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How can we make Students Happier at School? Parental Pressure or Support for Academic Success, Educational Stress and School Happiness of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The ongoing debate about if students' lives are either positively or negatively affected by parental involvement in terms of support or pressure for their children academic success is still important. This study aims to determine the relationships between secondary school students' gender, parents' income, grade, parental pressure or support for students' academic success, educational stress they experience, and their level of school happiness, and to examine the effect of parental pressure or support for academic success on the level of school happiness. The study was carried out with 1051 secondary school students in Düzce, Turkey. To collect data, three separate scales were used, and the data were analyzed using path analysis. The results revealed that happiness at school decreases as hopelessness versus expectation, workload, work pressure increase. On the other hand, happiness at school increases when the parental support for academic success increases. Female students are happier at school than male students. Educational stress leads the parents to put more pressure on their children for their academic success, which makes the school happiness lower. Although the parents support their children for their academic success, the level of happiness at school may decrease if they are under stress. Work pressure sustains the positive effect of parental support for academic success and has a positive impact on school happiness.

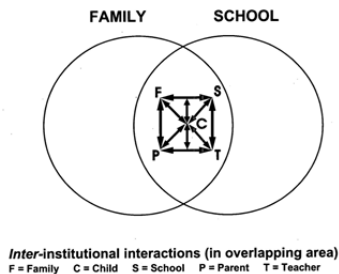
Keywords: Parental Pressure, Parental Support, Educational Stress, Academic Success, School Happiness

Introduction

School life is almost the longest phase during which people must deal with academic and social issues at the same time, and since education is a system that has many internal and external stakeholders which have either direct or indirect impact on students' lives, considering the interaction between students and these stakeholders, one may conclude that the parents, teachers and curriculum are the ones which play a key role on the students. However, how much and in what ways the students are affected through the interaction with these stakeholders varies according to the level of education (pre-school, primary, secondary, high school, university and post-graduate education) at which the students study.

Many studies have focused on the role of parents in the development and education of children (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017) and suggest the idea that parental involvement has a strong impact on the academic success of their children (Bradley, Ferguson & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2021; Chohan &

Khan, 2010; Epstein, 1985; Erdoğan & Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001). Perhaps, the most influential study about parental involvement for the academic success of the students is Epstein et al. (2002) school-family-partnership theory which suggests that the stakeholders work cooperatively to support the improvement and education of children (Please see Figure 1).

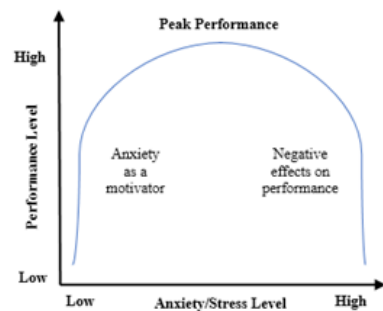


**Figure 1: Epstein's Theoretical Model
Overlapping Spheres of Influence-Internal
Structure Epstein et al. (2002)**

Figure 1 indicates the children are at the center and the focus of the school and families, they should both support the development of children through cooperation (Epstein et al., 2002). Many researchers have emphasized the fact that parental involvement is an important contributor to student's academic success and an effective motivator for school happiness (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; Newchurch, 2017; Toldson, 2008). Therefore, parents should aim to support their children for academic success and well-being rather than putting pressure on them to do more. Of course, every parent will wish their children to do best at school; however, they should know that their attitude may lead to educational stress and academic anxiety, and this may cause not only academic deficiencies but also psychological problems in their children and affect their school happiness level.

Another factor that affects a student's academic success is educational stress and academic anxiety. The related literature suggests that parents' high academic expectations from their children are a major cause of stress among students (Sarma, 2014) although parental expectations generally report a positive association with academic achievement in the literature (Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; You, Lim, No & Dang, 2016).

According to this, we can suggest that parents' attitude when they state their expectations from their children is a significant factor as well. In order not to cause educational stress and/or academic anxiety in the students, parents should foster positive attitude and support towards their children rather than putting more pressure on them by expecting too much. Children having too much educational stress may be more likely to have anxiety that is hard to handle, and this results in lower academic performance (Please see Figure 2). For example, Hooda and Saini (2017) suggests that the anxiety level related to certain academic tasks increases as a student's academic performance suffers because of the stress, and although a little anxiety may result in motivation, if the amount increases, this may not be a positive factor on students' success (Cassady, 2010; Mahajan, 2015). Therefore, one role of the school and family should be to reduce the amount of anxiety and stress the students may have.



**Figure 2: The Relationship between Anxiety/
Stress and Academic Performance (Hooda &
Saini, 2017)**

School happiness is another variable that this study focuses on. Children spend most of their time at school, with teachers and peers, which makes this place an imperative part of a child's optimal development; therefore, promoting positive interactions and emotions in school serve to improve both individual performance and total school functioning (McCabe, Bray, Kehle, Theodore & Gelbar, 2011). Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2012) states that children should be happy while being educated, not only at the weekends or after leaving the classrooms. However, another study by Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter (2003) suggested that students' happiness decreased while they were being educated at school. The current literature suggests

that degree of school happiness is related to stress, self-esteem, depression, school satisfaction (Cheon & Lim, 2020). Similarly, Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2012) found that dissatisfaction with school or unhappiness at school is linked with several problems with the school and parents, and psychological issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. Therefore, parents and school should be aware of the importance of their role in students' level of happiness at school and should put special effort to promote happiness and satisfaction at school.

This study aims to determine the relationships between secondary school students' gender, parents' income, grade, parental pressure or support for students' academic success, educational stress they experience, and their level of school happiness. In addition, the role of educational stress as a mediator variable was examined in the study. Accordingly, the second aim of the study is to examine the effect of parental pressure or support for academic success on the level of school happiness. As this study aims at determining the relationships that affect students' academic success and happiness, it is of great of importance for all the educational stakeholders.

Method

This study adopts the correlational research design (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

Participants

The research was carried out with 1051 secondary school students in Düzce. The reason for choosing this city to carry out this research is that it has a population where data can be collected easily by the researchers. The participants voluntarily gave their consent to participate in the research. Therefore, these students constitute the sample of the research. The above-mentioned reasons led to the use of convenience sampling method as one of the nonprobability sampling methods. In nonprobability sampling methods, the probability of selecting each sample from the population cannot be accurately determined (Sümbüloğlu & Sümbüloğlu, 2005). Among the participants, there were not any students studying at a private school or at an imam hatip secondary school. The demographic variables of the students who participated in the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Variables of the Participants

Variables		N	Frequency
Gender	Male	556	52.9
	Female	495	47.1
Parents' Income	5000 TL and/or lower	470	44.7
	5001-10000 TL	394	37.5
	10001-15000 TL	122	11.6
	15001 TL and/or higher	65	6.2
Grade	5th Grade	227	21.6
	6th Grade	166	15.8
	7th Grade	233	22.2
	8th Grade	425	40.4
Total		1051	100

Data Collection Tool

Three separate scales were used in this study to collect data. The first is "parental pressure or support scale for academic success", the second is "educational stress scale" and the third is "school happiness scale". Permissions were obtained from the researchers who developed these scales.

Parental Pressure or Support Scale for Academic Success

Parental Pressure or Support for Academic Success Scale developed by Kapıkıran (2016) was used to examine the parental pressure or support for the academic success felt by the students. This 5-point Likert type scale consists of 15 items and two factors: Parental Support Academic Success (PSAS) (Items 11-15) and Parental Pressure for Academic

Success (PPAS) (Items 1-10). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which was used to determine the internal consistency of the total and factors of the scale, was calculated as .84 for PPAS, .71 for PSAS and .82 for all items.

Academic Stress Scale

The scale, developed by Sun, Dunne, Hou and Xu (2011), and adapted into Turkish by Seçer, Veyis and Gökçen (2015), aims to determine the educational stress levels of students. This five-point Likert-type scale consists of 16 items and four subdimensions: hopelessness versus expectation (items 8, 9, 14, 15 and 16), workload (items 5, 6 and 7), success anxiety (items 10, 11, 12 and 13), and academic pressure (1, 2, 3 and 4 items). The reliability levels of the scale are .73, .75, .76 and .75 for the subdimensions, respectively. The fit indices obtained at the end of the confirmatory factor analysis were RMSEA=.064, RMR= .015, NFI=.90, CFI=.95, IFI=.95, RFI=.90, AGFI=.90, GFI=.91.

Happiness at School Scale

The Happiness at School Scale, which aims to determine the happiness of elementary education students at school was developed by Gündoğan and Akar (2019). The scale includes 9 items (Likert-type). The scale consists of two subdimensions: happiness at school (items 1-4) and unhappiness at school (items 5-9). The reliability degree for both sub-dimensions was determined as .68 and for the whole scale as .76.

Data Analysis

The collected data were transferred to the JAMOVI program. The reason for choosing this statistical software is that it is free. Path analysis was performed in data analysis. Path analysis is an approach in order to model explanatory relationships between observed variables. The defining feature of path analysis models is the absence of hidden variables. Path analysis models are special cases of structural equation models (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006). In the Path model created for the study, the variables of happiness at school, educational stress and parental pressure or support for academic success are continuous variables. In addition, categorical variables such as gender, income and class level

were also included in the model. Since the variables in the model are categorical and there is no normal distribution expectation, the estimations were made by the method of “Asymptotic Distribution Free”.

Ethical Committee Approval

To carry out the research, the ethical committee approval was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Scientific Research Ethics Committee (Date of Approval: 03/08/2021-No:13/16). Also, the study was approved by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Düzce Directorate of National Education (11/10/2021 and E-10240236-20-No: 34328717).

Findings and Discussion

The effect of gender, income, grade, parental pressure or support for academic success, and educational stress variables on happiness at school were modeled. In addition, the effect of parental academic success pressure or support on happiness at school was modeled through the educational stress as a mediator variable. The analysis method, which provides the analysis of both direct and indirect (effects through the mediator variable) effects at once, is Path analysis, which is performed on a regression basis. The path analysis model applied in the study is indicated in Figure 3.

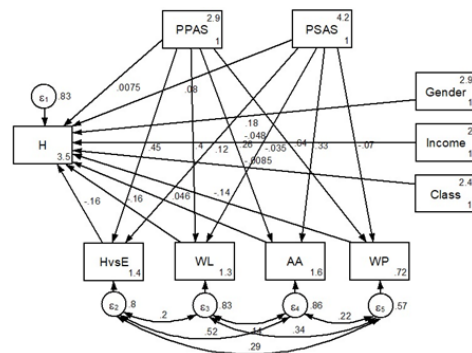


Figure 3: The Effect of Parental Pressure or Support for Academic Success, Gender, Income and Grade on Happiness at School in the Educational Stress Tool Variable

(H: Happiness at School, HvsE: Hopelessness versus Expectation, WL: Workload, AA: Academic Anxiety, WP: Work Pressure, PPAS: Parental Pressure Academic Success, PSAS: Parental Support for Academic Success)

The degree of freedom of chi-square-X², which is one of the fit index values of the applied path analysis, is 4.49, “Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)” was 0.058, Comparative Fit Index was (CFI) 0.949, Turker-The Lewis Index (TLI) was found as 0.851. These fit index values

are suggested as acceptable in the related literature (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993; Kline, 2011; Ozdamar, 2013; Sumer, 2000). These results revealed that the path model was appropriate. The predictions in the model were examined. The results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression Predictions in the Model

		Coefficient	Standard Error	Z	p
Direct Effect	HvsE → H	-0.08	0.02	-4.02	<0.0001
	WL → H	-0.11	0.02	-4.72	<0.0001
	AA → H	0.03	0.02	1.25	0.213
	WP → H	-0.07	0.02	-3.17	0.002
	PPAS → H	0.01	0.01	0.19	0.847
	PSAS → H	0.04	0.02	2.48	0.013
	Gender → H	0.83	0.13	6.56	<0.0001
	Parents' Income → H	-0.12	0.07	-1.73	0.084
Indirect Effect	Grade → H	-0.02	0.06	-0.30	0.765
	PPAS → HvsE → H	-0.02	0.01	-5.63	<0.0001
	PSAS → HvsE → H	-0.01	0.01	-3.15	0.002
	PPAS → WL → H	-0.03	0.01	-6.43	<0.0001
	PSAS → WL → H	0.01	0.01	1.07	0.287
	PPAS → AA → H	-0.01	0.01	-2.59	0.010
	PSAS → AA → H	-0.01	0.01	-2.47	0.014
	PPAS → WP → H	-0.04	0.01	-6.13	<0.0001
PSAS → WP → H	0.01	0.01	2.84	0.004	

H: School Happiness, HvsE: Hopelessness versus Expectations, WL: Workload, AA: Academic Anxiety, WP: Work Pressure, PPAS: Parental Pressure for Academic Success, PSAS: Parental Support for Academic Success

The direct effects performed in the path model revealed the following results:

Hopelessness versus Expectation, one of the subdimensions of educational stress scale, has a significant negative impact on happiness at school ($p < .01$), which means happiness at school decreases when hopelessness versus expectation increases. Similarly, Eriksen (2020) states that the reason for this is the fact that the more parents expect from their children to be academically better students, they also put some academic pressure on their children, and if the students get a low score from an assignment or an exam, they may lose their hopes for the future academic results.

Workload, one of the subdimensions of educational stress scale, has a negative but significant impact on happiness at school ($p < .01$). Therefore, it can be concluded that happiness at school decreases as the workload increases. This finding is in correlation with the study conducted by Pajarianto, Kadir, Galugu, Sari and Febuanti (2020) in that too much workload causes higher academic stress on students. In other words, having too many assignments makes the students experience stress, which can affect their academic performance and happiness at school. Working pressure, one of the subdimensions of the educational stress scale, has a significant but negative effect on happiness at school ($p < .01$). This result reveals that happiness at school decreases as the working pressure increases.

Academic anxiety, one of the subdimensions of educational stress scale, does not have a significant effect on happiness at school ($p > .01$). This finding

does not correlate with the results of the study conducted by Kapur (2018) in that the factors such as academic anxiety, depression or other problems related to stress prove to be impediments within the course of students' academic achievement. Therefore, it is crucial for the students to take pleasure from their school and classroom activities having a positive viewpoint. Another study (Eriksen, 2021) suggests that the increase in the academic anxiety leads to mental health problems among the students and negative feelings towards school.

Although the parental pressure for academic success on their child does not have a significant effect on happiness at school ($p < .01$), the parental support for academic success has a positive and significant effect on happiness at school ($p < .01$), which suggests that when parental support for academic success increases, happiness at school increases, as well. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Waters, Loton and Jach (2019). According to this study, parental support and encouragement has a significant effect on the students' academic achievement and level of happiness. Another study by Kapur (2018) revealed that when parents are encouraging towards their children and support them, then children do become more motivated to learn, and therefore have a better academic success. Similarly, many other studies state that parental involvement in terms of supporting children is very important for children's academic success (Barnard, 2004; Christenson, 2004; Gokturk & Dinckal, 2018; Newchurch, 2017).

Gender has a positive and significant effect on happiness at school ($p < .01$). In the data set, gender was coded as "1" male and "2" female. Happiness at school increases when the gender code is 2 (female). This result shows that female students are happier at school than males. This finding correlates with the findings of several studies (Bhansali & Trivedi, 2008; Pramod, 1996) in that as the boys have more academic anxiety, they feel less happy at school compared to girls. On the other hand, parents' income level does not have a significant effect on happiness at school ($p > .01$). However, in a study conducted by Duan, Guan and Bu (2018), it is stated that low socioeconomic status of the parents negatively affects the happiness at school, and the relationship between academic socialization and academic achievement.

Also, Jeynes (2017) found parental involvement levels were significantly higher in upper and middle-class families than in low-income families. Similarly, Chohan and Khan (2010) found that having low-income may result in poor performance in academic achievement of their children as they do not have enough resources to spend extra money on educational sources. The findings of the study by Okpala, Okpala, and Smith (2001) also supports the idea that economic circumstances are significantly correlated with academic achievement. Another variable that does not have a significant effect on happiness at school is "grade" ($p > .01$).

The indirect effects performed in the path model revealed the following results:

"Parental pressure for academic success", which does not have a significant effect on happiness at school in the case of a direct effect, is a significant variable ($p < .05$) and has a negative effect on the hopelessness versus expectation. It is also a significant variable and has a negative effect on the workload as a mediator variable ($p < .05$). This means parental pressure affects the workload and hopelessness versus expectation negatively. Similarly, parental pressure for academic success is a significant variable ($p < .05$) with a negative effect on the mediator variable academic anxiety, and a significant variable ($p < .05$) with a negative effect on the mediator variable of work pressure. These findings are in correlation with the study by Bhansali and Trivedi (2008) in that parents' desire and expectation for higher academic achievement creates a situation of continuous stress and academic anxiety for students. In line with these results, it can be concluded that all subdimensions of educational stress scale led to an increase in parental pressure for academic success and decrease the level of happiness at school.

Although "parental support for academic success" in the case of direct effect had a significant positive effect on happiness at school, is a significant variable ($p < .05$) with a negative effect on the mediator variable "hopelessness versus expectation". In addition, the parental support for academic success is a significant variable with a negative effect on the academic anxiety ($p < .05$) and it is a significant variable with a positive effect on the

work pressure ($p < .05$). In this case, it was observed that hopelessness versus expectation and academic anxiety reversed the positive effect on parental support for academic success. In other words, even if the parents support their children for their academic success, it can be concluded that, under these stress variables, the level of happiness at school decreases. However, the mediator variable that maintains the positive effect of parental support, which has a positive effect on happiness at school as a direct effect, is “work pressure”.

Limitations

This study was conducted with 1051 secondary/middle school students who study in Düzce, Turkey. Therefore, the results are based on a group of students who study in one city only. The future research can be conducted to with a larger sample of secondary students from different cities in Turkey and/or abroad.

Conclusion

This study explores the relationships between secondary school students' gender, parents' income, grade, parental pressure or support for students' academic success, educational stress they experience, and their level of school happiness, and to examine the effect of parental pressure or support for academic success on the level of school happiness. The results of the study revealed that happiness at school decreases as hopelessness versus expectation, workload, work pressure increase. On the other hand, happiness at school increases when the parental support for academic success increases. All subdimensions of educational stress scale, and therefore, educational stress itself, causes the parents to put more pressure on their children for their academic success, and the level of happiness at school gets lower. Hopelessness versus expectation and academic anxiety reverse the positive effect on parental support for academic success, and even if the parents support their children for their academic success, the level of happiness at school decreases under these stress variables. The mediator variable that sustained the positive effect of parental support for academic success and had a positive effect on happiness at school was work pressure.

Future research should carry on investigating the

factors that affect students' academic performances and level of happiness at school as these two stands out as the core components that lead to educational stress and academic anxiety. Similarly, more studies should be carried out on the effect of parental involvement in school in terms of academic support and pressure to raise awareness about the issue. In addition, schools should design and develop programs to raise awareness about the role of parents and school on the development and the happiness of children. Similarly, school administration should aim to create a positive climate and a safe environment to help students become happy at school. In this way, the school and families can collaborate to create a youth which will better serve our society and future, and more importantly, to achieve a social welfare.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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