The Attitudes of 2nd and 3rd Grade Primary School Students towards Life studies Course and Their Levels of School Happiness

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ABSTRACT

Students' ability to internalize desired characteristics in life studies course is closely related to their readiness. The readiness is in turn linked to students' knowledge, abilities, interests, habits, attitudes and values. Considering attitudes, students learn more effectively and become more successful when they develop a positive attitude towards a course. Depending on that success, students are expected to be happy. In the present study, students' attitudes towards life studies course and their levels of school happiness are investigated using single survey, causal comparative and correlational survey models. The study sample consists of 948 students selected via stratified and random sampling from a population of students attending 2nd and 3rd grades of primary schools in Ankara. The results of the analyses performed with parametric tests demonstrate high levels of life studies course attitudes and school happiness among 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students. A moderate, positive and significant relationship was found between attitudes and school happiness, with attitude accounting for 15% of the total variance of happiness. However, attitudes and school happiness do not vary significantly according to gender, grade, parents' education and daily reading time.

Keywords: Attitude, Life Studies, School Happiness.

INTRODUCTION

Life studies course can be considered as an important course that prepares children for life and provides information about life. Children at first receive informal education from their families and immediate environment and then maintain their education formally in schools. Preschool education constitutes the first stage of formal education and provides an important basis for children to acquire knowledge about life. Life studies course plays a central role in acquiring the knowledge of life during the primary school period. According to Binbaşıoğlu (2003), the main purpose of education is to contribute to children's successful and effective adaptation to their environment, and life studies course at the primary school level is the first course that constitutes the basic step in achieving this goal.

Education of children includes both natural and social life environments. Educating children in consideration of their needs in natural and social environment is important therefore. Children at primary school age have been taught with life studies course for a long time. Life studies course is described as "the first course of the citizenship education programme that attempts to provide children with the knowledge of life by taking into account the understanding of the child in order for the child to know and recognise themselves; the content of which is formed with social sciences, physical sciences, art, thought and values, and which provides the characteristics of being a good person, a national citizen and finally a world citizen in the globalising world, and which tries to provide children with the knowledge of life based on the concept of collective education" (Tay, 2017). In another way, life studies course is defined as the process of establishing a connection with natural and social reality based on proof and the vital knowledge obtained at the end of this process (Sönmez, 2005). The definitions makes it clear that the child is a special being and educational activities for children should be of a quality that will support their development in every aspect. In this context, life studies course has an important position as one of the pivot courses of primary school, and it is a course that contributes to children to recognise their own selves first and to become effective citizens with an expanding perspective then. The aim of life studies course is to help students acquire basic life skills and develop positive personal qualities (MoNE, 2018). In line with this aim, students are expected to grow up as individuals who are sensitive to the environment in which they live and to reflect the achievements in the programme to their lives by internalising them. The ability of students to acquire the desired behaviours, that is, to internalise the outcomes, is closely related to their readiness. Readiness to learn is linked to students' knowledge, abilities, interests, habits, attitudes and values. Pertinent learning experiences cannot be expected to occur in a teaching situation that does not take the mentioned elements into consideration (Taşdemir, 2000). One of those elements is attitude.

Notwithstanding the variety of definitions on the concept of attitude, which is of Latin origin and means "ready for action", it is generally accepted that attitudes are specific to the individual and provide integrity and consistency in thoughts, feelings and behaviours regarding an object (Tavşancıl, 2002). Research on attitudes reveal that students' attitudes towards a course and subject can determine how they approach the course, their level of knowledge, performance, desire to acquire knowledge and interest in that subject (Bloom, 1995). Students learn more effectively and achieve better when they are interested in and develop positive attitudes towards any subject or course (Erden & Akman, 1997; Fidan, 1996). They are expected to be happy depending on this success.

"Subjective well-being", which is called happiness in daily life, refers to the individual's evaluation of their life. This kind of evaluation takes place in both cognitive (life satisfaction judgements) and affective (pleasant or unpleasant emotional reactions) domains (Diener and Diener, 1995; Diener and Diener, 1996). Individuals with a high sense of subjective well-being evaluate their experiences in a more positive way, while unhappy ones focus on the annoying

dimensions of the events they experience (Diener, 1994). Previous research also reveal that happy individuals perceive, interpret and conclude events more positively than unhappy individuals (Lyubomırsky & Tucker, 1998). Individuals who have a positive sense of subjective well-being have higher life satisfaction as well (Suldo & Huebner, 2005). Also, the authors Twilley, Holland, and Morris (2022) emphasize the significant role of recreation professionals in fostering well-being among students on campus. They argue that by offering intentional and targeted outdoor recreation programs, these professionals can make a lasting positive impact on student well-being.

The feeling of happiness in children starts from early periods. Attitude is one of the most influential factors on children's development (Hong, Ra, & Jang, 2015; Bird & Markle, 2012), given that children begin to understand happiness (Honig & Brophy, 1996; Harter 1983; Lewis & Michalson, 1983). Furthermore, individuals' affective and cognitive developmental processes have a linear relationship with their happiness levels (Kantarcıoğlu, 1998).

This study aims to investigate the relationship between 2nd and 3rd grade students' attitudes towards life studies course and their levels of school happiness. Although previous studies conclude that positive attitude has a positive effect on happiness, there is no consensus on the direction of causal relationship between the two variables (Cuñado & Gracia, 2012; Huebner, Suldo, Valois, Darne & Zullig, 2004). The present study is expected to give an idea about the direction of that causal relationship. Besides the main question "Is there a significant relationship between 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students' attitudes towards life studies course and their level of school happiness?", the study seeks answers to the following sub-questions:

What are the attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course?

Do the attitudes of primary school students towards life studies course vary significantly according to gender, class, parents' education level and daily book reading time?

To what level are the 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students happy at school?

Do primary school students' levels of school happiness vary significantly according to gender, grade, parents' level and daily book reading time?

METHOD

Research Model

This quantitative research was conducted by using single survey, causal comparative, and correlational survey models, which are among the general survey models that investigate the existence and/or degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 1998, p. 81). Single survey model was used to describe life studies course attitudes and school happiness, whereas causal comparative survey was used to find whether students' life studies course attitudes and school happiness change according to variables. Correlational survey model was employed to investigate the relationship between attitudes towards life studies course and levels of school happiness among primary school students.

Population and Sample of the Study

The present research has a study population. Study population, also called target population or accessible population (Akbulut, 2010), comes to the fore when it is not possible to reach the entire population because of its abstractness and largeness or when it is not possible to generalise the obtained results to the entire population in a healthy way. The population is therefore limited by the researcher according to a number of criteria in line with the objectives of the research and for certain reasons. In the present study, the sample consists of students

attending the 2nd and 3rd grades of primary schools in the 2021-2022 academic year studying in the central district of Yenimahalle, Ankara. The number of students attending the 2nd grade in Yenimahalle central district is 7706 and the number of students attending the 3rd grade is 7739.

In the first stage of sampling from the study population, primary schools were divided into three groups as high, middle and low in terms of socioeconomic level through stratified sampling. In the second stage, two schools were selected from each stratum by random sampling method, and data collection tools were distributed to 1080 students, 1020 of which were taken back and the data obtained were transferred to the SPSS programme. Finally, 72 students were eliminated on the grounds that sincere answers could not be obtained, and finally a total of 948 students constituted the sample of the study.

Data Collection Tools

The data of the study were obtained using the "Life studies Course Attitude Scale" developed by Oker and Tay (2020) and the "Happiness Scale at School for Primary School Students" developed by Gündoğan and Akar (2019).

Life Studies Course Attitude Scale: The Life studies Course Attitude Scale consists of 16 items and 3 factors. The scale was developed to determine the attitude levels of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students. The factors were named as "negative attitudes towards life studies course", "positive attitudes towards life studies course content" and "positive attitudes towards life studies course" respectively. It is seen that the scale development stages suggested by DeVellis (2016) were taken into consideration in the preparation of the scale. According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the overall scale was .801, and the factors were .740, .729 and .663, respectively. According to the confirmatory factor analysis, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the overall scale was .88. In the present study, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as .89.

School Happiness Scale: The Happiness Scale at School for Primary School Students consists of 9 items and 2 factors. Exploratory factor analysis was performed to ensure the construct validity of the scale and it was found that the scale was collected in two dimensions with an eigenvalue greater than 1 and explained 48.65% of the total variance. The first dimension explained 32.98 % and the second dimension explained 15.67 % of the variance. The eigenvalue of the first factor was 2.97, while that of the second factor was 1.41. Since all 4 items in the first dimension were related to feeling good at school, this dimension was named "School happiness". Since the 5 items in the second dimension were based on not feeling good at school, this dimension was named "School Unhappiness". The calculated Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.76. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as .78.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive, causal and correlational analyses were used to interpret the data. Descriptive analyses included the determination of frequency, percentage and standard deviation values regarding the attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course and their level of school happiness. Various parameters were examined to find whether the data were normally distributed or not and whether there was a significant difference between dependent and independent variables or not. Kolmogorov Smirnov values, Skewness-Kurtosis values, coefficients of variation, histogram graphs, Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot graphs, Normal Q-Q Plot graphs and Boxplot graphs were examined as the group size of each independent variable was over thirty (30) so as to understand whether or not the data

showed normal distribution in the analysis. After testing the normal distribution of the data, Independent Sample t-Test, One Sample t-Test, and 5-factor ANOVA tests were run for causal analyses. Pearson Correlation Test was conducted for correlational analysis as well.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings and interpretations related to the attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course and their level of school happiness, whether these levels change according to multiple variables and whether there is a significant relationship between these two levels.

Findings Related to the Sub-Question "What are the Attitudes of 2nd and 3rd Grade Primary School Students Towards Life Studies Course?"

In order to find whether the attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course were significantly higher or not, the average of the scores they received from the "life studies course attitude scale" was subjected to a one-sample t-test vis-à-vis the expected mean. The expected mean is the value obtained by multiplying the number obtained by adding one to the Likert scale and dividing it by two by the number of items. Since the scale consisted of 16 items in triple Likert type ([3+1]/2*16), the expected mean was calculated as 32.

If the mean scores of the 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students are significantly higher than the expected mean, it can be interpreted that their attitude levels are high. If they are significantly lower than the expected mean, it can be interpreted that their attitude levels are low. If they do not differ significantly vis-à-vis the expected mean, it can be interpreted that their attitude levels are mediocre. Related data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Attitude Levels of 2nd and 3rd Grade Primary School Students towards Life Studies Course

N	$\overline{X}$	S	Expected Mean	df.	t	p
948	42.60	6.32	32	947	119.865	.000

There is a significant difference between the mean of the attitude scores of the 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course and the expected mean (t_{947}=119.865; p<.00). The significant difference is in favour of the mean of the attitude scores of the 2nd and 3rd grade students towards life studies course ($\overline{X}$=42.60), and the attitude level of the 2nd and 3rd grade students towards life studies course was accordingly found high.

Findings Related to the Sub-Question "Do the Attitudes of 2nd and 3rd Grade Primary School Students Towards Life Studies Course Vary Significantly according to Gender, Grade, Parents' Education Level and Daily Book Reading Time?"

The results of the five-factor ANOVA on whether or not the attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course vary significantly according to gender, grade, parents' education level and daily book reading time are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Do the Attitudes of Primary School Students towards Life Studies Course Vary Significantly according to Gender, Grade, Parents' Education Level and Daily Book Reading Time?

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	p	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	8844.263[a]	215	41.136	1.040	.353	.234
Intercept	251035.907	1	251035.907	6345.287	.000	.897
Gender	80.736	1	80.736	2.041	.154	.003
Grade	70.691	1	70.691	1.787	.182	.002
Reading	314.608	4	78.652	1.988	.095	.011
Mother's Education	66.261	4	16.565	.419	.795	.002
Father's Education	161.010	4	40.253	1.017	.397	.006
Error	28959.808	732	39.563			
Total	1757958.000	948				
Corrected Total	37804.072	947				

a. R^2=.234 (Adjusted R Squared=.009)

The results of the five-factor ANOVA show that the attitude levels of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course do not change according to their gender, grade, mother's education level, father's education level and reading hours. In other words, those factors do not have any effect on attitudes towards life studies.

Findings Related to the Sub-Question "To What Level are to 2nd and 3rd Grade Primary School Students are Happy at School?"

In order to determine whether or not the levels of school happiness of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students are significantly higher, the mean scores of 2nd and 3rd grade students from the scale of school happiness were subjected to a one-sample t-test vis-a-vis the expected mean. Since the scale consists of 9 items in a triple Likert type ([3+1]/2*9), the expected mean was calculated as 18. The related data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Primary School 2nd and 3rd Grade Students' Level of School Happiness

N	$\overline{X}$	S	Expected Mean	df.	t	p
948	24.49	3.03	18	947	65.84	.000

Table 3 demonstrates a significant difference between the mean scores of happiness levels among 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students and the expected mean (t_{947}=65.84; p<.00). Since the mean scores of happiness levels among 2nd and 3rd grade students ($\overline{X}$=24.49) are significantly higher than the expected mean, it can be said that their happiness levels are high. It can be concluded that the happiness levels of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students are positively high.

Findings Related to the Sub-Question "Do Primary School Students' Levels of School Happiness Vary Significantly According to Gender, Grade, Parents' Education Level, And Daily Book Reading Time?

The results of the five-factor ANOVA on whether or not the levels of school happiness of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students vary significantly according to gender, grade, parents' education level and daily book reading time are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Do Primary School Students' Levels of School Happiness Vary Significantly according to Gender, Grade, Parents' Education Level and Daily Book Reading Time?

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	p	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	28.956[a]	215	.135	1.254	.017	.269
Intercept	977.688	1	977.688	9101.122	.000	.926
Gender	.177	1	.177	1.647	.200	.002
Grade	.180	1	.180	1.671	.197	.002
Reading	.330	4	.083	.768	.546	.004
Mother's education	.016	4	.004	.037	.997	.000
Father's education	.513	4	.128	1.193	.313	.006
Error	78.635	732	.107			
Total	7125.481	948				
Corrected Total	107.591	947				

a. $R^2 = .269$ (Adjusted R Squared$=.054$)

The results of the five-factor ANOVA show that the school happiness levels of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students do not change according to their gender, grade, mother's education status, father's education status and reading hours. In brief, these factors have no effect on the school happiness levels of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students.

Findings Related to the Sub-Question "Is there a Relationship Between 2nd and 3rd Grade Primary School Students' Level of School Happiness and Their Attitudes Towards Life Studies Course?

The findings concerning the relationship between 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students' levels of school happiness and their attitudes towards life studies course are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The Relationship between 2nd and 3rd Grades Primary School Students' Attitudes towards Life Studies Course and Their Level of School Happiness

		Attitude	Happiness
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.386**
	p		.000
	N	948	948
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	.386**	1
	p	.000	
	N	948	948

Table 5 indicates a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students' level of school happiness and their attitudes towards life studies course, with r= .386, p<.01. The coefficient of determination ($r^2=.15$) shows that attitude accounts for 15% of the total variance (variability) of happiness.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The research results indicate that attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course are positively high, though their attitudes do not vary according to gender, grade, parents' education level and reading hours. When the literature is examined, it is seen that several studies attempted to understand the predictors of students' attitude levels (Baş, Dilber-Özer, 2021; Tertemiz, & Tay, 2021; Sarı, 2020; Oker, 2019; Zayimoğlu Öztürk & Coşkun, 2015). As a matter of fact, when the studies conducted for this purpose are examined,

it is seen that the variables that form the hypothesis of predicting attitude are activity-based, program-based, subject-based, concept-based and the ones used in this study are gender, grade level, mother and father's educational status, and book reading hours (Yavuz, 2017; Oker & Tay, 2019; İra, Özenç İra & Geçer, 2019; Bütün, 2021, Hocaoğlu & Aktepe, 2022). Just like the present study did, they found higher levels of attitude towards life studies course and attempted to investigate what affects the attitude in question and by what it is affected. As a matter of fact, when the studies conducted for this purpose are examined, it is seen that the variables that form the hypothesis of predicting attitude are activity-based, program-based, subject-based, concept-based and the ones used in this study are gender, grade level, mother and father education status, and book reading hours (Yavuz, 2017; Oker & Tay, 2019; İra, Özenç İra & Geçer, 2019; Tüm, 2021, Hocaoğlu & Aktepe, 2022).The results of this study show that the factors examined do not have any significant effect on attitudes towards life studies course.

Another result of the study is that 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students have positively high levels of school happiness. This result indicates that primary school students are happy at school. Happy individuals can be expected to experience less problems in social life, including school life, to be more successful in their work, and to be more effective in exhibiting skills, especially of communication. Other studies also found that primary school students with high levels of happiness experience less psychological problems (Richter, Gilbert, & McEvan, 2009), gain more comfortable peer communication (Aypay & Eryılmaz, 2011) and have higher attitudes towards school (Huebner, Suldo, Valois, Darne, & Zullig, 2004). This study investigated the variability of school happiness among 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students and found that school happiness levels do not differ according to students' gender, grades, parents' education levels and reading hours. There are several studies investigating students' happiness in terms of different variables and their reasons for happiness (Engels, Aelterman, Petegem, & Schepens, 2004; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Richter, Gilbert, & McEvan, 2009). This study reveals that gender, grade level, parents' educational status and reading hours have no effect on attitudes of 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students towards life studies course and their school happiness. Almost all the studies emphasize the importance of investigating the source of children's happiness and conducting further research to increase happiness levels (Engels, Aelterman, Petegem, & Schepens, 2004; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005;).

Our findings show a moderate, positive and significant relationship between the level of school happiness and life studies course attitudes among 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students. Attitude accounts for 15% of the total variance of school happiness. The relevant literature argues that primary school students with high levels of happiness have higher attitudes towards school (Huebner, Suldo, Valois, Darne, & Zullig, 2004). In this context, students with high levels of school happiness are expected to have high attitudes towards life studies course. Or vice versa, students with high attitudes towards life studies course may be usually happier at school. As the present study demonstrated, 15% of the total variance in school happiness is caused by attitude. In other words, the higher levels of attitudes children have towards life studies course, the happier they may be at school as they are affected in part by their attitude. It would be pertinent to identify other factors affecting children's happiness and to organize courses and school environment with a more holistic understanding.

The research results indicate that life studies course attitudes and happiness levels among 2nd and 3rd grade primary school students are high, and there is a significant relationship between attitude and happiness levels. As a matter of fact, in an attempt to better understand the source of both attitude and happiness, it can be suggested to conduct further studies focusing separately on different dimensions.

Life studies course can be enriched with activities in which students are able to develop positive attitudes. Activities that will increase students' self-confidence, encourage empathy and support positive thinking can help them develop positive attitudes. Such activities can contribute to strengthening the relationships between students and making the classroom environment more supportive. Based on the main result of the present study indicating a relationship between students' school happiness and their attitudes towards life studies course, students may be happy at school with the effect of positive attitude.

Given the relationship between school happiness and attitudes towards life studies course, families can also be actively engaged in the process as an important part of children's education. Families can support students' attitudes towards life studies course and their happiness levels. If families integrate the subjects learnt at school into daily life and establish emotional bonds with children, they may help students approach the course from a more positive perspective.

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Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest