

Family Functioning in School-Aged Children: A Systematic Review of Research in Türkiye Using the McMaster Family Model

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to review the studies conducted on school-aged children in Türkiye between 2000 and 2023 based on the McMaster Family Functioning Model. In this study, a systematic review method was used and the studies that used the McMaster Family Assessment Device as a measurement tool were found through academic search engines. A total of 105 articles and dissertations on school-aged children were identified and analyzed for various characteristics. Since the 2000s, there has been an increase in studies of family functioning. In addition, it was found that more studies were conducted at the middle and high school levels of education, while there were fewer studies at the preschool and elementary school levels. More studies were found on issues that can be described as negative, such as conduct problems and bullying.

Keywords: Family functioning, Student, McMaster model

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Introduction

The factors that affect students, both positively and negatively, have been extensively researched for many years. Studies have focused on various aspects that directly impact students such as teachers, classroom settings, teaching materials, and teaching methods. These issues have been studied intensely and continue to be a topic of research. In addition, family and family relationships, which are relatively outside the school environment but affect the student's education, healthy development and psychological state, are also investigated (e.g. Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007; Halgunseth, 2009). The family's relationships, attitude towards the child, problem-solving approach, shared responsibilities, and overall dynamic have a direct or indirect impact on the child's development, education, and overall wellbeing. It is essential to recognize this interdependence and strive for a nurturing family environment (Yavuzer, 1996). The family is a structure that directly or indirectly affects individuals and plays an important role in meeting their needs (Kocayörük, 2010; Usta, 2019). Failure to meet the needs of the individual in a healthy way can lead to a number of negative outcomes, both individual and societal (e.g. Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005; Boxer & Butkus, 2005). While dysfunctional families negatively impact the development and behavior of the child, this situation is experienced in the opposite direction in functional families (Guilamo-Ramos, Raccard, Dittus, & Bouris, 2006; Yörükoğlu, 2000). In this context, studies regarding the functioning of the family are deemed significant.

The family is a structure that has been present in various forms in all societies since people first began living together. This structure has endured throughout history to the present day (Haralambos & Holborn, 1985). The family is a structure comprised of a mother, father, and children, but in various societies, it may encompass a broader range of relatives. Despite the family's size, it fulfills fundamental roles like transmitting culture and social norms. In addition to these, the family also fulfills important functions such as reproduction, raising new generations, and meeting the physiological and psychological needs of the child (Maccoby, 1984). The fact that the family fulfills economic, social, cultural, and educational functions within the social structure makes it an indispensable institution for society, as well as the development, education, and protection of children have been considered the moral duty of parents and have belonged to the family since the earliest periods of history (Akyüz, 2012).

The concept of family functioning has been explained by researchers who have taken different approaches. While the researchers' explanations of the family's functions are similar, some differences are also apparent. When examined in research, the functions of the family include meeting economic needs, providing social status, planning children's education, providing religious education, engaging in leisure activities, protecting family members, and creating a loving and sexual environment (Bulut, 1993). Regarding family functionality, the Beaver System Model, the Circumplex Family System

Model and the McMaster Family Functions Model are common models. According to the Beaver System Model, the family has two functions. The first is the family competence function, which aims to fulfill the need of family members to be autonomous, to discuss relationships, and to use effective communication. The second is the family lifestyle function, which expresses the lifestyle that individuals internalize. Healthy functioning families have a balance in the competence and autonomy dimensions (Beavers & Hampson, 2000). According to the Circumplex Family System Model, family functioning is associated with balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility while unbalanced levels of cohesion and flexibility are associated with family dysfunctionality (Olson, 2000).

According to the McMaster Family Functions Model, the primary function of the family is to establish an environment that fosters social, psychological, and biological development and supports the well-being of its members (Miller, Ryan, Keitner, Bishop, & Epstein, 2000; Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978). Family functionality is linked to the transactional and systemic properties of the family, rather than the psychological traits of individual family members (Westley & Epstein, 1969). In this context, families should perform three fundamental functions to function properly: basic tasks, developmental tasks, and crisis tasks. Basic tasks consist of meeting necessary needs such as food and shelter. Developmental tasks are addressed in two dimensions: individual development (infancy, childhood, adolescence, middle age, and old age crises) and family development (early years of marriage, pregnancy with the first child, and birth of the first child). Crisis tasks involve managing various crises such as illness, accidents, financial setbacks, career transitions, and relocation. The McMaster Model of Family Functioning assesses family functionality as either healthy or unhealthy by considering the dimensions of the model separately, rather than as a whole. During the assessment, the family is evaluated across six dimensions, namely Problem solving, communication, role fulfillment, emotional responsiveness, emotional involvement, and behavior regulation (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983).

In the McMaster Model of Family Functioning, the family is viewed as a complex system, and the assessment is conducted by analyzing six interrelated dimensions (Miller, Ryan, Keitner, Bishop, & Epstein, 2000). The problem-solving dimension is the first dimension in the McMaster Family Functions Model, and it assesses the family's ability to solve problems. The family's proficiency in addressing daily challenges, such as generating income or finding housing, or emotional challenges that threaten the integrity and functioning of the family is assessed. In the communication dimension, communication within the family is assessed. Open and direct communication is considered functional while masked and indirect communication is considered dysfunctional. The third dimension is roles, which refer to patterns of behavior exhibited by family members in fulfilling the family's needs. These behaviors may be linked to routine behaviors and emotional functions within each family, along with behaviors that may arise from how roles and responsibilities are shared. It is preferable for roles and responsibilities to be both flexible and clearly defined. Affective responsiveness is the fourth

dimension, defined as the family's appropriate emotional response to stimuli. Difficulty expressing emotions within the family can result in a sense of constriction among members. For the family to succeed in this dimension, it must be capable of easily expressing all emotions, whether they are positive or negative. Affective involvement is the fifth dimension of family functionality. It demonstrates the recognition and admiration that family members express for each other's pursuits beyond emotional support. Insufficient or excessive interest and admiration are viewed as dysfunctional. Behavior control is the sixth dimension, encompassing the rules that family members abide by, as well as behavior patterns and interpersonal relationships beyond the family unit. Functionality highlights the fact that behavior control is not grounded in strict or irregular regulations, but rather adheres to adaptive and suitable standards. All of these dimensions are interrelated, and any problems in one dimension can have an impact on the rest. Evaluating one function alone does not provide information about the family's overall functionality (Bulut, 1990).

Although approaches assessing the functionality or dysfunctionality of the family system emphasize distinct elements, their evaluations are typically viewed through the lens of whether family members' bio-psycho-social needs are satisfied (Schrodt, 2005). The family must confront several challenges throughout its life cycle, and those capable of adjusting to change are regarded as functional or healthy (Gadding, 2019). Bowen's (1966) family systems approach indicates that negative patterns in the parents' family history adversely impact the child's emotional state and are viewed as unhealthy. Individuals who are unable to establish healthy boundaries within their family may create dysfunctional families, passing on this pattern of behavior to their children. In contrast, functional families are able to distinguish themselves from their family of origin, recognize any negative impacts, maintain emotional connections, and cultivate supportive and affectionate relationships (Carr, 2012). Family functioning is a critical component of social structure, which has undergone extensive study in recent years. The family represents the most basic structure of society, and familial well-being serves as a crucial indicator of community health (Shahmahmoudi & Mazandarani, 2015). It is commonly believed that a healthy upbringing of children within this social framework will lead to healthier and more functional future generations (Yıldırım & Temel Mert, 2021).

The aim of this study is to explore research conducted in Türkiye from 2000 to 2023 concerning school-aged children's family functioning according to the McMaster Model. This systematic study will provide an overall assessment of family functioning research in Türkiye, specifically on school-aged children, and present the findings to researchers and practitioners in this field. In addition, this study will outline the areas of concentration and identify areas that require further research based on a comprehensive compilation of existing studies. To achieve the overall objectives, the following questions were addressed:

- What is the distribution of studies by type?
- What is the distribution of studies by year?
- What is the distribution of studies by school level?
- What is the distribution of sample sizes in the studies?
- What variables are associated with family functioning in the studies?

Method

In this study, a systematic literature review was conducted to find answers to the research questions. Content analysis method was used to analyze the data related to the review. During the research process, data collected from Turkish students during the specified time period was examined using the McMaster Family Assessment Device, which was developed based on the McMaster Model. ULAKBIM National Database, YOK Thesis Center, a university database and Google Scholar were used for literature review. Citations for the McMaster Family Assessment Device (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, The McMaster family assessment device, 1983) and the adaptation of the scale into Turkish by Bulut (Family Assessment Device Handbook [Aile Değerlendirme Ölçeği El Kitabı], 1990) were examined. The publications that cited both studies were analyzed by applying specific criteria: Conducted in Türkiye, conducted between 2000 and 2023, utilized the McMaster Family Assessment Device for data collection, and focused on school-age children. As a result of the screening, studies that were considered to be irrelevant to the purpose of the study were excluded for various reasons such as not being published in peer-reviewed journals, being outside the fields such as psychology, education, health, interpersonal relations, not having family functioning and school-age children as the main research topic, being conducted before 2000, collecting data solely from parents and selecting a sample from outside Türkiye. Studies on students at the pre-school, primary school, secondary school, high school and university levels were included in the review. Studies involving individuals in adolescence were also included, even if no educational level was mentioned, as these individuals continue to be students within the scope of compulsory education. The researcher analyzed these studies in line with the research questions. In this process, descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies were analyzed. The results were evaluated in the context of existing literature and various data and suggestions were presented.

Findings

In this section, the findings of the descriptive review of studies on family functioning in school-age children are presented. As a result of the research, a total of 105 studies, 51 published articles and 54 theses, were reached. Of the theses, 46 were master's theses, 4 were medical specialty theses, and 4 were doctoral theses. The distribution of studies conducted from 2000 to 2023, organized by year, is displayed in Figure 1. As seen in Figure 1 below, there has been an increasing trend in the

number of studies of family functioning among school-age children have increased over the years. The highest number of studies was published between 2015 and 2019 with a total of 45 studies while the lowest number of studies was published between 2000 and 2004 with a total of 3 studies.

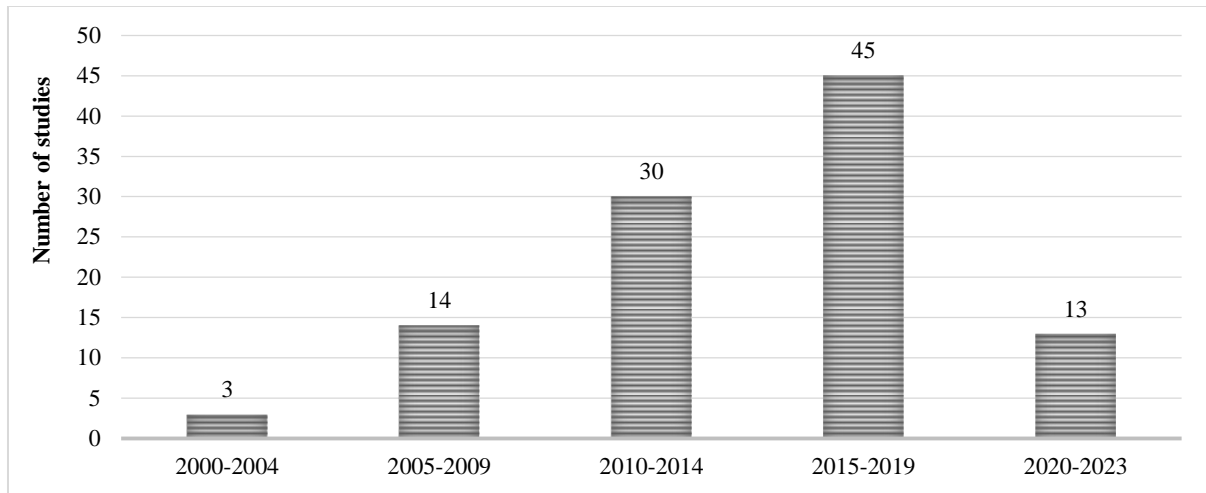


Figure 1. Distribution of studies by year

When examining the school levels covered in the studies (Figure 2), it becomes apparent that a wide range of levels have been addressed. However, the bulk of the studies concentrate on the middle and high school periods, while very few were undertaken on the primary and pre-school stages. However, 17 studies were conducted only with university students, 25 studies were conducted only with high school students, 24 studies were conducted only with middle school students, 5 studies were conducted only with primary school students, and 8 studies were conducted only with preschool students. While no studies have examined the educational outcomes of preschool students alongside those of other age groups, there exist 7 studies investigating outcomes for primary and secondary school students, 16 studies investigating outcomes for secondary and high school students, and 3 studies investigating outcomes for high school and university students.

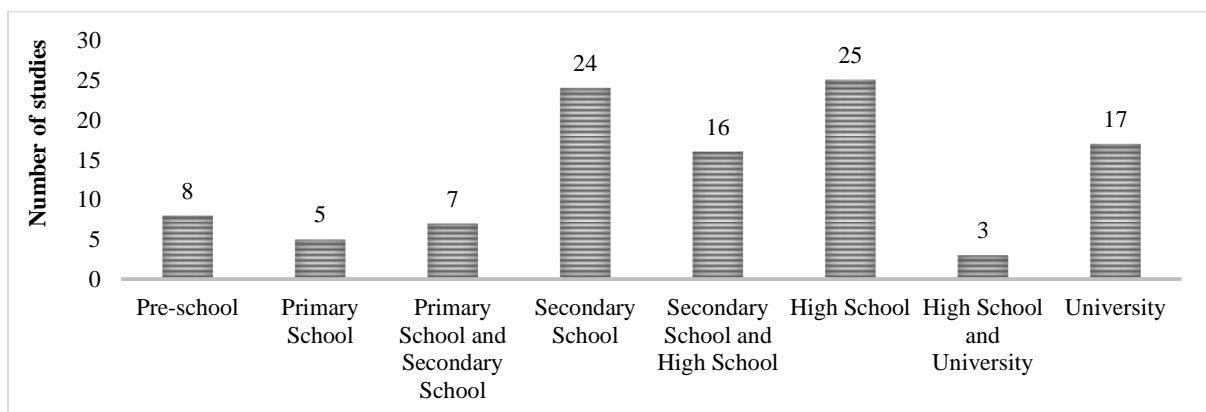


Figure 2. Distribution of studies by school level

The results of the examination of the number of samples used in the studies are presented in Table 1. There were 23 studies with a sample size of less than 100 people, representing 21.9% of the total. There were 17 studies with samples between 101-200 (16.2%), 19 studies with samples between 201-300 (18.1%), 21 studies with samples between 301-400 (20%), 4 studies with samples between 401-500 (3.8%) and 21 studies with samples of 500 or more (20%). Studies with a sample size of 100 or less are the most common and studies with a sample size between 401-500 are the least common.

Table 1. Sample distribution of the studies

	f	Percentage (%)
0-100	23	21,9
101-200	17	16,2
201-300	19	18,1
301-400	21	20
401-500	4	3,8
500+	21	20
Total	105	100

According to the study's results, it is notable that school-age children's family functioning has been examined with a broad range of variables (Table 2). These variables include studies of children's positive traits and behaviors as well as studies of traits and behaviors that may be considered negative. Most studies examined more than one variable that may be related to family functioning. While such studies are listed in the table, each variable examined is listed separately. Looking at the variables that were revealed as a result of the review, it can be seen that behavior problems were studied most intensively. Behavioral problems were followed by academic achievement, depression, and the relationship between attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and family functioning. It is apparent that a vast array of research topics exists while limited research is available on numerous topics. Suicidal tendencies, ideation, and attempt; anger, aggression, hostility, and violent behavior; bullying; anxiety; self-esteem; crime; self-harm; substance use; special education; internet, social media and game addiction; affective disorders; well-being; life satisfaction; differentiation of self; attachment to mother/father; problem solving; hopelessness; self-efficacy; early schemas; learned resourcefulness; psychological resilience; emotion regulation; adjustment level; assertiveness; locus of control; cognitive flexibility were identified as variables in at least two published articles and their relationship with family functioning was investigated. Internet parenting styles; problematic internet use; loneliness; stress; somatization; personality characteristics; negative self; psychological development; social development; physical development; cognitive development; emotional development; coping attitudes; self-regulation; decision making; intolerance of uncertainty; friendship; leisure participation; empathy; social competency; school adjustment; emotional adjustment; social support; attitude toward school; attitude toward teachers; knowledge of social and moral rules;

popularity in school; internalizing/externalizing problems; social problem; interpersonal relationship; attachment to friends were each studied as a variable in one publication.

Table 2. Variables investigated along with family functionality

Variables	f	%	Variables	f	%
Behavior Problems	9	5.66	Internet parenting styles	1	0.63
Academic Achievement	8	5.00	Problematic internet use	1	0.63
Depression	8	5.00	Loneliness	1	0.63
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	8	5.00	Stress	1	0.63
Suicidal tendencies, ideation, and attempt	7	4.40	Somatization	1	0.63
Anger, aggression, hostility, and violent behavior	7	4.40	Personality characteristics	1	0.63
Bullying	6	3.77	Negative self	1	0.63
Anxiety	6	3.77	Psychological development	1	0.63
Self-esteem	6	3.77	Social development	1	0.63
Crime	5	3.14	Physical development	1	0.63
Self-harm	5	3.14	Cognitive development	1	0.63
Substance use	5	3.14	Emotional development	1	0.63
Special education	4	2.52	Coping attitudes	1	0.63
Internet, social media and game addiction	4	2.52	Self-regulation	1	0.63
Affective disorders	3	1.89	Decision making	1	0.63
Well-being	3	1.89	Intolerance of uncertainty	1	0.63
Life satisfaction	3	1.89	Friendship	1	0.63
Differentiation of self	3	1.89	Leisure participation	1	0.63
Attachment to mother/father	3	1.89	Empathy	1	0.63
Problem solving	3	1.89	Social competency	1	0.63
Hopelessness	2	1.26	School adjustment	1	0.63
Self-efficacy	2	1.26	Emotional adjustment	1	0.63
Early schemas	2	1.26	Social support	1	0.63
Learned resourcefulness	2	1.26	Attitude toward school	1	0.63
Psychological resilience	2	1.26	Attitude toward teachers	1	0.63
Emotion regulation	2	1.26	Knowledge of social and moral rules	1	0.63
Adjustment level	2	1.26	Popularity in school	1	0.63
Assertiveness	2	1.26	Internalizing/externalizing problems	1	0.63
Locus of Control	2	1.26	Social problem	1	0.63
Cognitive flexibility	2	1.26	Interpersonal relationship	1	0.63
Eating disorders	1	0.63	Attachment to friends	1	0.63
Eating attitude	1	0.63			

Discussion, Suggestions and Policy Implications

The aim of this study is to review the studies conducted on school-aged children in Türkiye between 2000 and 2023 based on the McMaster Family Functioning Model. The aim of this systematic review was to identify the general characteristics of the studies conducted from 2000 to the present (2023), to evaluate them, and to make suggestions for the future in this context. In the context of these basic objectives, the studies were analyzed, and various findings were obtained.

When analyzing the research results, 51 published articles and 54 theses stand out. It is noteworthy that 46 of the theses (43.8% of the total number of studies and 85.2% of the theses) are master's theses and there are only 4 doctoral theses. Similarly, 4 theses were found in the field of medical specialization. When evaluating the distribution of research in general, the fact that the number of master's students is higher than the number of Ph.D. students, and that more theses are written in parallel, may explain the high number of Master's theses on the subject. It is believed that increasing the number of doctoral dissertations that examine family functioning in depth will contribute to the field.

When analyzing the distribution of studies by year, it is noticeable that there has been an increase since the 2000s. While 3 studies were found between 2000-2004, 45 studies were found between 2015-2019. This situation can be seen as an indication of increased interest in the McMaster Family Functioning Model and family functioning of school-aged children in general. Between 2020 and 2023, 13 studies were found. The current study was conducted in early 2023. It can be assumed that the number of studies will increase with the publication of studies on the topic in the following months from the date and that the increasing trend between 2000 and 2019 will continue in a similar way.

When the distribution of the studies according to the level of education was analyzed, studies related to all school levels were found. While some studies include students at only one level of education, there are studies on students at more than one level of education in the literature. Studies examining students in early school stages such as pre-school and primary school are fewer in number compared to studies in other school stages. This may be due to the difficulties in collecting data from children in this period. It is noteworthy that most of the studies were conducted with middle and high school students. The fact that it is easier to collect data from students at this stage, as opposed to preschool and elementary school students, may have influenced this number. From a developmental perspective, the influence of the family on children at an early age is undeniable. The research field dedicated to understanding the significant impact of the family environment on the psychological growth of adolescents holds a special and fundamental place in academic inquiry (McKinney & Renk, 2011). The family interaction of primary school children attracts more attention in terms of its effect on academic achievement compared to other levels of education. (Gümüşeli, 2004; Yavuzer, 2012).

Similarly, the academic performance of elementary school students has been found to depend on the fulfillment of family functions, healthy family problem solving, communication, role clarity, emotional responsiveness, and increased attention (Küçükkaragöz & Harmanlı, 9-13 Eylül 2002). In this context, it is believed that more studies on young students will contribute to the field. University students were also included in this study because they are still pursuing their education and generally maintain ties with their families. The number of studies conducted with university students is

considerable compared to other levels of education. In this context, longitudinal studies planned to cover the period from preschool to university will provide valuable information in terms of revealing the effect of family functioning on school-age children. With this information, family interventions can be implemented to help raise healthier generations.

When the study group distribution of the analyzed studies is examined, it is seen that the highest number of studies (21.9%) consisted of less than 100 participants and the lowest number of studies (3.8%) consisted of 401-500 participants. Although the sample size is influenced by factors such as the number of variables and the size of the population, it is noted that a sample size greater than 30 and less than 500 may be sufficient for many studies (Büyükoztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2008). When the number of participants of the studies is analyzed in general, it is assessed that the sample numbers are sufficient.

An exploration of the variables associated with family functioning in studies of school-age children reveals a wide range of topics and mainly found significant relationships between the variables. Family dysfunctionality is found to be cause of negative aspects on most studies. Diversity on topics can be seen as an indicator that family functioning is effective in many areas. It can be seen that most studies relate to variables that can be considered negative, such as conduct problems, depression, suicide, anger, bullying, anxiety, delinquency, self-harm, substance use, and addiction. This finding may be due to the fact that the McMaster Family Functioning presents a more clinical model, or it may be due to the more problem-oriented approach of the researchers. In this context, research that adopts the positive psychology approach, which is becoming increasingly popular today, and examines the relationship between positive individual characteristics and family functioning may make significant contributions to the field. In addition, there is a limitation in studies on the psychological, social, cognitive, and emotional development of students. Since the importance of family on child development is known, it would be beneficial to conduct research on developmental areas in depth as well.

Given the growing body of research on family functioning, policymakers should consider investing in and promoting family support programs. These programs can provide parents with the skills and resources they need to create healthier family environments for their school-age children. As found in this research, there are many behavior problems related to family functionality. Implementing these programs in the early years of schooling will also be useful in preventing the growth of problems. In addition to the implementation of prevention programs, work can be done with the children themselves to improve their life skills, as well as with their families, taking into account the functionality of the family.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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Ethical Statement

The research was prepared in accordance with scientific ethical principles. The meta-analysis studies are exempt from ethics approval because data was retrieved and synthesized from already published studies.

Credit Author Statement

The author confirms that he had all responsibilities for the following: Conceptualization of the study and design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript.

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