

Full Length Research Paper

## The effect of quality of school life on sense of happiness: A study on University students

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**This study investigated the relationship between quality of school life and happiness among university students. For this purpose, 326 students from five different faculties in Çankırı Karatekin University participated in the study. Participants filled in the 'scale for quality of school life' and 'scale for Oxford happiness-Compact form'. Data were analyzed by using methods of arithmetical mean, standard deviation, t-test, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA), ANOVA, ANCOVA and multivariate regression analyses. Findings showed that participants' views about the quality of school life and happiness were at moderate level. In addition, it was found out that being a student in different faculties did not display any significant difference on their happiness. It was also revealed at the end of this study that students' views about the quality of school life were not a significant predictor of students' happiness. Based on these findings, it was concluded that students' happiness was independent of the quality of their school life.**

**Key words:** Happiness, school satisfaction, quality of school life, university, student.

### INTRODUCTION

Human beings are said to have been in search of happiness throughout history. In fact, the philosophers who have expressed an opinion on human nature claim the idea that human beings are always inclined to the objects of pleasure which make them happy. For instance, according to Aristoteles, happiness is the meaning and the aim of whole life. However, Freud proposed that sense world of human works according to the principle of pleasure (Hall and Lindzey, 1985, p. 33). In other words, while human beings run after pleasure, they tend to escape from pain. Despite such opinions, the

academic attention paid to the search of the factors related to happiness of human beings and the empirical studies carried out in this regard are relatively new. It can be said that the academic attention for positive psychology including the happiness got intensity during the last quarter of twentieth century. It is clear that the researches carried out in these years focused on *subjective well-being* which is described as "cognitive and sentimental evaluation of human related to his own life" (Diener, 2000).

Besides subjective well-being, it may be said that the

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researchers have carried out studies on *life satisfaction* which is a similar psychological structure (Diener et al., 1985). Life satisfaction is described as “a general evaluation of a person’s life quality according to the standards chosen by himself” (Dost, 2007, p. 133). On the other hand, the industrial psychologists have been studying on *job satisfaction* for a long time (Organ et al., 2004). However, one of the research areas of marriage psychologists is *marriage satisfaction* (Gottman and Krokoff, 1989). Similarly, students’ satisfaction about school life at schools where people spend most of their lifetime is one of the most popular subjects studied by educators and psychologists (Baker, 1999).

In this regard, *happiness* has been the major research topic of scholars during the last decades. Happiness is generally described as the sense of pleasure and satisfaction about life (Yang, 2008). There are three important components in the definition of happiness. The first one is the relative existence of positive senses, second one is inexistence of negative senses and the third one is the existence of cognitive variables such as life satisfaction (Hills and Argyle, 2001a). It is seen that a part of studies which address happiness focuses on the relation between happiness and personality variables, and it is understood that there is a close relation between personality and happiness (Brebner, 1998). Similarly, it is reported that there is a relation between extroversion as a characteristic and happiness (Furnham and Brewin, 1990). Argyle and Lu (1990) concluded in their study that social-skill and happiness are related to each other. On the other hand, Diener and Diener (1996), asserted that many people are happy. Bülbül and Giray (2011) analysed the relational structure between socio-economic variables and happiness, and they found out that when young and married housewives consider their whole life, their life satisfactions are at mid-upper level. In the same study, it is also concluded that males with a low level of education who live and work in cities, and who are in lower income groups have a mid-upper happiness level. In another study which is carried out on happiness with participants from different cultures, it has been indicated that qualities of friendship and social skills of people have positive relation with happiness (Demir et al., 2012). Hills and Argyle (1998) came to the conclusion that happiness, music and religious experiences have a relation among them. However, it is reported that emotional stability is an important variable which predicts happiness (Hills and Argyle, 2001b).

There are three kinds of theories of happiness. One of them is *hedonism*. According to hedonism, happiness is a matter of raw subjective feeling. That is to say, a happy person smiles a lot, bright eyed and bushy tailed; his pleasure is intense and high in quantity, his pains are few and far between. This approach to happiness has its modern conceptual roots dating back to Bentham’s utilitarianism. The second theoretical approach to happiness is *desire theory*. According to desire theory,

happiness is a matter of getting what you want. Based on desire theory, it can be said that fulfillment of a desire contributes to one’s happiness regardless of the amount of pleasure. The third approach to happiness is *objective list theory*. This theory lodges happiness outside of feeling and onto a list of “truly valuable” things in the real world. It holds that happiness consists of a human life that achieves certain things from a list of worthwhile pursuits: such a list might include career accomplishments, friendship, freedom from disease and pain, etc (Seligman and Royzman, 2003).

With the increasing tendency in researches focusing on happiness, it is observed that certain researchers are trying to develop a valid and reliable method to measure happiness. For instance, Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) (Argyle et al., 1995) and Life Satisfaction Scales (Diener et al., 1985; Pavot and Diener, 1993) have been developed with this purpose. Similarly, certain researchers have been observed to be trying to measure happiness with only a question (Abdel-Khalek, 2006). By organizing the scales of aforementioned adaptations, it is aimed to measure the perception of happiness in different cultures (Doğan and Sapmaz, 2012; Doğan and Cotoş, 2011).

As it is seen, happiness has turned out to be a fundamental area of research within the tradition of positive psychology. However, it has been concluded at the end of the literature review that students’ perceptions about the quality of their school life and its gradual effect on their happiness at schools where people spend most of their lifetime have not been studied yet. On the other hand, the quality of school life which can be described as a state of well-being coming out as a result of students’ participation in school life and their engagement in school environment is expected to have an effect on students’ happiness (Karatzias et al., 2001, p. 91). The studies related to the quality of school life can be said to have been carried out depending on life quality to a great extent. In this regard, life quality is described as a perception related to the physical and psychological health status of the person (Wong et al., 2001). Life quality is a concept related to the person’s own sense of wellness, conditions of developing the potentials and positive social attendance sense (Lunenbergh and Schmidt, 1988). From this point of view, conceptualizing quality of school life may also be said to be fed by life quality. According to Epstein and McPartland (1976a), the quality of school life is an umbrella concept which consists of “school satisfactions”, “in-class studying dependence” and “students’ attitudes to their teachers”.

The school satisfaction which is a sub-dimension of school life quality ends with the students’ participation in school life substantially as a result of related factors and educational experiences; therefore it is a “mood” which supports the subjective wellness of student (Karatzia et al., 2002). It is stated that lower school satisfaction has negative results on some students (Ainley, 1991). On the

other hand, it is reported that relatively high school satisfaction causes students to love school more and increase their sense of attachment to school (Goodenow and Grady, 1992). Besides, the school satisfaction, their attachment to in-class studies is one of the most important components of their perceptions about the quality of school life. In this regard, students' attachment to in-class studies is expected to be influential on their perceptions about school quality. For instance, in a research carried out about on school attachment, it has been found out that the students whose attachment level to school is low have a tendency to come to school late, and they have attendance problems, and their academic successes are low and they have problematic behaviours at school (Firestone and Resenblum, 1988). On the other hand, students' attitudes to the teachers are important indicators of the school life quality (Epstein and McPartland, 1976b). The researches indicate that positive attitudes to teachers are related to learning, the feelings of hate or like about the courses and academic successes of the students (Miller et al., 1975; Roorda et al., 2011).

In a research carried out in Australia about school life quality, it has been found out that curriculums especially positive teacher attitudes, fellows attitudes, in-school activities and school rules have positive effects on students' perception of school life quality (Batten and Girling-Butcher, 1981). In a study carried out in Scotland and Greece, it is seen that female students have more positive thoughts about school life quality than male students (Karatzia et al., 2001). In a research carried out in Italy, it has been concluded that the quality of service rendered at schools causes students to have positive perception about school life quality (Petruzzellis et al., 2006). In another research, it is seen that socio-economic differences have effect on school satisfaction (Grodem, 2009; Sarı et al., 2007). In another research carried out in Turkey, the life quality perceptions of university students are determined to be at middle and lower levels (Doğanay and Sarı, 2006). In a research carried out about school satisfactions of students who are in different faculties of university, it is seen that the school life quality perceptions of students having education in different faculties are different (Çokluk-Bökeoğlu and Yılmaz, 2007). Similarly, Özdemir (2012) who has analysed the faculty life quality perceptions of university students according to different varieties, has found out that students' perceptions related to faculty life are different according to faculties and genders.

As it is seen, the researches related to school life quality have been carried out at different school levels and types. Researches generally indicate that perceptions of students related to school life quality are different according to different variables. However, the effects of the perceptions of students related to school life quality on their happinesses have not been searched yet. This case is the problem of this study. As it is mentioned

before, relatively good school life quality has positive results on students. We hope that the result of the present study will contribute to the literature and fill in the gap within.. The knowledge which will be produced in this specific study will help the policy makers and educators to rehabilitate the school conditions. Namely, good school conditions mean better student well-being and happiness. In this regard, it is wondered how university students' perceptions about school life quality will affect their happiness. The general purpose of this research is to discover the relative effect on the happinesses of students. In this regard, the research questions are as follows:

1. Are the quality of school life and the perception of happiness significantly different according to the gender and faculties of the participants?
2. When the perception points related to school life quality are controlled, are the happiness perceptions of the participants significantly different according to their faculties?
3. Does the quality of school life predict participants' happiness?

## METHOD

This research which aims to determine the effect of university students' perceptions of school life quality on their happiness, is a correlational study. It has been carried out according to quantitative research approach.

## Participants

This research is carried out with 326 students who study at five different faculties of Çankırı Karatekin University during the second semester of 2012 to 2013 academic year. 109 of the participants are male, and 217 of them are female. The age group of participants is between 18 to 30, and the average age is 21.53. 38 of the students are freshmen, 103 of them are sophomore, 133 of them are junior, and 52 of them are senior students. However, 172 of the participants study in Literature, 45 of them study at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, 51 of them study at Forestry, 34 of them study Science and 24 of them study at Faculty of Engineering. 110 of the participants study in daytime Education and the other 216 study in evening Education.

## Data collection tools

In this research, in order to determine the participants' perceptions of their school life qualities, "Faculty Life Quality Scale (FLQS)" is used. In order to determine the happiness perceptions of participants, "Oxford Happiness Scale (OHS)" is used. The detailed information about psychometrical characteristics of scales are indicated below.

*Faculty Life Quality Scale (FLQS)*. The original form of FLQS is developed by Epstein and McPartland (1976b). The adaptation study of FLQS to Turkish culture is carried out by Yılmaz and Çokluk-Bökeoğlu (2006). FLQS has three main sub-dimensions such as 'Satisfaction from Faculty (15 articles)', 'Satisfaction from Lecturers (15 items)' and 'Satisfaction from Class Environment and

**Table 1.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results of OHS-S and FLQS.

Scales	$\chi^2$	Sd	$\chi^2/Sd$	AGFI	GFI	NFI	CFI	IFI	RMR	RMSEA
OHS-S	14.38	12	1.16	0.97	0.99	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.03	0.02
FLQS	2433.34	588	4.13	0.67	0.71	0.91	0.93	0.93	0.10	0.09

**Table 2.** Aritmethical averages and standard deviation points of FLQS and OHS-S according to gender and faculty varieties.

		Gender		Faculty				
		F	M	Literature	Science	SEAS	Engineering	Forestry
SLQS	M	2.9	3.0	2.7	3.4	3.3	2.9	3.4
	SD	.63	.61	.58	.52	.64	.38	.48
OHS-S	M	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.2
	SD	.70	.64	.67	.76	.75	.54	.68

Student Relations (7 items). FLQS is a Likert type scale which has values varying from 'Strongly Disagree (1)' to 'Strongly Agree (5)'. The borders of the options and the values in sub-scales of FLQS are as stated here: '1=strongly disagree, 1.00-1.79'; '2=A little agree, 1.80-2.59'; '3=Do not agree 2.60-3.39'; '4=Agree, 3.40-4.19'; '5= Strongly Agree 4.20-5.00'. The Croanbach alpha coefficient related to sub-dimensions of FLQS is calculated to be .75 for sub-dimension of 'Satisfaction from Faculty', .83 for Satisfaction from Lecturers, and .67 for "Satisfaction from Class Environment and Student Relations'. In the calculations for the whole scale, Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient is stated as .87. The validity of the scale is tested according to confirmative factor analysis of scale in the current research (CFA); the reliability of the scale is tested according to Croanbach alpha internal consistency parameter. In this test, Croanbach alpha value is calculated as .95. CFA results are indicated in Table 1.

*Oxford Happiness Scale-Short Form (OHS-S)*. OHS-S is developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) with the purpose of evaluating the happiness levels of human. OHS-S has eight items in total. The Turkish adaptation studies of OHS-S are carried out by Doğan and Akıncı-Çötök (2011). OHS-S has a single factor structure. During the Turkish adaptation studies, OHS-S Cronbach alpha value is determined as .74, and test-retest reliability parameter is determined as .85. OHS-S is tested again to see whether it is valid and reliable or not in this study. The validity studies are carried out by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the reliability studies are carried out by Cronbach alpha coefficient, and Cronbach alpha value is determined as .75. The results of CFA are indicated in Table 1.

As it is seen in Table 1, goodness of fit indexes for both scales are at acceptable levels (Byrne and Campbell, 1999; Kline, 2005; Meyers et al., 2006). The results indicate that the model established for OHS-S is compatible at a fine level; the model established for FLQS is relatively at a fine level.

### Processes and data analysis

The data collection tools are directly applied to the participants in the research before their lessons at the faculties. The participants participate in the research voluntarily. In the research, the data collected from 326 participants are analysed by arithmetical

average, Standard deviation, t-test, one-way variance analyses (ANOVA), one factor covariance analysis (ANCOVA), Confirmative factor analysis (CFA), and multi-regression analysis. In the analysis of data, SPSS 18 and LISREL 8.0 programs are used, and their meaning tests are carried out in .05 level.

### FINDINGS

In this research, as a result of the analysis of collected data from the participants, the findings stated below are reached:

#### 1. Findings on the point of views about school life quality and happiness perceptions of the participants

The mean and standard deviations calculations carried out with the purpose of determining the point of views about school life quality and happiness perceptions of the participants according to the demographic varieties are indicated in Table 2.

As it is seen in Table 2, the point of views of male and female participants about school life quality have near average values [F= 2.9; M= 3.0]. This finding states that both of these two genders are satisfied with school life at moderate level. In t-test carried out according to the gender variables related to school life, it is determined that there is not a significant difference between two groups [t(324)= 1.66 p > .05]. On the other hand, the happiness point averages of the participants are seen as 3.4 among females, and 3.2 among males. Therefore, it is again determined that the participants are happy at moderate level. In t-test analysis carried out related to the differences between the happiness points of two groups, it is seen that the average difference between two groups are statistically significant [t(324)= -2.72 p < .05]. Thus, the female participants are happier than the males. As it is seen in Table 2 again, the views of participants who

**Table 3.** The descriptive statistics of happiness test points according to faculties.

Faculty	N	Average	Corrected average
Faculty of Literature	172	3.49	3.53
Faculty of Science	34	3.44	3.15
Faculty of Engineering	24	3.18	3.17
Faculty of Forestry	51	3.25	3.09
Faculty of SEAS	45	3.39	3.46

study at different faculties about school life quality indicate different average points [Literature= 2.7; Science= 3.4; SEAS=3.3; Engineering= 2.9; Forestry= 3.4]. Thus, the views of participants who participate in the research from different faculties about school life quality are seen to be at a moderate level.

The significance of the difference among the point averages of faculties is tested by one-way variance analysis (ANOVA). According to this analysis, the point of views of participants who participate in the research from different faculties about school life quality are significantly different [ $F_{(4-321)} = 21.70$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. According to Scheffe test results carried out to determine the source of difference, the students of Forestry and Science Faculties are more satisfied with their faculties than the students from Literature Faculty. On the other hand, when the happiness points of participants are analysed, the findings stated below are received: [Literature= 3.4; Science= 3.4; SEAS= 3.3; Engineering= 3.1; Forestry= 3.2]. According to this result, it is understood that the participants are moderately happy. However, the difference between groups are not significant [ $F_{(4-321)} = 1.91$ ;  $p > .05$ ].

*2. When the perception points related to school life quality are controlled, are the happiness perceptions of the participants significantly different according to their faculties?*

With the purpose of finding out an answer to the second question of the research, one-way factor covariance (ANCOVA) analysis is applied on data set. Thus, at first it is analysed that whether there is a direct relation between FLQS nad OHS-S and whether the data set meets the ANCOVA assumptions or not. Corelation parameter is calculated to see whether there is a relation between two variables on ( $r = .18$ ;  $p < .001$ ) level with the purpose of analysing. The relation between the variables is analysed by scatter diagram, and it is seen that whether aforementioned relation is direct or not. On the other hand, the equalities of leanings of regression lines, the common effect meaningfulness of "school life quality x faculty" on "happiness" points is tested by ANCOVA.

In the calculations carried out with this purpose, it is determined that the effect of "school life quality x faculty"

on happinesses of students is ineffective [ $F_{(4-316)} = 0.75$ ,  $> .05$ ]. This finding received indicate that the leanings of regression lines calculated related to predicting the happiness based on the point of views on school life quality of students who study in five different faculties are not equal. In this regard, the corrected happiness test average points according to the points of faculty life quality scale of students are seen in Table 3.

As it is seen in Table 3, happiness test points averages are calculated to be 3.49 for Faculty of Literature, 3.44 for Faculty of Science, 3.18 for Faculty of Engineering, 3.25 for Faculty of Forestry, and 3.39 for Faculty of SEAS. However, when the school life quality scale points are checked, it is seen that there is difference among the happiness test points. According to this, happiness test corrected average points are 3.53 for Faculty of Literature, 3.15 for Faculty of Science, 3.17 for Faculty of Engineering, 3.09 for Faculty of Forestry, and 3.46 for Faculty of SEAS. According to corrected happiness test average points, happiness level is seen to be the highest among students of Faculty of Literature. Respectively, students of SEAS, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Forestry are in order. The significance of this difference seen among happiness average points of students studying in different faculties is tested by ANCOVA. The results are indicated in Table 4.

As it is seen in Table 4, there is not a significant difference among the corrected performance test average points of school life quality scale of students who study in different faculties [ $F_{(4-316)} = 1.17$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. The happinesses of students are not related to the quality of faculties of them. However, according to the Benferroni test results, happiness level of students of Faculty of Literature (3.53), is seen to be significantly higher than students of Faculty of Forestry (3.09) ( $p < .05$ ).

*3. Does the quality of school life predict participants' happiness?*

It is analysed by multi variable regression analysis whether the point of views related to school life quality of participants are a significant predictor of happiness perceptions. The multi variable regression analysis results which are received with this purpose are indicated in Table 5.

**Table 4.** ANCOVA results of corrected happiness test according to faculty life quality scale.

Variance source	Total square	Sd	Square average	F	P
FYNÖ (Reg)	7.03	1	7.08	15.75	.000
Faculty	2.12	4	0.52	1.17	.321*
Error	141.157	316	0.47		
Total	3953.980	326			

\*p &gt; .05.

**Table 5.** Multi-regression Results Related to Prediction of Happiness.

Variable	B	Standard error B	$\beta$	t	p
Stable	2.80 4	.181		15.475	.000
Satisfaction from school	.054	.078	.052	.689	.489
Satisfaction from lecturer	.153	.061	.173	2.509	.013*
Satisfaction from class environment and student relations	-.013	.064	-.015	-.207	.836

\*p < .05, R = .19, R<sup>2</sup> = .04, F<sub>(3-322)</sub> = 92.821, p = .005.

As it is seen in Table 5, the three sub-dimensions of “school life quality scale” have a low level and significant relation with students’ happiness (R=0.19, R<sup>2</sup>=0.04, p<.01). However, it is determined that each three dimensions explain 4% of variance in happinesses of students.

According to standardized regression parameter ( $\beta$ ), the relative order of predictor variables on happinesses of students are in this order; “satisfaction with the lecturer”, “satisfaction with the school”, and “satisfaction with class environment and student relations”. When t-test results related to regression parameters are analysed, it is determined that “satisfaction with lecturer” is a significant predictor of happinesses of students, but “satisfaction with school”, and “satisfaction with class environment and student relations” dimensions have not significant effects on happiness of students.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study carried out with university students, the multiple relational structure between students’ views about the faculties where they get education and their levels of happiness has been analysed. In this regard, at first, it is seen that the participants are satisfied with school life at a moderate level. In another study which analyses students’ satisfaction with their school life, it is determined that the perceptions of students related to school life quality are at moderate level. For instance, in

a similar study, Özdemir (2012) determines that the participants think that their school life qualities are at moderate level. This finding seems to comply with another research finding (Doğanay and Sarı, 2006; Bilgiç and Sarı, 2010; Sarı et al., 2007). Depending on the finding gained at the end of this research which supports the literature, it is seen that the students are satisfied with the schools moderately. This result can be evaluated to be neither too positive nor too negative. The purpose of all investments in education is to develop cognitive, affective and psycho-motor competences of students. One of the conditions of achieving this purpose is to prove the satisfaction with school life for students. Therefore, in the direction of the findings indicating that students perceive school life quality at middle level, transforming the schools into living spaces where students are happy may be suggested. Definitely, it is important that such studies shall be supported by government, private sector and parents.

It is seen that the happiness perception as second variable of the research is also at the moderate level. It may be thought that many parameters have roles related to realization of happiness perception as a psychological structure. The most important of these parameters is the characteristics of human (Brebner, 1998). In this current study, one of the factors related to the realization of happiness perception of students at middle level may be their characteristics. One of the most remarkable points of this study indicate that female participants are happier

than males. Therefore, this finding may be thought to support the research finding of Brebner (1998). Because, having male or female identity biologically and socially may be thought important for occurrence of different characteristics. For instance, the raising styles of females and males may be different on the basis of social gender. These differences may be assumed to have an effect on their happiness perceptions. In this regard, it is determined that there are significant differences between participants' views related to school life quality according to genders in this current study. This finding also seems to support the relevant literature (Batten and Girling-Butcher, 1981; Çokluk-Bökeoğlu and Yılmaz, 2007; Verkuyten and Thijs, 2002).

Another finding gained at the end of this research is that the qualities of faculties where students study do not cause significant change on their happiness perception. In other words, although there are relative differences among the happiness levels of students who study at different faculties, the reason of these differences is not the perception of them related to their school lives. Although there are significant differences among the faculties related to school life quality perceptions of students, these differences have important and significant effects on their happiness. Students' happiness is independent of their faculties. In some other researches, it is determined that school life quality perceptions of students at different faculties are different among the faculties (Doğanay and Sarı, 2006; Özdemir, 2012). However, in the current study, the point of views of students related to qualities of faculties do not seem to predict their happiness significantly. One of the basic reasons of this finding is that happiness perception may be based on whether the individual live according to his own standards or not. Hence, the findings of the present study support the *desire theory of happiness*. As it was mentioned in the introduction section, desire theory sees happiness as a matter of getting what one wants.

Çankırı Karatekin University where the research is carried out is a newly-established university. Because this reason, the students who attend this university have relatively low socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, the sub-construction problems, scarcity of sports and cultural activities and other similar disadvantages resulting from the fact that it is a newly-established university are not much influential on students' happiness or unhappiness. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate supportive results for his argument. Although the results of regression analysis indicate that there is a significant effect on the happinesses of children, it is seen that this effect is at a lower level. Moreover, it is determined that the school life quality is not a meaningful predictor of satisfaction with school and satisfaction with class environment and student relations, and happinesses of students. As a result, when this study is evaluated as a whole, the happiness of students does not depend on the qualities of faculties where they study.

## Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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