



ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' SCHOOL ATTITUDES AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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Abstract/Povzetek The study aims to determine elementary and middle school students' school attitudes. A school attitudes measurement tool was used in the study. The participants of the study comprised 410 students. The results of the current study show that willing participation in school activities affects school attitudes. The results also show that with increasing grade level, the rate of willing participation drops. It was also found that there is a significant correlation with participation in extracurricular activities. The school attitudes mean score of students willingly participating in extracurricular activities is significantly higher than that of students participating involuntarily.

Odnos osnovnošolcev in srednješolcev do šole in izvenšolske dejavnosti Namen raziskave je ugotoviti kakšen odnos do šole imajo osnovnošolci in dijaki srednjih šol. V raziskavi je bilo uporabljeno orodje za merjenje odnosa do šole. Udeleženi je bilo 410 učencev in dijakov. Rezultati pričujoče raziskave kažejo, da hoteno sodelovanje v šolskih dejavnostih vpliva na odnos do šole in da stopnja hotenega sodelovanja v višjih razredih upada. Ugotovili smo tudi, da obstaja pozitivna korelacija s sodelovanjem v izvenšolskih dejavnostih. Srednji rezultat v odnosu do šole je pri učencih, ki hoteno sodelujejo v izvenšolskih dejavnostih, pomembno višji kot pri učencih, ki ne želijo sodelovati.

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Introduction

Whether our children are happy at school is one of the important questions for families and relatives from the first days of school. It has been a matter of concern whether the child communicates with friends, whether they are alone at school and in the classroom, and whether they like their teachers. School attitude cannot be considered on its own, isolated from the school environment, social environment and classroom climate. School attitudes are not limited to the learning environment of the class but are also related to the school environment (Şeker, 2013). The concept of school attitudes cannot be considered as merely students' perception of the classroom environment, and the learning and teaching process. Although school attitudes are related to in-school factors such as instruction and the classroom atmosphere, they should be viewed as a combination of factors such as family, peer groups, out-of-school factors and other factors (Şeker, 2013).

School attitudes are considered to be factors that affect academic achievement. Schools are generally regarded as places where only educational activities are carried out, but they are more than this. Both academic and non-academic information is imparted to students (Şeker, 2011). School is important to children's overall life satisfaction. School-related social support also affects students' life satisfaction (Danielsen et al., 2009). When the existing research on school attitudes is examined, it becomes clear that school attitudes are affected by many variables. School attitudes seem to be closely associated with school success (McCoy, 2005; Legum & Hoare, 2004; Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley et al., 2003; McCoach, 2002); Hung & Marjoribanks, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1992). The sense of belonging to school is one of the important variables affecting school attitudes (Şeker, 2013; Anderman 2003; Nichols, 2006; Pintrich & Maehar, 2004). The family's education level also affects the child's school attitudes (Marksteiner & Kruger, 2016). Teacher behaviours can also affect school attitudes (Pell & Jarvis, 2003; Ho, 2004; Greimel & Gever, 2003). The quality of the instruction is another important factor affecting school attitudes (Leithwood, Aitken & Jantzi, 2006). Aside from these factors, many others such as the classroom atmosphere (Urban, 1999); Gerler et al., 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1983), teacher competences (Malm and Löfgren, 2006), peer influence (Allés-Jardel et al., 2002), the family (Flouri et al., 2002); Kaplan et al., 2007) have been found to affect school attitudes. Given that both academic and non-academic situations contribute to school attitudes (Şeker, 2013), these attitudes

have the potential to affect not only students' academic achievement but also the happiness of their families and acquaintances.

Extracurricular activities (ECA) include both academic and non-academic activities such as academic clubs, arts, learning groups, culture clubs, dance and so on. Participation in extracurricular activities is necessarily related to academic success and psychosocial measures. ECA has been positively associated with academic achievement, increased engagement in school, and educational aspirations (Han & Kwon, 2018). Participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) is positively related to cognitive and socioemotional outcomes for children and adolescents. Participation in ECAs during elementary school has small but positive causal effects on academic ability. The effects grow larger for students in later grades (Carbonaro & Maloney, 2019).

Some studies focus on investigating the effects of extracurricular activities or supplementary activities and voluntary participation in these activities on school attitudes and on whether school attitudes vary depending on the level of schooling. Extracurricular supplementary activities foster students' tendency to be involved in school life and school belonging (Martinez, Coker, McMahan, Cohen, & Thapa, 2016) and enhance students' commitment to school (Massoni, 2011). Participation in extracurricular activities creates a bridge between the academic and social dimensions of education, which contributes to students' sense of belonging to school (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). The direct relationship between school belongingness and school attitudes (Şeker, 2011) may indicate an association between participation in extracurricular activities and school attitudes.

Method

The current study employed the descriptive method and causal-comparative model. In the causal-comparative model, the causes or results of the differences between groups can be explored. Any causal-comparative research is conducted to determine the results and causes of the differences between known groups having different experiences. The basic causal-comparative approach aims at the possible causes of a difference recognised between the groups (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). In this regard, the current study aims to determine whether the variables grade level and participation in supplementary (extracurricular) activities lead to any significant

difference in school attitudes, and if they do, then to develop hypotheses about its causes. Since school attitude is viewed as a combination of in-school and out-of-school factors in the current study, the school attitudes measurement tool (Şeker, 2011) was used for this purpose.

The current study investigated the following:

- a. whether extracurricular activities that are supplementary to the curriculum and voluntary participation in these activities lead to a difference in school attitudes;
- b. whether the school attitudes of students from different levels of schooling vary.

Participants

The current study employing the purposive sampling method was conducted on students from two elementary schools and one middle school--a total of 164 elementary school students and a total of 246 middle school 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th graders. Thus, for purposive sampling, the researcher selected particular elements from the population that would be adequately informative about the topic (McMillan, 2008). A total of 410 students volunteered from the public school participating in the study. The primary and elementary schools were selected from the same part of the city.

Information about the study group is given in Table 1:

Table 1: Distribution of participating students across grades

Grade	n	%
4th	164	40.0
5th	61	14.9
6th	80	19.5
7th	59	14.4
8th	46	11.2
Total	410	100

A total of 164 elementary school fourth graders and 246 middle school students constitute the study group for the current research. Of the participating students, 199 are females (48.5%) and 207 are males (50.5%).

Data Collection Tools

The school attitudes measurement tool developed by Şeker (2011) was used in the current study. The scale consists of the factors of instruction, school imageloneliness, feedback-assessment, willingness and belongingness and 22 items. Some items aiming to elicit data about whether they are engaged in extracurricular activities, whether they willingly participate in school activities and what it would require for them to enjoy their school more were added to the end of the scale. The alpha reliability of the scale was calculated to be 0.89 in the current study.

Data analysis

Descriptive analyses were carried out on total attitude scores of the students from different schools and grade levels. In addition to these, the between-grade and between-school differences in the students' attitude scores were analysed with the independent-samples t-test, and what the school attitudes are in different grades was analysed by using variance analysis. In the difference analyses, the t-test and one-way variance analysis were employed. In the analysis of the students' responses to the open-ended question "What would it take for you to enjoy your school more?", the responses of both the elementary school and middle school students were analysed by grouping them. In this analysis, the students' responses to this question were read, codes were assigned to bits of information, and these codes were reduced to themes and then analysed.

Findings

It has been established that many factors such as the sense of belongingness to the school, the family's level of education, teacher behaviours, quality of instruction, class atmosphere and peer interaction affect school attitudes. In addition to these factors affecting school attitudes, the current study also looked at the relationship between grade level and school attitudes and the effects of extracurricular activities and willing participation in these activities on school attitudes. The situation of differentiation of school attitudes among classes is described in Table 2

Table 2: The results of one-way variance analysis conducted to reveal the state of differentiation of school attitudes across grades

	Mean Squares	Sd	Mean Squares Value	F Value	P
Within-groups	31897.738	4	7974.435	43.096	.000
Between-groups	74940.008	405	185.037		
Total	106837.747	409			

As can be seen in Table 2, school attitudes vary significantly across the grades ($F(4,405) = 43.096, p = .000$). This difference was analysed according to the Scheffé post hoc criterion, one of the Post hoc analyses. The results of the Scheffé test revealed that the 4th grade students' school attitude mean score differs significantly from those of the other groups ($p < 0.000$). In addition to this, the 6th grade students' attitude mean score differs significantly from that of the 8th graders ($p < 0.038$). The 4th grade students' attitude mean score was found to be 93.96. This mean score was calculated to be 77.99 for the 5th graders, 78.21 for the 6th graders, 78.14 for the 7th graders and 70.15 for the 8th graders. The descriptive information about the students' school attitudes across the grades is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: School attitude across grades

Grade	n	\bar{x}	S	Lowest	Highest
4.00	164	93.9554	10.44987	62.00	110.00
5.00	61	77.9984	15.95238	44.00	107.00
6.00	80	78.2105	17.04512	36.00	107.00
7.00	59	78.1372	13.78507	45.00	109.00
8.00	46	70.1567	13.24785	34.00	100.00
Total	410	83.5628	16,16221	34.00	110.00

These findings show that the 4th graders have the highest score for school attitudes, and the 8th graders have the lowest score for school attitudes. This means that with increasing grade level, school attitudes decrease.

Though it is not one of the research questions, a t-test was used to see whether the participants' school attitudes vary depending on gender, to inform the reader. The results of this analysis revealed that the female students' school attitude mean score

is ($M=84.78$, $SD=15.81$) and the male students' school attitude mean score is ($M=82.57$, $SD=16.53$). These findings show that school attitudes do not vary significantly by gender ($t(404) = 1.378$, $P= .169$).

Whether the students' school attitudes vary significantly depending on their willing participation in school activities was also analysed with a t-test. According to the results of this analysis, while the school attitude mean score of the students willingly participating in school activities was calculated to be ($M=85.83$, $SD=15.15$), that of the students not willingly participating in school activities was calculated to be ($M=73.86$, $SD=17.26$). These findings show that the school attitude mean score of students willingly participating in school activities is significantly higher than that of students not willingly participating in them ($t(399) = 6.06$, $P= .000$).

These findings show that willing participation in school activities does affect school attitudes. In the current study, it was also investigated whether willing participation varies across the grade levels. In this regard, it was determined that 91.9% of 4th graders, 83.1% of 5th graders, 75.0% of 6th graders and 56.8% of 8th graders willingly participate in activities. This shows that with increasing grade level, the rate of willing participation in activities drops.

Another t-test was run to determine whether there was a correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and school attitudes. As a result of this analysis, the school attitude mean score of students participating in extracurricular activities was calculated to be ($M=85.95$, $SD=15.71$), while that of the students not participating was calculated to be ($M=75.12$, $SD=14.58$). These findings show that the school attitude mean score of students participating in extracurricular activities is significantly higher than that of students who do not participate in such activities ($t(395) = 5.634$, $P= .000$).

In the current study, it was also investigated which grades have greater participation in extracurricular activities. In this regard, it was investigated whether participation in extracurricular activities varied by grade level. In this connection, it was found that 91.8% of 4th graders, 75.9% of 5th graders, 78.5% of 6th graders, 66.7% of 7th graders and 56.8% of 8th graders willingly participated in extracurricular activities. These findings show that the highest rate of participation in extracurricular activities belongs to the 4th graders, while the lowest rate of participation belongs to the 8th

graders. Thus, it can be argued that with increasing grade level, the rate of willing participation in extracurricular activities drops, particularly in middle school.

The participating students were asked the question “What would it take for you to enjoy your school more?” The students’ responses to this question were classified into groups: play, playground maintenance, demands for improvement of the physical conditions of the class and school, academic demands for the instructional setting, demands related to security concerns, demands for respect and understanding in communication and other individual demands. These groups of demands were analysed by grade level. Moreover, the students’ responses given to the open-ended question were coded in Excel and thus quantified and tabulated.

Although the majority of 4th grade students are seen to be at peace and content with their schools (Table 4), the responses of the 4th grade students to this open-ended question were found to be mostly related to play, playground maintenance, mutual respect and understanding and improvement of the physical conditions of the class and school. When the 4th grade students’ demands were investigated, they proved to be mostly related to play and playground improvement. Some students’ opinions about this theme are as follows:

I want to have a football pitch in our school; I want it to be a grass pitch.

(Student No. 29)

I want volleyball courts to be built.

(Student No. 117)

If only there were more playgrounds.

(Student No. 31)

There are also some demands for better organisation of the existing facilities. For example,

I want the pitch to be open.

(Student No. 24)

I want the nets to be mended.

(Student No. 67)

The 4th grade students stated that if children were more respectful to each other, they would like their schools more. This theme comes second in the order of importance. Some student opinions about this theme are given below.

.... I would like my friends to be good.

(Student No. 110)

...I would like to not hear any swearing.

(Student No. 109)

...We should not be oppressed.

(Student No. 63)

...I would like my friends to be more sincere.

(Student No. 42)

One student offered a suggestion on this theme:

...extra lessons should be given to misbehaving students.

(Student No. 30)

Not only how children treat each other but also how the canteen manager treats them is important for them to enjoy their school more:

...I would like a better canteen manager.

(Student No. 139)

I would like a more beautiful canteen manager.

(Student No. 143)

Improvement of the physical conditions of the classroom and school is one of the themes coming to the fore for the 4th graders to enjoy their school more. Some student opinions about this theme are given below:

...The classroom should be painted.

(Student No. 43)

...I would like more tables for students to sit at in the canteen.

(Student No. 88)

...Our school could be more decorated and full of flowers.

(Student No. 76)

...I want more playgrounds.

(Student No.72)

Aside from the three prominent themes mentioned above, the 4th grade students cite other themes such as instruction, and concern for security as important if they are to get more enjoyment out of school. In addition to these, the students' special personal demands were collected under the title of "other". Under the heading of "other", one student wanted "free ice-cream"; one student wanted "the food in the canteen to be sold free", and one student wanted "not to leave his/her teacher". These student demands for improving their enjoyment of school are summarised

Table 4. As can be seen in Table 4, students' responses to the open-ended question vary depending on their grade level. In this respect, while the 5th grade students see improvements to classroom and school conditions as more important than the others for them to get more enjoyment from school, the 6th grade students cite playground maintenance, the 7th graders cite improvement in the quality of instruction, and the 8th graders cite play, playground maintenance and improvement of instruction as more important. As can be seen in Table 4, the demands of the 7th and particularly those of the 8th graders are relatively fewer. Among the demands of the 6th graders, the number of specific personal demands is also higher. Some middle school students' statements in this regard are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Some demands from students for them to enjoy their school more

Demands	4th Grade (n)	5th Grade (n)	6th Grade (n)	7th Grade (n)	8th Grade (n)
Play – Playground Maintenance	47	5	19	5	4
Respect-understanding	19	4	9	4	2
Physical conditions of the class and school	10	11	3	3	1
Quality of instruction	9	3	10	8	4
Security concerns	4	-	-	-	-
Breaks, class hours	-	8	13	2	1
Technology support	-	2	-	2	1
Cleanness- Hygiene	-	2	-	-	1
Nothing, as everything is fine	46	-	-	-	-
Other	6	5	27	5	2

The 5th grade students' responses to the question are mostly related to the physical conditions of the classroom and school:

...I would like each student to sit at one desk.

5th grade student No. 12

... I would like the desks and benches in the garden to be changed.

5th grade student No. 16

They also voice some demands for changing the time of breaks and class hours. These demands are related to the starting time of lessons and longer break times.

...I would like class hours to be shorter.

5th grade student No. 2

... I would like courses to end earlier.

5th grade student No. 17

...I want breaks to be 20 minutes and lunch break to be 1 hour and 40 minutes.

5th grade student No.1

The 6th grade students expressed demands for more play, playground maintenance, rearrangement of break times and more respect and understanding for them to enjoy their school more. As can be seen in Table 5, the 6th grade students have the highest number of specific personal demands. Some student responses in this regard are given below:

...I would like breaks to be longer and to have more social activities.

6th grade student No.11

...I would like a volleyball net and mobile phones to be allowed in school.

6th grade student No. 1

...I want no ban on mobile phones and casual dress.

6th grade student No. 1

...There should be no discrimination among students; classes should be more enjoyable.

6th grade student No. 8

...There should be more physical activities in our school; students shouldn't keep watch.

6th grade student No. 21

...I would like classes to be delivered outside and with more activities.

6th grade student No. 30

...Students who swear should be punished.

6th grade student No. 43

The 7th grade students think that improving the quality of instruction, improving play opportunities and playgrounds are among the important factors for them to enjoy their school more. Some student responses in this regard are given below:

...I would like easier exam questions.

7th grade student No. 1

There should be individually tailored programs.

7th grade student No. 6

...Class activities should be more enjoyable.

7th grade student No. 23

...The use of smart boards during breaks should be allowed.

7th grade student No. 1

I would like a bigger canteen, and goalposts

7th grade student No. 16

Though the number of demands from the 8th grade students to increase their enjoyment of school is relatively lower, they do have some demands for improving the quality of instruction and the playgrounds. Some student responses in this regard are given below:

...I would like classes to be more enjoyable.

8th grade student No. 1

... I want a stricter study program.

8th grade student No. 5

... I would like a better basketball court and baskets.

8th grade student No. 9

Discussion

The results of the current study show that willing participation in school activities does affect school attitudes. The results also show that with increasing grade level, the rate of willing participation drops. It was also found that there is a significant correlation between participation in extracurricular activities; that is, the school attitude mean score of those students willingly participating in extracurricular activities is significantly higher than that of the students not willingly participating. Participation in school activities seems to be related to many activities. Participation in school activities is also closely associated with academic achievement (George, 2012), social interaction and school attendance (Wachsmuth, 2013). In a study conducted on at-risk children, Miller (2016) found that students' participation in extracurricular activities positively affected their academic perception, attitudes towards learning, attitude towards school, their family and peer interactions, school life, self-esteem and life satisfaction. Extracurricular activities are seen to be way of enhancing student commitment and student participation (Miller, 2016). The findings of the current study have revealed that the highest rate of participation in extracurricular activities belongs to the 4th graders, while the lowest rate of participation belongs to the 8th graders. With increasing grade level, especially

among middle school students, participation in extracurricular activities was found to be decreasing. In another study, it was found that from the 5th grade through the 8th grade, the levels of attitudes and concerns in relation to science courses significantly decrease (Yildirim and Kansız, 2017); a similar result was obtained by Tuncer and Yilmaz (2016), stating that with increasing grade level, the students' math attitudes decrease. This might be because with increasing grade level, students start to focus more on their exam performance, that is, on the result rather than the process (Güvercin, Tekkaya and Sungur, 2010).

The findings of the current study showed that the students' school attitudes vary by grade level. The school attitudes of the 4th graders were found to be higher than those of the students in all the other grades. With increasing grade level, school attitudes worsen. Moreover, the school attitudes of elementary school students were found to be higher than those of the middle school students. With increasing age, the attitudes towards science were found to be changing, and with increasing age, the attitudes towards science were found to be decreasing (Sorge, 2007). Though not directly revealed by the findings of the current study, the fact that different courses are given by different teachers at the middle school level—in contrast to elementary school, where they are instructed by one classroom teacher—might have led to differences in the school attitudes of the students, something that could be further investigated in future research. Hypotheses claiming that school practices and curricular differences can affect school attitudes can be produced. In this respect, school attitudes can be considered together with the differences among implemented curriculums. Moreover, since 8th grade students in Turkey take the centralised high school entrance exam, it seems to be normal that their interest shifts from the process to exam performance; that is, the result with increasing grade level (Güvercin, Tekkaya and Sungur, 2010). Another hypothesis to be produced can be that, while entering the period of adolescence, students are in pursuit of their own identities, and their talents and interests being subjected to critical evaluation in this period may result in decreasing interest (Potvin and Hasni, 2014).

Conclusion

The research findings show that willing participation in school activities does affect school attitudes. In the current study, willing participation varies across grade levels. The findings show that with increasing grade level, the rate of willing participation in activities drops. These findings show that the highest rate of participation in extracurricular activities belongs to the 4th graders, while the lowest rate of participation belongs to the 8th graders. Entrance exams and the focus on cognitive achievement in secondary school learning decrease the desire to participate in extracurricular activities when the grade level increases. Thus, it can be argued that with increasing grade level, the rate of willing participation in extracurricular activities drops, particularly in middle school. When the curriculum is mostly focused on students' cognitive behaviour, and secondary education entrance exams are taken in line with these goals, having a competitive atmosphere may affect students' participation in extra program activities and school attitudes.

The participating students were asked the question "What would it take for you to enjoy your school more?" The students' responses to this question were classified into the following groups: play, playground maintenance, demands for improvement of the physical conditions of the class and school, academic demands for the instructional setting, demands related to security concerns, and demands for respect and understanding in communication. These demands vary according to the class level. Extra programs that can focus on student needs could make a significant contribution to students' school satisfaction.

Besides the strengths of the current research, there are some limitations. Differentiation could be better analysed by longitudinal surveys including secondary schools in which students in the study group are still attending. This can be seen as a limitation. Another limitation of the current study is that the extent to which factor groups affect school attitudes has not been investigated; thus, further research might explore which of the following factor groups is more effective on school attitudes: age-related developmental factors, cultural factors, or factors related to school structure and organization. There are also some limitations to the causal research employed in the current study, which makes it difficult to explain the findings with sufficient precision. Such causal studies may generally require the application of different methodologies to test the above hypotheses to be studied experimentally

later. Unlike experimental research, no manipulation of the independent variable can be performed in a causal study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

The responses to the question “What would it take for you to enjoy your school more?” by the 8th graders such as “I would like this question to have been asked us before”, “There should be no courses”, “There should be a stricter study program”, and even “No school” can be interpreted as indicating their concerns. It has been reported that the high school entrance exam increases student concerns (Şad & Şahiner, 2016) and that students experience emotional problems due to this exam. The reasons behind these emotional problems can be stress, anxiety and fear (Duban & Arısoy, 2016). As can be seen from the metaphors created by the 8th grade students, they have many concerns about the exam.

School attitudes among the elementary school 4th grade students were found to be significantly more positive than those among the middle school students. The lowest school attitude mean score was found among the 8th graders. A significant correlation was found between school attitudes and willing participation in school activities. The attitude mean score of the students willingly participating in school activities was found to be higher than that of the students not willingly participating. The elementary school students' rate of willing participation in school activities was found to be 91.9%, which is higher than that of the middle school students. The lowest rate of willing participation in school activities was found among the 8th graders. This decrease seems to be associated with school attitudes. Similar findings were obtained in relation to participation in extracurricular activities. While the 4th grade students' rate of participation in extracurricular activities was found to be 91.8%, the rate was 75.9% for the 5th grade students, 78.5% for the 6th grade students, 66.7% for the 7th grade students and 56.8% for the 8th grade students. These findings show that with increasing grade level, both school attitudes and participation in extracurricular activities of the students decrease. Organization of the structure and curriculum of middle school (formal and particularly supplementary) according to student needs should contribute to students' school success and life satisfaction.

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