The Impact of School Happiness on Student Leadership

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Abstract

School happiness is a state of emotional well-being that occurs through the alignment between the goals of the school and the goals of teachers, students, and other school stakeholders. Students who experience school happiness can improve their talents and skills. Student leadership is a concept that describes the behavior of students who are effective with an outstanding speech and behaviors compared to their peers and stand out with their unique approaches. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between school happiness and student leadership and to determine the effect of school happiness on student leadership. The sample of this study, which is designed in the descriptive relational screening model, consists of a total of 470 students from either public or private elementary schools in Ankara in the 2022-2023 academic year. The school happiness scale was used to determine the level of school happiness and the student leadership scale was used to determine the level of student leadership. According to the findings, the perceived level of school happiness of the students in the sample is "always" and the level of leadership is "mostly". A positive and moderately significant relationship was found between school happiness and student leadership. As the level of school happiness increases, so does the level of student leadership. The impact of school happiness on student leadership is moderate and positive. Additionally, school happiness significantly predicts student leadership.

Keywords: *School Happiness, Student Leadership, Student Perceptions*

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Introduction

Attending school with pleasure and enjoy spending time there, is one of the positive indicators of the meaning and importance of the school concept in students' minds. Students who like to be in schools are also satisfied with the education and training activities carried out there. However, educational and teaching activities may not be satisfactory in all schools. The basis for this is the differentiation between satisfaction and expectations. In any case, it is an undeniable fact that successful schools design their educational and training activities with the expectations of students and parents in mind. Because the greatest wish of most parents is to raise happy children. (Diener & Lucas, 2004). This expectation of happiness is associated with the education that children receive. In fact, happy children are the best learners (Noddings, 2003). Happiness has a positive effect on learning. Happiness is generally defined as a state of well-being consisting of positive emotions in individuals and a feeling of satisfaction with life (Carter & Seifert, 2012). In this case, happy students should be content with the school where they spend much of their day-to-day life.

School happiness is defined as a state of emotional well-being that occurs because of the harmony between the goals of the school and the goals of teachers, students, and other shareholders (Engels, Aelterman, Petegem & Schepens, 2004). Compatibility of goals of the students and the school result with happiness. Students who experience school happiness can develop their talents and skills. While the opportunities offered by the school support this development, students can be happy to be at the school because of the opportunities offered to them. Administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other shareholders can adopt the school environment in which they are happy. The school environment is adopted not only physically but also in terms of human social relations.

School happiness has been studied in different dimensions by various researchers. Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2011), has found that there were strong significant relationships between Finnish students' overall happiness, school happiness and social relationships. Kaya & Sezgin (2017) determined that the significant predictors of happiness levels of secondary school students were work pressure, status, feelings towards school, hopelessness against expectation and teacher dimensions. Moçoşoğlu & Kaya (2018) identified significant differences between the organizational happiness of school administrators and teachers depending on the school type variable. It was also found that there was a significant negative relationship between the organizational silence of school administrators and teachers and their level of organizational happiness. Sezer & Can (2018) found that parents linked student happiness in school to physical equipment, learning environment, school environment, teacher qualifications, communication, cooperation, learning activities, social activities, school management and education policies. Tösten, Avcı & Şahin. (2018) found a moderate and positive relationship between teachers' organizational happiness and organizational socialization and concluded that organizational happiness significantly predicted socialization. Özgenel & Bozkurt (2020) have found that there is a significant relationship between teachers' political skills and school happiness. In addition, Özgenel & Canuylası (2020) found that there is a significant positive relationship between paternalistic leadership behaviors of school principals and organizational happiness. Al-Bataineh, Mahasneh & Al-Zoubi (2021) have identified significant positive relationships between Jordanian teachers' feelings of autonomy and school happiness. Toraman, Aktan & Korkmaz (2022) have

determined that the school happiness of secondary school students increases with parental support to increase academic success and decreases with the increase in workload, expectation, stress, and despair. Akyürek (2022) has found that the school climate significantly predicted school happiness and concluded that the positive school climate supported by academic, social, and artistic activities increased happiness.

Student leadership describes students who, despite not having a consensus definition, are influential among their peers with their words and behaviors and stand out with their unique approaches. Leskinen, Kumpulainen, Kajamaa & Rajala (2020) identified four characteristics of leading students based on behaviors in the process of social interaction and cooperation found in a classroom where small groups are studied at a primary school. These include coordinating work together, exploring new ideas, seeking resources, and supporting other group members by guiding them. Based on these observations, it is seen that the leading students stand out in their environment. In the work conducted together, they determine or organize who will do what work. They put forward different and new ideas. They take the lead in finding the source of materials or knowledge to be used in the studies to be carried out. They help group members to understand the problem and find a solution.

Although the number of studies focusing on student leadership is limited, student leadership has also been addressed in research on the leadership of teachers and educational administrators. Can (2009) determined that teachers at elementary and primary school levels exhibited moderate leadership behaviors in the sample of Turkey and determined that teachers were inadequate in developing students' problem-solving, creativity and entrepreneurship aspects. Beycioğlu & Aslan (2012) stated that the effect of teacher leadership on students should be investigated in line with the results they obtained by examining teacher leadership at the primary education level. Ogurlu & Emir (2014) implemented a leadership development program of fifteen sessions within the scope of the experimental study for gifted and non-gifted students and determined that this program had positive effects on the students in both groups. Cansoy & Turan (2016) identified seven components as the willingness to struggle and goal setting, communication, group skills, confidence and trustworthiness, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, and responsibility at the scale they developed to determine the leadership characteristics of young people at the secondary school level. Araşkal & Kılınç (2019) determined that students who see leadership examples in their teachers and are supported in this direction will have more leadership qualities. Akyürek (2020) found that the leadership skills of gifted students were at a high level and that the leadership skill levels of these students varied significantly among themselves. Öz & Baloğlu (2020) stated that the leadership experience of the students was at a low level and that their leadership qualities decreased as the level of education increased, and that the students showed leadership qualities mostly in primary and secondary school levels.

In the literature review, there was no research examining the relationship between student leadership and school happiness, especially at the elementary school level, and examining the effect of school happiness on student leadership. Therefore, we concluded that it is necessary to examine the relationship between student leadership and school happiness among students at the elementary school level. In this context, the aim of this study is to determine the effect of school happiness on student leadership according to the perceptions of elementary school students. Thus, the sub-problems determined for the purpose of the study are listed as follows:

1. What is the level of school happiness according to student perceptions?
2. What is the level of student leadership according to student perceptions?
3. What is the relationship between school happiness and student leadership according to student perceptions?
4. Does school happiness predict student leadership at a meaningful level according to student perceptions?

Method

Model of the Study

This study is in the relational survey model of descriptive nature. Relational screening is a quantitative research model that aims to determine the presence and degree of co-change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2015). The main goal is to determine whether the variables change together and if so, in what degree and direction.

Population and Sample

To carry out this study, we obtained the ethics committee approval from Selçuk University with a document number E-16343714-605.02-505868 on 04.20.2023. The population of the study consists of a total of 324898 students from either public or private elementary schools in Ankara, the capital of Turkey (Ministry of National Education [MNE], 2023). According to the 95% confidence interval, the lower limit for the sample size of the study is 384 (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). The sample of the research consists of a total of 470 students from either public or private elementary schools in Ankara in the 2022-2023 academic year. According to the population size of the study, sample size is sufficient within a 95% confidence interval (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). Sampling of students was carried out by simple random sampling. Random sampling is the simplest and most common method of selecting a sample, in which the sample is selected unit by unit, with equal probability of selection (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2012). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on demographic variables (gender, class, and school type).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on Demographic Variables

Variables		N	%
Gender	Girl	246	52.3
	Boy	224	47.7
Class	2	236	50.2
	3	140	29.8
	4	94	20
School Type	Public	411	87.4
	Private	59	12.6
Total		470	100

In Table 1, it is seen that the rate of girl population according to gender variable is higher than boys with 52.3%. According to the class variable, the group with the highest rate is the 2nd

grade with 50.2% and the group with the least rate is the 4th grade students with 20%. As for the school type variable, it is seen that the public school is more than the private school with 87.4%.

Data Collection Tools

School happiness scale

The school happiness scale developed by Özdemir, Yılmaz Hiğde & Sağkal (2021) was used to determine the level of school happiness. It is a five-point Likert type scale and developed based on 4 items and a single theoretical dimension. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to verify the factor pattern of the scale. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, the t values of the latent variables explaining the observed variables were found to be significant at the level of .01. Since significant t-values are obtained for all items in the model, all indicators are included in the model. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the scale demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results of the School Happiness Scale

Fit measurements	Measurement value	The reference range
p	.00	< .01
X^2/sd	2.34	≤ 3
RMSEA	.05	$\leq .05$
SRMR	.01	$\leq .05$
NNFI	.99	$\geq .95$
CFI	.99	$\geq .95$

As seen in Table 2, the p value is significant at the level of .01. In many confirmatory factor analyses, it is normal for the p value to be significant due to the large sample size. Therefore, alternative fit indices for the compatibility between the two matrices were evaluated. It's found that X^2/sd, RMSEA, SRMR, NNFI and CFI values have perfect compatibility. As a result of the values, it can be concluded that the single-factor structure of the school happiness scale consisting of 4 items is confirmed as a model.

In reliability analyzes, first, item analysis was examined by using item-total correlation. Then, the reliability of the scale was examined by using Cronbach's Alpha criterion. Results of the reliability analysis of the scale indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

Reliability Analysis Results of the School Happiness Scale

Dimensions	Alpha value	Item-total correlation
School Happiness Scale	.81	.57-.69

It's seen in Table 3, the overall internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the school happiness scale is .81. This result confirms that the school happiness scale's general internal consistency coefficient is adequate for the reliability of the scale scores. It is observed that the

item-total correlations for all items in the scale range between .57 and .69. These values of item-total correlations can be viewed as items in the scale distinguish individuals well.

Student Leadership Scale

The student leadership scale developed by Roets (1992) and adapted to Turkish by Çayırdağ & Acar (2007) was used to determine student leadership. It is a five-point Likert type scale, developed on the basis of 26 items and a single theoretical dimension. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to verify the factor pattern. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, the t values of the latent variables explaining the observed variables were found to be significant at the level of .01. Since significant t-values are obtained for all items in the model, all indicators are included in the model. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the scale are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results of the Student Leadership Scale

Fit measurements	Measurement value	The reference range
p	.00	< .01
X^2/sd	1.33	≤ 3
RMSEA	.02	$\leq .05$
SRMR	.03	$\leq .05$
NNFI	.96	$\geq .95$
CFI	.97	$\geq .95$

The p value is significant at the .01 level, as seen in Table 4. It is typical for the p value to be significant in many confirmatory factor analyses because of the large sample size. Therefore, alternative fit indices for the compatibility between the two matrices were evaluated. It was found that X^2/sd, RMSEA, SRMR, NNFI and CFI values have perfect compatibility. Consequently, the single-factor structure of the student leadership scale consisting of 26 items is confirmed as a model.

In the reliability analyzes, first, item analysis was examined by using item-total correlation. Then, the reliability of the scale was examined by using Cronbach's alpha criterion. Results of the reliability analysis of the scale demonstrated in Table 5.

Tablo 5
Reliability Analysis Results of the Student Leadership Scale

Dimensions	Alpha value	Item-total correlation
Student leadership scale	.88	.32-.57

In Table 5, it's seen that the overall internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the student leadership scale is .88. In this context, it can be interpreted that the internal consistency coefficient of the student leadership scale is sufficient for the reliability of the scale scores. Item-total correlations for all items included in the scale appear to range from .32 to .57. The item-total correlations can be interpreted as the items on the scale distinguish individuals well.

Data Collection and Analysis

The measurement tools applied in April-May 2023. To analyze the data, firstly, the condition of the data set meeting the assumption of normality was examined. Accordingly, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis coefficients, mean, median and mode values were

examined. The standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis values were .69, -1.04, 1.02 on the school happiness scale and .51, -.60, .29 on the student leadership scale respectively. The kurtosis and skewness values in the study are between ±2. These results are interpreted as showing a normal distribution of the data set (George & Mallery, 2010). In addition, the mean, median and mode values were 4.25, 4.37, 5.00 on the school happiness scale and 4.04, 4.11, 4.19 on the student leadership scale. Proximity of these values also shows that the data set is normally distributed (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). In this case, parametric test techniques were selected and used to test the sub-problems of the research.

The rating range of the school happiness and student leadership scale is as follows; never (1.00-1.79), rarely (1.80-2.59), sometimes (2.60-3.39), mostly (3.40-4.19), always (4.20-5.00). In the process of analyzing the data, primarily arithmetic mean and standard deviation techniques were utilized. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was gauged in the analysis of the relationships between the variables. The correlation coefficient being between 0.70-1.00 in absolute value is high; between 0.30-0.70 is moderate and if it is between 0.00-0.30 it can be defined as a low-level relationship (Büyüköztürk, 2013). Multiple linear regression analysis was carried out so as to ascertain the predictive levels of independent variables for dependent variables. Standardized Beta (β) coefficients and their significance t-test results were considered in the interpretation of the regression analyses.

Results

Within the scope of the first sub-problem of the study, the level of school happiness was examined according to student perceptions. Table 6 provides descriptive statistics on the level of school happiness.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics on School Happiness

Dimensions	N	$\bar{x}$	SS
School happiness	470	4.26	.69

In Table 6, it is seen that the perceptions of the students about the level of school happiness are at the level of "always" ($\bar{x}$= 4.26).

For the second sub-problem of the research, according to student perceptions, the level of student leadership was examined. Table 7 provides descriptive statistics on the level of student leadership.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics on Student Leadership

Dimensions	N	$\bar{x}$	SS
Student leadership	470	4.05	.52

In Table 7, it is seen that the perceptions of the students about the level of student leadership are at the level of "mostly" ($\bar{x}$= 4.05).

Considering the third sub-problem of the research, the level of relationship between school happiness and student leadership according to student perceptions were examined. In Table 8, the results of correlation analysis between variables are shown.

Table 8

Correlation Analysis Results Between Variables

Variables	1	2
1.School happiness	1.00	.38[*]
2.Student leadership		1.00

[*]$p < .01$

When the table is examined, it is seen that there is a moderate positive relationship between school happiness and student leadership (r= .38, p<.01). In other words, as the level of school happiness increases, there is a moderate increase in the level of student leadership. In addition, as the level of student leadership increases, it can be interpreted as a moderate increase in the level of school happiness.

Finally, for the fourth sub-problem of the research according to student perceptions, whether school happiness predicts student leadership at a significant level or not, was examined. Table 9 shows the results of multiple linear regression analysis of predictor of student leadership.

Table 9

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results on Predicting Student Leadership

Variables	B	Standard Error B	β	t	p	Dual r	Partial R
Constant	2.847	.137	---	20.822	.000	---	---
School happiness	.282	.032	.380	8.884	.000[*]	.380	.380
$R= .380$ $R^2= .144$ $F_{(1, 468)}= 78.923$ $p= .000$							

[*]$p < .01$

In the table, when the dual and partial correlations between the predictor variables and the predicted (dependent) variable were examined, it was seen that there is a positive and moderate relationship between school happiness and student leadership ($r = .380$, $R = .380$, $R^2 = .144$, $p< .01$). The school happiness variable explains 14% of the total variance in student leadership scores. The t-test results related to the significance of the regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that the school happiness variable is an important (significant) predictor on student leadership. According to the results of regression analysis, the regression equation (mathematical model) related to the prediction of student leadership is as follows: Student leadership = .282School happiness.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

In this study, we examined the relationship between school happiness and student leadership according to the perceptions of elementary school students and aimed to determine the effect of school happiness on student leadership. According to the results, the level of school happiness perceived by the students in the sample is "always" and the level of leadership is "mostly". There is a positive and moderately significant relationship between school happiness and student leadership. That is, as the level of school happiness increases, the level of student leadership also increases moderately. The impact of school happiness on student leadership is moderate and positive. In addition, school happiness significantly predicts student leadership. It

can be foreseen that students who experience school happiness show their leadership qualities. Students who have been educated in happy school settings are likely to exhibit leadership qualities.

Since school happiness is a process that directly affects the happiness of teachers, students, and other stakeholders, it can be said that the happiness of one of the components also affects the other as well. Just as the happiness of teachers makes students and school administrators happy, the happiness of students makes teachers and administrators happy. Ultimately, happy school administrators also care about the well-being of teachers and students. Mertoğlu (2018) found that the happiness levels of primary, secondary, and high school teachers changed significantly in favor of teachers who went to school willingly. It is normal for teachers who love their work and go to school willingly to be happier and therefore positively influence students and other colleagues. School administrators, teachers and other stakeholders taking this result into consideration will positively affect school happiness as well.

To build happy school settings, it is essential to make some social, cultural, political, and environmental arrangements. Because school happiness is a comprehensive concept. The happiness of students, teachers, school administrators and other stakeholders can only be achieved through a multi-faceted approach. Talebzadeh & Samkan (2011) have identified four basic factors within the framework of a conceptual model they propose to ensure school happiness. The first one is physical factors which is related to the course materials and content that support the imagination and creativity of the students and the landscaping. The second is the individual factors that express the ability of teachers to establish good relations among themselves, to get to know the students and to make effective presentations. The third is the social and emotional factors that appreciate students and propose to establish friendly relationships and offer educational environments with more social and sporting activities. The fourth is instructional factors and refers to instructional activities that include calming and relaxing classroom environments supported by music and artistic activities and excursions, observations, and sports activities. When the physical, individual, emotional, and instructional factors in this conceptual framework are taken into consideration, this approach, which proposes to change teacher behaviors and program contents, may cause changes that will positively increase school happiness even if putting them in practice partially.

Another result of this study is that as the level of school happiness increases, the number of students showing their leadership behaviors also increases. In this case, considering the factors that ensure school happiness and determining and implementing policies to ensure changes within the framework of these facts should be among the priorities of school management and teaching leaders. In this respect, Eker & Özgenel (2021) found that instructional leadership behaviors of school principals significantly predicted school happiness and concluded that school principals positively and significantly affected school happiness as they developed instructional leadership behaviors. Since school happiness is a process that directly affects teachers, students, and other stakeholders, it can be thought that school principals can increase students' school happiness by improving instructional leadership behaviors and therefore positively affect their level of leadership.

As a result, there is a statistically positively significant relationship between school happiness and student leadership. As the level of school happiness increases, the level of student leadership increases significantly. School happiness predicts student leadership meaningfully.

Leading students can be expected to grow up in happy school settings. However, this research also has some limitations. First, there are only elementary school students in the scope of the study. Therefore, a larger sample of experimental studies in different school levels are needed to generalize the results. Second, the meaning that elementary school students ascribe to the concept of happiness is limited to their world and may contain misleading knowledge. For this reason, it is also necessary to examine the results of the application from the sample of elder students. Third, errors resulting from the necessary information and guidance during the application of the scales may have led to incorrect or incomplete answers. It is necessary to take these aspects into account when evaluating the results.

Based on the findings of the study, it may be beneficial to consider the following suggestions: Informative studies on the concept of school happiness can be carried out within the scope of in-service trainings. Research can be carried out to reveal the meanings that students, teachers, and other school stakeholders attach to the concept of school happiness. Studies can be carried out to conceptualize student leadership more clearly. The characteristics of student leadership can be determined by observing the behavior of leading students in school settings.

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