</i>
	LL	UL					LL	UL				
E	.16	.28	.38***	.59***	.44***	.21***	.07	.17	.30***	.40***	.44***	.32***
A	.11	.23	.27***	.63***	.30***	.13**	.10	.20	.33***	.44***	.30***	.15**
O	.21	.33	.47***	.57***	.47***	.20***	.10	.20	.42***	.36***	.47***	.32***
C	.12	.23	.32***	.56***	.51***	.33***	.09	.19	.41***	.34***	.51***	.37***
N	–	–	–	.65***	–	-.07	–	–	–	.55***	–	.09
	.26	.13	.30***		.27***		.45	.27	.65***		.27***	

E: Extraversion, A: Agreeableness, O: Openness, C: Conscientiousness, N: Neuroticism;

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between personality traits, emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, and leadership self-efficacy. We discussed the mediating role of emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility in the relationship between personality traits and leadership self-efficacy. We verified the three hypotheses we created in this direction. In our study, we found that cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence partially mediate the relationship between extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and leadership self-efficacy. In addition, cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence played a full mediator role between neuroticism personality traits and leadership self-efficacy. We discussed our results in light of the literature.

Our first hypothesis was that personality traits significantly explain leadership self-efficacy. When we examined the literature, we determined that few studies examine the relationships between personality traits and leadership self-efficacy. However, we also came across findings that support our research. In their study, Ng et al. (2008) determined a negative significant relationship between leadership self-efficacy and neuroticism, and a positive significant relationship between extroversion and conscientiousness. Similarly, Huszczo and Endres (2017) concluded in their study with undergraduate and graduate students that leadership self-efficacy is positively and significantly correlated with extraversion, conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness personality traits. Leadership self-efficacy can be expressed as individual's perceptions of their competencies in order to fulfill their leadership roles and perform their intended tasks effectively. From this point of view, it is inevitable that leadership self-efficacy is related to many variables that can affect the perceptions of the individual. Leadership requires the ability to adapt to the group and the decisions taken, be social and exhibit assertive behaviors, fulfill tasks without interruption, accept innovations and try new things.

On the other hand, personality is a combination of innate characteristics that are shaped by interacting with the environment in the process and are resistant to change, affecting many factors. Based on the research results, it can be mentioned that individuals with extroversion, openness,

agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality traits have some of the characteristics required for leadership. From this point of view, the four personality traits mentioned may increase the belief in leadership self-efficacy. In addition, neuroticism is characterized by emotional instability and negatively affects the ability of individuals to adapt. For this reason, neuroticism may negatively affect the positive characteristics required by leadership. Psychological counseling especially requires positive personality traits as a professional group. Ye et al. (2019) determined in their study that psychological counselors showed higher levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness than norm groups.

The second hypothesis of our study was that emotional intelligence mediating the relationship between the personality traits of counselor candidates and their leadership self-efficacy. The mediating role was significant in all personality traits. When we examined the literature, we saw that there was no study that dealt with these three variables together. However, some studies supported our study's results, albeit indirectly. Fabio et al. (2013) concluded in their study with university students that extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality traits have positive and significant relationships with emotional intelligence. In addition, Lopes et al. (2003) determined in their study with university students that there are significant relationships between emotional intelligence and personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. In another study conducted with undergraduate students (Augusto Landa et al., 2010), significant relationships were found between the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence and personality traits.

Emotional intelligence is the individual's ability to perceive himself and others; It can be expressed as the ability to understand and control emotions and regulate emotions. The extroversion personality trait of counselor candidates can increase their socialization and sociability. This may enable them to interact more with others to perceive and control themselves and their emotions, others and their emotions in a relationship. Niyogi et al. (2020) concluded in their study with young people that there is a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and assertiveness. Individuals with the personality trait of agreeableness can act together with others, their tolerance level is high and they are tolerant. Counselor candidates with these characteristics may empathize with others more and understand the feelings of others because they approach others more humanely. Feldman (2003) found a positive and significant relationship between the emotional intelligence levels of the participants and their cognitive risk tolerance. Conscientiousness personality trait includes a sense of duty, perseverance, and purposefulness. Counselor candidates with this characteristic may be conscious of what it takes to be in a relationship and interaction. In this way, they can use their emotional intelligence more actively. Openness to experience includes features such as being open to new experiences, changes, new feelings, and thoughts. In this sense, psychological counselor candidates with openness may be inclined to understand their own and others' feelings and thoughts and create positive changes. In their study, Shi et al. (2016) found significant positive relationships between openness, intelligence, and creative thinking. These positive personality traits and emotional intelligence include many factors, such as flexibility required for leadership self-efficacy, acting in a group,

giving importance to the feelings and thoughts of others, and being social. When emotional intelligence is included in the model, the decrease in the predictive value of personality traits may indicate that emotional intelligence is an essential variable between personality traits and leadership self-efficacy. Finally, neuroticism is characterized by emotional instability. In this context, it has a structure opposite to the characteristics of emotional intelligence. Based on the results obtained from this point of view, it can be thought that psychological counselor candidates with neuroticism personality traits are not very competent in communicating with others and understanding their feelings and thoughts.

The third hypothesis of our study was that cognitive flexibility plays a mediating role in the relationship between the personality traits of counselor candidates and their leadership self-efficacy. Mediation role was significant in all personality traits. As in our second hypothesis, when we examined the literature, we saw that no study dealt with these variables together. However, some studies indirectly supported our study. In studies conducted with different sample groups, there was a positive relationship between extroversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness personality traits and cognitive flexibility; It was concluded that there is a negative significant relationship between neuroticism and cognitive flexibility (Çekici, 2019; Odacı & Cıkrıkci, 2019; Smith & Konik, 2022). Although no study deals with cognitive flexibility and leadership self-efficacy together, in some studies, the variable of self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility in different fields have been discussed. For example, in some studies conducted with high school students, it has been found that there are positive and significant relationships between cognitive flexibility and academic, emotional, and social self-efficacy (Çelikkaleli, 2014; Demirtaş, 2020; Esen et al., 2017). In addition, Kim and Omizo (2005) determined a positive and significant relationship between general self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility. Counselor candidates with personality traits of extroversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness may be changing their way of perceiving different perspectives and accordingly, because they are open to communicating with others and opinions. These positive personality traits may enable counselor candidates to be more “flexible” cognitively. Cognitive flexibility can also be considered as self-efficacy for leadership, which requires constant communication and interaction with other people.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study has some limitations. First of all, this study was carried out in a cross-sectional design. Therefore, this study does not allow causal inferences about the results. Future studies can be designed as longitudinal studies and contribute to causal inferences between variables. Secondly, the study was conducted with psychological counselor candidates in Turkey. The generalizability of the results of the study to different cultures is controversial.

For this reason, it is essential to investigate the findings between cultures. Despite all its limitations, the present study provided essential results for the literature. Theoretically, this study with counselor candidates showed that emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility mediated the relationship between personality traits and leadership self-efficacy. This result provides a comprehensive view of the leadership self-efficacy of counselor candidates. This study was carried out to determine the current

status of candidates who received counseling training. Conducting this study with groups who have completed their psychological counseling training may be functional in comparing the two groups regarding the variables discussed. Considering the diversity of institutions where psychological counselors work and the scope of leadership, it is essential to consider the concept of leadership specifically for psychological counselors.

For this reason, it may be helpful to examine different variables that can explain the concept of leadership in psychological counselors in future studies. This study tested a theoretical model dealing with personality traits, emotional intelligence, and cognitive flexibility variables. It is essential to see the functionality of these models in practice and to create and test theoretical models. Experimental studies can support the accuracy of these theoretical models created in subsequent studies.

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