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Perception of High School Students About Quality of School Life

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the school life quality of high school students in terms of different variables. Designed as a quantitative study, the data was collected via The Quality of Life in High Schools Scale (QLHSS) developed by Sarı in 2011. The participants of the study were a total of 732 high school students attending different types of public high schools in Denizli/Turkey. Three types of high schools included in the study. The clustering sampling method was used to determine the participants. Analysis shows that high school students have an moderate level of school quality life. First grade students have higher level of school quality life and students attending vocational high school have lower school quality life than the other types of high schools. Surprisingly, students in more crowded classes have respectively higher perceptions of school life quality. Related literature also have similar findings about the perceptions of students about their school life quality. Throughout the end of their high school education, students have respectively negative perceptions about the quality of their school life. This is possibly because of the anxiety of national university entrance exam.

Keywords: Quality of school life, high school, high school students.

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Lise Öğrencilerinin Okul Yaşam Kalitesi Algıları

Özet

Eldeki çalışma liselerde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin okul yaşam kalitelerini farklı değişkenler açısından incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nicel olarak desenlenen çalışmada veriler Sarı (2011) tarafından geliştirilen Liselerde Okul Yaşam Kalitesi Ölçeği aracılığı ile toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın katılımcılarını Denizli merkezde, farklı tür liselerde öğrenim görmekte olan toplam 732 lise öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmaya üç farklı lise türünde öğrenim gören öğrenciler katılmış ve katılımcılar küme örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilmiştir. Analizler öğrencilerin okullarındaki yaşam kalitesini orta düzeyde algıladıklarını göstermektedir. Lise birinci sınıfta öğrenim gören öğrencilerin okul yaşam kalitesi ile ilgili algıları daha olumludur. Meslek lisesinde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin ise okullarındaki yaşam kalitesi ile ilgili algıları diğer okul türlerinde öğrenim gören öğrencilere göre daha olumsuzdur. İlginç bir şekilde daha kalabalık sınıflarda öğrenim gören öğrencilerin okul yaşam kalitesi algı düzeyleri daha yüksek bulunmuştur. İlgili alan yazın öğrencilerin okul yaşam kalitesi algıları ile ilgili benzer sonuçlar içermektedir. Lise eğitimlerinin sonlarına doğru öğrenciler nispeten daha olumsuz okul yaşam kalitesi algısına sahip olmaktadır. Bu durum ulusal üniversite giriş sınavlarının yarattığı kaygı düzeyi ile ilgili olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okul yaşam kalitesi, lise, lise öğrencileri.

1. Introduction

Schools are not the places only for academic purposes, on the contrary, they have their own social and cultural climate which creates a socio-cultural environment for their students. This environment might have several variables including relationships, rules and procedures, social activities let alone academic activities. High school students, who are adolescences also, pass a huge part of their life at schools (Sarı, 2011). Gander and Gardiner (1993) indicate that school life contributes to the vocational and social purposes of adolescences, furthermore, it increases the aesthetic and the intellectual aspects. In this contribution, high schools play an important role by providing a deep cognitive and affective understanding for the students (Demir and Demir, 2012). In a report by Sabancı University Education Reform Initiative (ERG, [Education Reform Initiative], 2013), the purpose of high schools is underlined as providing an exploration of self and the world for the students. In another report carried by Ministry of Education-MoNE (2017), the purpose of high schools is determined as "these institutions improve students' self-confidence, self-control, and responsibility; gain the skills of creative and critical thinking; gain an insight of lifelong learning". With all these significant roles and purposes of high schools mentioned above, it seems to require a qualified learning and communication atmosphere at high schools.

First mentioned in education by Epstein and McPartland (1976), school life quality is handled under three dimensions: a general satisfaction for the school, connectedness to the school, and attitudes towards the teachers. Epstein and McPartland (1976) then identified five dimensions of school life quality: positive/negative feelings to school, school management, teachers, student-student communication, and statue. What is meant by school life quality is a general and continuous wellbeing, and it is evaluated by both positive and negative experiences. These experiences are generally held in close environments of the individuals like family, friends, school, or workplace (Linnakylä and Brunell, 1996). School life quality depends on life quality in literature which is defined as the self-perception of the individual on general wellbeing, possibilities for improving the potentials, and positive social participation (Lunenberg and Schmidt, 1988; Wong, Cronin, Griffith, Irvine and Guyatt, 2001). As for Turkey, quality of school life has been on the agenda of research on education since the works of Sarı and Doğanay in 2006 who investigate the quality of life in a university campus in terms of democratic life culture. Sarı, Ötünç and Erceylan (2007) developed a scale for the quality of school life for high school students and Sarı reexamines the reliability and validity of this scale in 2011. Based on the theoretical frame of Epstein and McPartland (1976), the Quality of Life in High Schools Scale has seven dimensions that are "teachers (the quality of teacher-student relationship, and self-development of the teachers)", "positive feelings for the school", "statue (students' feeling of belonging and significance at the school)", "school management (the quality of the relationship between the administrators and the students, participatory management)", "negative feelings for the school", "students (the quality of the relationship between the students)" and "social activities".

In Turkey, students start high school at the age of 15 after completing 4 years of secondary school and getting a national high school entrance exam. There are various types of high schools to which students are oriented according to their exam scores. If the students cannot get enough scores for the schools they prefer, then they must enroll in the closest high school in their neighborhood (MoNE, 2014). This means that not all high school students are going to their preferred schools. Among the state schools, Anatolian High Schools (AHS) and Science Schools (SS) are the most preferred school types as they have a high rate of university entrance. On the other hand, Vocational High Schools (VHS) are the ones that attract students mostly from low socio-economic classes and who cannot get high exam scores from the national standardized exams (ERG [Education Reform Initiative], 2014). Although there have been various initiatives for improving the quality of education in vocational high schools in Turkey, these schools are still the least preferred schools among students who desire higher academic achievement, especially in university entrance exams. This kind of identification of the school types might create a difference in students' perceptions of their school, and how they feel at the school as the quality of school life has a significant impact on students' well beings, happiness, and

academic achievement at schools (Antaramian, 2017; Sinclair and Fraser, 2002; Wolf, Chandler and Spies, 2001). It also affects their mental health and self-respect (Sarı and Cenkseven, 2008). High school students as adolescents are not just the students who are preparing for an upper educational level. They are in one of their most creative, important, and exciting life periods. Moreover, Mok and Flynn (2002) found out social skills are directly related to the perceived quality of school life. Apart from related variables to quality of school life, there are some variables that directly or indirectly affect how the students feel about their school life such as school type, school and class size, gender, and grade. A body of literature has examined those variables concerning quality of school life (Aliyev and Tunc, 2015; Aykıt and Baba Öztürk, 2017; Batten and Girling-Butcher, 1981; Erden and Erdem, 2013; Ereş and Bilasa, 2016; Moc and Flynn, 2002).

In this regard, how students perceive the quality of life at their schools, in general, is worth to be investigated. The current study aims to get a general idea about the high school students' perceptions of their school life quality and examine this perception in terms of some variables. The research questions are such that;

1. What are the perceptions of high school students in three different types of school about their school life quality?
2. Are these perceptions significantly differ according to their school type, class size, and grade level?

2. Method

2.1. Research model

This research is designed as a quantitative study in a descriptive survey model. In a descriptive study, an attempt is made to describe an event, individual, or object under their conditions and as they are by determining a sample from the population that forms the study universe (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). The current study tries to determine the perception of high school students about their school life quality without any intervention to the existing situation.

2.2. Participants

Participants of the study were a total of 732 high school students attending 8 different high schools in Denizli, Turkey. There are three types of high schools included in the study. The clustering sampling method was used to determine the participants. Details of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants.

School type	Gender	9 th grade		10 th grade		11 th grade		12 th grade		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Vocational	Female	29	25,2	22	19,1	33	28,7	31	27,0	115	100,0
High School	Male	30	23,1	36	27,7	39	30,0	25	19,2	130	100,0
(VHS)	Total	59	24,1	58	23,7	72	29,4	56	22,9	245	33,5
Anatolian	Female	74	33,5	69	31,2	53	24,0	25	11,3	221	100,0
High School	Male	49	29,7	50	30,3	41	24,8	25	15,2	165	100,0
(AHS)	Total	123	31,9	119	30,8	94	24,4	50	13,0	386	52,7
Science	Female	14	25,0	14	25,0	16	28,6	12	21,4	56	100,0
School (SS)	Male	14	31,1	11	24,4	11	24,4	9	20,0	45	100,0
	Total	28	27,7	25	24,8	27	26,7	21	20,8	101	13,8

There are a total of 245 high school students participating in the study from Vocational High Schools (VHS). VHS is the 4 years of high school where students can get vocational skills in different fields of industry and occupations. Grounded in the early times of the Turkish Republic, vocational schools have always been under consideration to train the workers with the required skills for the various fields of industry. Despite many reform attempts in their curriculum, vocational schools have always been the stepchild of educational policies in Turkey. Students who cannot get enough marks in the national exams for high schools enroll in vocational high schools. There is a common perception that students with low academic achievement and socioeconomic status go to vocational schools to get a job more quickly and easily.

There are a total of 386 high school students participating in the study from Anatolian High Schools (AHS). AHS is the school which many of the parents prefer for their children. In the early times of the 90s, these schools were 7 years of length with an English prep class and with a high rate of university entrance. Now, all Anatolian High Schools long four years with the same curriculum but some are better because of their historical background and cultural and academic heritage. They have respectively still a high rate of university entrance and an orientation to academic success.

There are a total of 101 high school students participating in the study from Science Schools (SS). SS is the most prestigious school among the state high schools in Turkey. The enrollment marks are quite high, and they are preparing their students for better universities for prestigious jobs in the fields of science and technology. Due to the pandemic situation, only one SS could be included in the study.

2.3. Data collection tools

The Quality of Life in High Schools Scale (QLHSS) is the data collection tool used for the study. Developed by Sarı (2011), the QLHSS is a five-point Likert-type scale having a total of 35 items and seven subscales (Teachers, Positive feelings toward school, Status, School administrators, Negative feelings toward school, Students, and Social activities). Within the scope of validity and reliability studies in this research, items 31 and 34 in the original scale were removed. The total reliability value of the scale for this study was calculated as ,84.

2.4. Data analysis

Data were gathered from students voluntarily from the schools in the sample and tested whether normally distributed. As the data is not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were implemented for the analysis. The current study aims to frame a general profile of the perceptions of the high school students about their school life quality, so the dimensions of the scale are left out of the analysis except for the first question.

3. Findings

Results are presented in line with the research questions. First, overall scores for The Quality of Life in High Schools Scale and its dimensions were given. Then the findings were given in terms of variables.

The perceptions of the high school students about school life quality

Mean averages from the Quality of Life in High Schools Scale were presented in Table 2. Both total points and dimensions were given.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviations of school life quality for the scale and subscales.

Scale/Dimensions	N	\bar{X}	Sd
The Quality of Life in High Schools Scale	732	3,03	,52
Interaction between students and teachers	732	3,03	,52
Positive feelings towards school	732	3,11	,92
Statue	732	3,12	,98
School administrators	732	3,54	,85
Negative feelings towards school	732	2,47	1,01
Interaction between students and students	732	2,94	,95
Social activity	732	2,80	,52

Students get moderate points from both the scale in total and the dimensions separately. The highest point get is the school management dimension while the lowest point is from the dimension of negative feelings towards the schools.

Perceptions of students about school life quality in terms of the school type variable

As the data is not normally distributed, non-parametric analysis is chosen to analyze the significant difference between the students' perceptions of school life quality according to the school type. Results were given in Table 3.

Table 3. Kruskal Wallis H-Test for school life quality points in terms of school type.

	School Type	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	P	Sig.
School Life Quality Total	VHS	245	322,79	2	18,586	,000	AHS-VHS
	AHS	386	396,75				
	SS	101	356,92				
	AHS	386	415,32				
	SS	101	345,62				

p <.05

Analysis shows that there is a significant difference between the perceptions of students in AHS and VHS. Students at Anatolian High School have a more positive perception of their school life quality than the ones in VHS.

Perceptions of students about school life quality in terms of grade level

Table 4 displays the analysis of Kruskal Wallis H Tests.

Table 4. Kruskal Wallis H-Test for school life quality points in terms of grade level.

	Grade	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	P	Sig.
School Life Quality Total	1	210	396,06	3	10,516	,015	1-2, 1-4
	2	202	339,97				
	3	193	380,94				
	4	127	337,87				

p <.05

Students in the first grade have the highest level of school life quality in general. A significant difference occurs especially between the first grades and second grades/fourth grades.

Perceptions of students about school life quality in terms of class size

The class size of the participants in the current study ranges from 12 to 37. Findings are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Kruskal Wallis H-Test for school life quality points in terms of class size.

			Class Size	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	P	Sig.
School Life Quality	Total		20 and less (1)	73	336,64	4	12,487	,014	3-2
			21–25 (2)	167	327,81				
			26–30 (3)	246	375,26				
			31–35 (4)	145	405,14				
			36 and more (5)	101	375,24				

p <.05

The highest level of school life quality is in the classes that have student numbers between 31 and 35. Analysis shows that students in respectively crowded classes have a more positive perception of school life quality.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the analysis, a general perception of the high school students about their school life quality is at a moderate level. This might indicate that students feel neither very happy/safe nor unhappy/unsatisfied at their schools. A body of literature on school life quality in Turkey found that the level of school life quality of the students is at a moderate level (Arastaman, 2017; Aykıt and Baba Öztürk, 2017; Ereş and Bilasa, 2016; Gedik, 2014; Karabey, 2017; Selvitopu, 2018). It is quite acceptable to find the level of school life quality as moderate in Turkey especially regarding the negative effect of university entrance exams in the years of high school education. In her study, Çınar Özdemir (2006) found out that standardized university entrance exam creates anxiety and stress among the students. What's more, as the analysis underlined, first-year students have a higher level of school life quality than the bigger classes. Research on school life quality among high school students also supports this finding (Durmaz, 2008; Erden and Erdem, 2013; Karatzias, et al., 2001). First-year students have just begun their high school life and might be more enthusiastic and hopeful for their school life in their beginning years of high school. Moreover, elder students have anxiety about university entrance exams, and this might affect not only their school life but also their life quality in a negative way. Hence, after the third year of high school, students' care and attention might turn into the anxiety of university life much more. That might standardize the perception of school life quality at a moderate level. Nevertheless, the moderate level also might indicate students' at least moderate level of wellbeing at their schools. Schools are the social environments that are very critical for the ages of high school students. Karatzias, Power and Swanson (2001) highlight the quality of school life as a concept that gives important clues about the attainments of schools because this concept is quite related to school stress, emotions to school, and self-concept. Moreover, Goodenow and Grady (1992) found that

students who perceive their school life quality high also have a high level of learning motivation. Supposing that most of their daily lives are passing at schools, it is yet still good for them to have a moderate level of school quality, but not enough.

Results show that students in Anatolian High School have a respectively higher level of school life quality than the students in Vocational High School. Limited research on school life quality (Selvitopu, 2018) among vocational high school students shows that students also have a moderate level of school life quality. Aykıt and Baba Öztürk (2017) also found out that students in Anatolian High Schools have a higher level of school life quality perceptions than the students in vocational high schools. Anatolian High Schools accept students with national standardized exams and relatively more successful students enroll in those schools. Many of the students, who cannot get enough high marks from the exams have a few preferences one of them which is the vocational high schools. Vocational High Schools in Turkey, unfortunately, have a negative perception from society such as students from the low level of academic achievement can go there. This perception might create an exclusionary effect for the students in vocational high schools compared to the students in Anatolian high schools. As Karatzias, Power and Stevenson (2001) indicates, if the students have positive views and attitudes towards their schools, it would probably be about how their schools are satisfactory environments for them. As the students don't feel themselves happy and safe at their school, their perception about the quality of life probably be negative.

Research on the relationship between school life quality and class size mostly focus on the primary and secondary education level (Alaca, 2011; Erden and Erdem, 2013). For instance, Ereş and Bilasa (2016) found out that classes consisting of 10-20 students have higher school life quality perception. Related literature also emphasizes that smaller class size affects school life quality and attachment to school positively (Ajayi, Audu and Ajayi, 2017). Strangely, in the current study, students in respectively crowded classes have more positive perception of school life quality than the others. Despite expecting a closer communication and interaction possibilities in a classroom with smaller sizes, specific to the current study, more crowded classes take place in Anatolian High Schools whose students have higher perception of school life quality. This might be a possible explanation for this result.

Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) noted down the importance of making schools (especially in secondary or high schools) better communities where young people can be cared for and supported. It is important for students to feel valuable, happy, and safe in close environments such as schools. Unfortunately, as Arastaman (2017) states most school-age students perceive the school as a boring game based on exam marks, and they believe that little effort is enough to pass this game. According to Sarı (2011), quality of school life indicates the satisfaction level of students from the school where they

spend most of their life period. Many researchers suggest a close relationship between the quality of school life and attachment to school, bullying, academic achievement (Aliyev and Tunc, 2015; Cenkseven Önder and Sarı, 2012; Hunt-Sartorti, 2007; Karatzias, Power and Swanson, 2001; Moc and Flynn, 2002; Toraman and Ayçiçek, 2019). Regarding the fact that schools are responsible for both students' academic and social improvement (Marks, 1998), how the high school students perceive their schools in terms of life quality might affect the maximum satisfaction of the students within all aspects of school life.

The current study has some limitations with its scope. Only one aspect of the school life quality was measured in terms of limited variables. Future research might add various concepts related to school life quality with different participants also. A mixed-method study might also be conducted including interviews within the schools which have the highest and lowest level of school life quality to investigate the personal experiences deeper. Furthermore, future research might focus on especially Vocational High Schools and the last graders of high school students to understand their perception of school life quality deeper.

Conflicts of Interests

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests

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