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Table of Contents

TITLE: MIGRATION – A PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATE 4
Amita Valmiki 4

MORE A TIME FOR REFLECTION THAN CELEBRATION: A CENTENARY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE CASE OF UNISA (THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA). 8
Andrew Manson 8

Health Education in Times of Ebola Virus Epidemic in Sierra Leone 9
Anthoni Jeorge 9

Marriage satisfaction dynamics of parents of children with autism: A mixed method study 19
Cem TÜMLÜ, Ramazan AKDOĞAN 19

Women in Society, Education and Empowered in African Context 20
Dolapo Adeniji-Neill 20

Inferiority feelings and loneliness mediate between perception of loneliness and subjective happiness 21
Elif Cimsir, Ramazan Akdoğan 21

AESOP'S "MYTHS" AND HAGIOGRAPHIC TEXTS. PARALLEL READING 22

Introductory note 22
Emmanouil Doundoulakis 22

Exploring method of Performance Evaluation in Online Learning, Center of open secondary schools in Korea- 28
Eun-Chul Lee 28

Afghan Conflict and Education: A Bleak Future for Afghans 29
Imtiyaz Gul Khan 29

Trilingualism in Kazakhstan: how school teachers are prepared for the transition 39
Kairat Kurakbayev, Dina Gungor, Adil Ashirbekov 39

Differences in the Attitude amongst Special Education Teachers towards the Inclusion of the Intellectually Disabled in the Kingdom of Bahrain 40
Maryam I AlSherawi 40

Art as tolerance 46
Nina Bae 46

Anticipating the Individual and Social Perspective of Bilingualism 47
Norehan Hussin 47

Exploring Challenges for Faculty teaching online doctoral cohorts 55
Pamela Lee and Lorrie McGovern 55

Integrated business, social and cultural development: the case of education partnerships in Te Tai Tokerau 68

Inferiority feelings and loneliness mediate between perception of loneliness and subjective happiness

Elif Cimsir, Ramazan Akdoğan

Although loneliness has become one of the most investigated concepts of social sciences due to its extensive negative correlation with happiness, no study had brought inferiority feelings into the equation until a recent study by Akdoğan (2017). Akdoğan's (2017) study shed a new light on loneliness research, by reporting a sizeable correlation coefficient (.57) between loneliness and inferiority feelings. This study aimed to further extend on the aforementioned line of research by involving perception of loneliness along with inferiority feelings in the equation. Within this context, the relationships among the variables of inferiority feelings, subjective happiness, loneliness, and the perception of loneliness were examined in this study. Participants were 169 students from the different faculties of a university in Turkey, during the academic year of 2016–2017. A serial multiple mediation analysis investigating the direct and indirect effects of the perception of loneliness (X) on subjective happiness (Y) through inferiority feelings (M_1) and loneliness (M_1) as serial mediators (i.e., $X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) was conducted. Results show that while the direct effect of perception of loneliness on happiness is not statistically different from zero, $c' = -.051$, $t\ (165) = -.072$, $p = .942$, the indirect effect of perception of loneliness through the 2 mediators, inferiority feelings and loneliness, is significant with a confidence interval below zero (-1.029 to -.173). The results support that inferiority feelings and loneliness act as serial mediators between perception of loneliness and subjective happiness, meaning that relative to those who reported loneliness as not a problem for themselves, those who reported it as a problem showed significantly higher inferiority feelings ($a_1 = 6.339$), which in turn was associated with greater loneliness ($d_{21} = .019$) and this translated into lower happiness ($b_2 = -4.177$). Individuals working in the helping professions should therefore consider the roles of inferiority feelings and the resulting loneliness when working with clients who struggle to achieve greater happiness in their lives.