

An Investigation of the Relationship between Students' Perceived School Kindness and School Attachment

Nagihan Oğuz-Duran

*Uludag University, Faculty of Education
noguzduran@hotmail.com*

Ayşe Kaya-Memiş

Şahin Yılmaz Primary School, Bursa

Abstract

Aiming at examining the relationships between school kindness and school attachment among primary school students, this study was carried out on a total of 159 (46.5% females and 53.5% males) Turkish primary school students. With this purpose, first, the School Kindness Scale was translated into the Turkish language and examined in terms of its validity and reliability. The 5-item and uni-dimensional structure of the scale was confirmed through factor analysis. Internal, split-half, and test-retest reliability of the scale was found satisfactory. Pearson product moments correlation analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between school kindness and school attachment. Gender and grade level effects on both school attachment and school kindness were examined through independent samples t-test, and the only significant difference found was the significant difference for gender groups, in favor of females, for the attachment to teacher scores. Findings were discussed in relation to school guidance and counseling services.

Keywords: School kindness, school attachment, primary school students

Factors that foster students' positive human qualities became an important topic of interest for educators and researchers since the emergence of the study of positive psychology (PP) (Binfet, Gaderman, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016) from the criticism of mainstream psychological science focusing on the negative side of human functioning (Banicki, 2014). Seligman and his colleagues' pioneering studies on human well-being, first focused on the conceptualization of human well-being theory and proposed three kinds of happiness: as positive emotion, engagement and meaning (Seligman, 2002; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). In the following years, Seligman (2011) established his alternative well-being theory, PERMA, which adds two more elements of well-being to the earlier model: accomplishment and positive relationships. As a result, according to the second theory, humans pursue five elements independently for increased well-being: positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M) and achievement (A) (Seligman, 2011). The original well-being theory was about maximizing happiness through the three factors. However, in PERMA, well-being appeared as a multidimensional construct that is defined by its five components, with no single measure defining well-being by itself.

The classification of character strengths and virtues was developed as part of the PP movement, and as a result of these well-being theories. Firstly, 24 universal human strengths were identified in the literature, believing that character strengths underpin and contribute to human well-being (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In recent years, well-being and character strengths theories applied to various institutions to develop programs to help people develop new cognitive and emotional tools. As a result, in the field of education, researchers have developed school-based PP interventions to cultivate positive states in students and in school staff, such as gratitude, resilience, optimism, hope, mindfulness and persistence (Waters, 2011). Although in the literature kindness has been reported as one of the top-ranking character strengths valued in Western society (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), it seems that the less studied one among the character strengths in the field of education.

School kindness

Kindness, "Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them." is one of the 24 character strengths and virtues identified in the literature (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Although there is a wide variety of definitions of kindness (niceness) in the literature, in all these definitions the common emphasis is seen about the

actions of one being used for another person's benefit (Binfet & Gaertner, 2015; Kerr, O'Donovan, & Pepping, 2014; Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Lyubomirsky, 2012).

According to Binfet et al. (2016), "kindness is a valuable social-emotional skill and component of school climate that should be explicitly thought in schools". They distinguished school culture and school climate by defining the former as "the product of the prevalent norms, beliefs, and practices found within a school" while defining the latter as "related with perceptions of the influences or effects this environment has on the psychological well-being of school members." Therefore, they developed a school kindness measurement tool, The School Kindness Scale, to assess perceptions of kindness in the school climate (Binfet et al., 2016).

School climate has been empirically linked to several favorable (e.g., feelings of safety, healthy relationships, academic, emotional and behavioral success) and unfavorable (e.g., relational aggression, poor classroom expectations) outcomes (Binfet et.al, 2016; Wentzel, Filisetti, & Looney, 2007). In this regard, it is important to investigate students' perceptions of kindness at their schools, since it influences the school climate. Moreover, although they are still limited, research suggests that kindness education programs may improve student social-emotional skills and the overall social environment of schools, thereby having positive impacts on students' well-being, achievement, and success (Kaplan, deBlois, Dominguez, & Walsh, 2016).

School attachment

The construct of school attachment has been defined and measured in the literature as being quite intertwined with some other concepts such as school connectedness, school engagement, school bonding, school belonging, commitment to school, and sense of community (O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003). In the present study, the construct has been limited to students' emotional connection to their school, peers, and teachers, based on the theoretical basis of the measurement tool used in the study.

Perhaps the most important reason for the interest in the concept of school attachment is its connectedness to some important psychosocial variables related to the school environment. As similar to school kindness, student attachment to school reported in the literature as related to both school climate (Hawkins, Doueck, & Lishner, 1988), and several positive social, emotional and academic outcomes for students (Anderman, 2002; Goodenow,

1993; Hawkins et al., 1988; Najaka, 2001; Resnick et al., 1997). For instance, school attachment was found in positive relationship with higher self-esteem (Owens-Sabir, 2008), higher academic success (Johnson, Crosnoe, Glen, & Elder, 2001; Lecroy & Krysik, 2008; Stewart, 2007;), and lower substance use (Somers & Gizzi, 2001). Studies also revealed grade level (Savi-Çakar, 2011a; Wei & Chen, 2010) and gender (Hill & Werner, 2006) have effects on school attachment. Accordingly, attachment to school decreases from primary school to middle school; and female students' seem to have higher school attachment rather than their male counterparts. However, in one study, Wei and Chen (2010) reported no gender difference between female and male students in regard to their attachment to school.

In Turkey, studies on school attachment seem still very few. As the first attempt, Savi-Çakar (2011a) adapted The School Attachment Scale into Turkish for the use of Turkish children and adolescents. In other studies, it is found that high quality of life (Savi-Çakar, 2011b), high self-respect, academic motivation (Karaşar & Kapçı, 2016), life satisfaction and self-esteem, and low school aggression (Savi-Çakar & Karataş, 2014) predict school attachment; whereas attachment to teacher predicts life satisfaction (Özdemir & Koruklu, 2013).

The present study

Considering their positive contributions to both school climate and student well-being, it seems important to investigate the relationships between the two new study topics in the field, school kindness, and school attachment. Therefore, this study aims (1) to translate The School Kindness Scale into Turkish language and provide preliminary validity and reliability evidence for the Turkish version of the scale; (2) to investigate gender and grade level effects on both school kindness and school attachment; and (3) to investigate the relationships between school kindness and school attachment among Turkish primary school students.

Method

Participants

A total of 159 (74 females and 85 males) elementary school students recruited from a Turkish state-funded elementary school were targeted for the study. Females composed 46.5% of the sample, whereas males composed 53.5%. About half of the students were attending the 3rd grade (50.9%) and about half of them were attending the 4th grade (49.1%). 5 different

classes included in the study. In all the five classes the classroom teachers were highly experienced female classroom teachers.

Measures

The School Kindness Scale (SKS). The SKS is a five-item and uni-dimensional scale (Binfet et al., 2016) to measure students' perceptions of kindness in their schools on a five-point scale ranging from disagree a lot (1) to agree a lot (5). The total score ranges from 1 to 25, with higher scores reflecting a higher perception of school kindness. Convergent and discriminant validity evidence of the scale were provided by Binfet al. (2006) via assessing the associations of SKS scores with student-reported classroom supportiveness, optimism, happiness, pro-social and social goals, satisfaction with life, and academic self-efficacy scores. Additionally, SKS scores were found significantly and positively associated with teacher-reported student's empathy, social skills, and peer acceptance. The internal consistency of the scale reported in the original scale development study was $\alpha = .71$

Adaptation studies carried out in the present study for the Turkish version of the SKS: Translation procedures of the SKS was started with asking permission to adapt the scale into Turkish by e-mail, on June 2016. Then, the English version of the SKS translated into the Turkish language independently by four experts. Three of the experts (with a PhD. from an English-medium university) were faculty members at the Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling of Uludağ University. The fourth expert was also a faculty member in the same department. After completing the forward translation, two faculty members, a native speaker and a bilingual faculty member at the Department of Foreign Languages independently translated the items back into English. The authors compared the back translations and assessed the item-by-item consistency. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with 10 elementary school students to examine the clarity of the Turkish items.

To test the construct validity of the Turkish version of the SKS, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed. Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded a measure of 120.57 ($p < .05$), and KMO yielded a measure of .73, revealing the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation revealed only one factor, explaining 44.47% of the variance. Factor loadings were .51, .76, .67, .65, and .72 for the five items, respectively.

For internal consistency evidence of The Turkish SKS, Cronbach's alpha scores were calculated, and the result showed sufficient internal consistency ($\alpha = .69$). When calculated separately for 3rd and 4th graders, Cronbach alfa's were .67, and .70, respectively. Spearman-

Brown split-half coefficients calculated for the total group and 3rd and 4th were also good (.71, .71, and .69, respectively). Additionally, to provide further empirical evidence for the scale, a test-retest study was conducted with 54 (27 female and 27 male) students at the same school. The Turkish SKS was administered to the participants twice 3 weeks apart. Pearson correlation coefficient regarding the relationship between the test-retest scores was found $r = .69$ ($p < .01$), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The School Attachment Scale (SAS). The SAS is a 15-item and uni-dimensional instrument constructed by Hill (2006) to measure attachment on a five-point Likert-type scale. The total score ranges from 1 to 65, with higher scores reflecting a higher level of school attachment. The scale adapted to Turkish by Savi (2011a). Two items eliminated from the scale during the validity and reliability studies for the Turkish form. Consistently with the original SAS, the Turkish version appeared in three factors as “attachment to school (AS)”, “attachment to peers (AP)”, and “attachment to the teacher (AT)”. Test-retest reliability of the scale was reported as $r = .85$; and Cronbach’s alpha values for the total scale and for the AS, AP, and AT sub-scales were reported as .84, .82, .71, and .74, respectively. For the present study, Cronbach alpha values recalculated and found as .78, .72, .54, and .65.

Procedure

Students completed the questionnaires in classroom settings with the assistance of the second author (their school counselor). Participation was voluntary. Students were informed regarding the aims and measures of the study both with written and oral instructions. The administration took about 15 minutes. All procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Uludağ University and the Institutional Review Board of Turkish Ministry of Education Bursa province.

Data analysis

Independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the gender and grade level groups in school kindness and school attachment scores. Additionally, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to explore the relationships between school kindness and school attachment. SPSS 20.00 was used for all data analyses.

Findings

Findings regarding the relationship between school kindness and school attachment

The relationship between school kindness and school attachment was examined by calculating Pearson’s product-moment correlations for the total group and for the female and male students separately. Results presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Pearson’s Product Moment Correlations for school kindness with school attachment

	School Attachment			
	Total score	Attachment to school	Attachment to peers	Attachment to teacher
School Kindness				
Whole Group (N= 159)	.49**	.45**	.43**	.26**
Females (N= 74)	.51**	.46**	.38**	.29**
Males (N= 85)	.48**	.45**	.47**	.25**

Note. $p < .05$ for all analyses

As seen in Table 3, SKS scores were found significantly correlated with both total and sub-scale scores of the SAS. The strongest correlation was found for females between the SKS and the SAS total scores ($r = .51, p < .05$). For all three groups (whole group, females, and males) the AT subscale revealed the lowest correlations, although still significant ($r = .26, r = .29$, and $r = .25$ respectively, and $p < .05$).

Findings regarding the gender and grade level effects on school kindness and school attachment

Separate independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the SKS and the SAT total scores, and three SAT subscale scores of the gender and grade level groups. Results for gender and grade level comparisons are presented in Table 2. and Table 3.

Table 2

School kindness and school attachment mean scores and t-test results for gender groups

	Gender		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Females (N= 74)	Males (N = 85)		
School kindness	20.35 (3.69)	19.88 (4.38)	.72	.47
School attachment	59.70 (4.05)	58.81 (5.99)	1.18	.26
Attachment to school	18.58 (1.82)	18.24 (2.37)	.98	.32
Attachment to peers	22.18 (2.18)	22.44 (2.55)	-.67	.49
Attachment to teacher	18.93 (1.36)	18.11 (2.48)	2.50	.01*

Note. * = $p < .05$. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Table 3
School kindness and school attachment means and t-test results for grade level groups

	Grade		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	3 rd grade (<i>N</i> = 81)	4 th grade (<i>N</i> = 78)		
School kindness	19.50 (4.09)	20.71 (3.98)	-1.89	.06
School attachment	58.75 (4.91)	59.71 (5.43)	-1.17	.24
Attachment to school	18.33 (2.02)	18.47 (2.20)	-.41	.67
Attachment to peers	22.04 (2.52)	22.61 (2.21)	-1.50	.13
Attachment to teacher	18.37 (2.21)	18.62 (1.91)	-.78	.43

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

As seen in Table 2, the only significant difference was found for the gender effect on AT scores, in favor of female students ($t= 2.60$; $p<.05$). Females reported higher attachment to their teachers than males. Additionally, as seen in Table 3, 3rd and 4th- grade students do not differ significantly in terms of their school kindness total scores and school attachment total and subscale scores.

Discussion and Conclusion

Three important results were obtained in this research which aimed to examine Turkish primary school students' school kindness perceptions and school attachment levels. First of all, this study is important in terms of obtaining preliminary evidence that the Turkish version of The School Kindness Scale (SKS) is a valid and reliable measurement tool that can be used for Turkish primary school students. In this respect, this study brings in the literature a practical instrument that can be used both by researchers and practitioners aiming at studying on school kindness in Turkish primary school students. In this study, it has been verified that the Turkish version of the SKS has a uni-dimensional structure in accordance with the original English version (Binfet et al., 2016). In addition, Cronbach alpha coefficients, Spearman-Brown split-half coefficient, and correlations between test-retest measurements showed the reliability of the Turkish SKS. Although the SKS original form was developed for 4th -8th grades, in this study, the validity and reliability evidence of the SKS, and the findings on the comparison of the 3rd and 4th grade students' SKS scores showed together that SKS can also be used for the 3rd grade elementary school students in Turkey. This finding can be considered important because Turkish primary school education system consisting of four years from the 1st to the 4th grades. In this regard, since by the validity and reliability evidence provided for the 3rd graders in the present study, researchers could collect

data from a wider group of students, and then examine the variables associated with school kindness perceptions of these students, or may determine the effectiveness of kindness improvement practices conducted with a larger group of primary school students, covering the 3rd graders. This seems to be an important contribution to the literature.

Secondly, in this study, gender and grade level effects on school kindness perceptions and school attachment levels of elementary school students were examined. The only statistically significant finding was that females have a higher level of attachment to their teachers than the males. This finding was expected, considering the attachment literature in regard to gender differences (Hill & Werner, 2006). However, despite the finding in the literature on school kindness that reveals higher levels of school kindness perception for girls than boys (Binfet et al., 2016), in the present study no significant difference was found between male and female students in terms of their school kindness perceptions. Considering that school kindness is still a newly developing study area in the field of school counseling, this finding could also be considered as a contribution to the literature, although it does not overlap with the limited information currently available. Gender differences in school kindness could be examined in further studies.

Additionally, in the literature, it was seen that grade level differences in school kindness and school attachment scores were revealed only when the grade levels compared to the broader spectrum from primary school to secondary school or high school. These differences are theoretically expectable since there are research findings on the decrease of prosocial behaviors of students in the transition from pre-adolescence to adolescence, as previously cited in Binfet et.al, (2016). However, in the present study, since the focus was only primary school students, only 3rd and 4th grade students compared. At the end of the primary school years, only one year may not create a difference on the school kindness perceptions or on the school attachment levels of the students. Although the comparison of the students in two grades, which differ only one year of age, seems unnecessary at first sight, the finding of the present study on the 3rd and 4th graders similarity of the school kindness scores could be used as an evidence for the usability of the Turkish SKS for the 3rd graders, as well as the 4th graders.

Finally, in this study, it was seen that the school kindness perceptions of primary school students were significantly related to the level of attachment of these students to their school. The correlation between scores obtained from the Turkish SKS and the SAS was significant and moderate as expected, indicating the importance of students school kindness

perceptions on their school attachment. School kindness appeared as a significant correlate of both total and sub-dimensional (attachment to school, peers, and the teacher) school attachment in primary school. Based on this finding, school counselors and administrators aiming at improving their students' school attachment and hence improving the school climate in their schools, could focus on implementing guidance and counseling activities to improve kindness in their schools.

To conclude, as a result of this study, first a brief and psychometrically valid measure to assess Turkish primary school students' school kindness perceptions has been provided to researchers and school counseling staff. Moreover, this study contributes to the school counseling literature by providing evidence of the relationship between school kindness and school attachment. Accordingly, the more students perceived their schools as kind the more they attached to their schools. This finding underlines the importance of kindness improvement programs in schools. By expanding the validation studies of the Turkish SKS to different age groups, it could be possible to conduct empirical school-based kindness fostering studies in Turkish schools in the future.

References

Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94*, 795–809.

Banicki, K. (2014). Positive psychology on character strengths and virtues. A disquieting suggestion. *New Ideas in Psychology, 33*, 21–34.

Binfet, J. T., Gadermann, A. M., & Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2016). Measuring kindness at school: Psychometric properties of a School Kindness Scale for children and adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools, 53*, 111-126.

Binfet, J. T. & Gaertner, A. (2015). Children's conceptualizations of kindness at school. *Canadian Children, 40*, 27-39.

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*, 79–90.

Hawkins, J. D., Doueck, H. J., & Lishner, D. M. (1988). Changing teaching practices in mainstream classrooms to improve bonding and behavior of low achievers. *American Educational Research Journal, 25*, 31–50.

Hill L. G. (2005). *Investigation of a brief measure of school attachment*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Hill, L. G., & Werner, N. E. (2006). Affiliative motivation, school attachment, and aggression in school. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*(2), 231-246.

Johnson, M. K, Crosnoe, R., Glen H., & Elder, G. H. (2001). Student attachment and academic engagement: the role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education 74*, 318-40.

Kaplan, D. M., deBlois, M., Dominguez, V., & Walsh, M. E. (2016). Studying the teaching of kindness: A conceptual model for evaluating kindness education programs in schools. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 58*, 160-170.

Karaşar, B., & Kapçı, E.G. (2016). Examining school attachment and academic success in terms of different variables. *Ankara University Journal of Faculty of Educational Sciences, 49*(1), 21-42.

Kerr, S. L., O'Donovan, A., & Pepping, C. A. (2014). Can gratitude and kindness interventions enhance well-being in a Clinical Sample? *Journal of Happiness Studies, 16*(1), 17-36.

Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2012). Kindness counts: Prompting prosocial behavior in preadolescents. *PLOS ONE, 7*: e51380.

Lecroy, C. W., & Krysik, F. (2008). Predictors of academic achievement and school attachment among Hispanic adolescents. *Children and School, 30*(4), 197-209.

Najaka, S. B. (2001). A meta-analytic inquiry into the relationship between risk factors and problem behavior. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 62*(1-A), 340.

O'Farrell, S. L., & Morrison, G. M. (2003). A factor analysis exploring school bonding and related constructs among upper elementary students. *California School Psychologist, 8*, 53-72.

Owens-Sabir, M. C. (2008). The relationship between self-esteem and delinquency: Implications for academic achievement among African Americans. *Jackson State University Researcher, 21*(3), 59-82.

Özdemir, Y., & Koruklu, N. (2013). Parental attachment, school attachment and life satisfaction in early adolescence. *Elementary Education Online, 12*(3), 836-848.

Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 23*(5), 603-619.

Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: the full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6, 25-41.

Resnick, L., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R.W., Bauman, K. E., Harris, K. M., Jones, J., et al. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278, 823–832.

Savi Çakar, F. (2011a). School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents: The Study of Validity and Reliability. *Elementary Education Online*, 10(1), 80-90.

Savi Çakar, F. (2011b). School attachment and quality of life in children and adolescents of elementary school in Turkey. *Educational Research*, 1(9), 1465-1471.

Savi Çakar, F., & Karataş, Z. (2014). *Ergenlerin okula bağlanmalarının yordayıcıları olarak yaşam doyumu, benlik saygısı ve okul öfkesi*. Conference Program and Paper Abstracts. 5th International Conference on New Trends in Education and Their Implications.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Free Press.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Simon & Shuster.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A classification and handbook*. New York: Oxford University Press/Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Somers, C. L., & Gizzi, T. J. (2001). Predicting adolescents' risky behavior: The influence of future orientation, school involvement and school attachment. *Adolescent and Family Health*, 2, 3–11.

Stewart, E. B. (2007). Individual and school structural effects on African American high school students' academic achievement. *The High School Journal*, 91, 16-34.

Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75-90.

Wei, H. S., & Chen, J.K. (2010). School attachment among Taiwanese adolescents: The roles of individual characteristics, peer relationships, and teacher well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 95(3), 421-436.

Wentzel, R. K., Filisetti, L., & Looney, L. (2007). Adolescent prosocial behavior: The role of self-processes and contextual cues. *Child Development*, 78, 895-910.

APPENDIX

Turkish version of the SKS

Maddeler	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Fikrim Yok	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle Katılıyorum
1. Okulumdaki yetişkinler nezakete örnek olacak şekilde davranırlar.					
2. Sınıfımda her zaman nezaket gösterilir.					
3. Okulumda her zaman nezaket gösterilir.					
4. Öğretmenim naziktir.					
5. Okulumda nazik olmak için cesaretlendirilirim.					