

The Mediating Role of School Satisfaction in the Relationship between Positive Experiences at School and School Attachment

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Abstract

Due to its social and personal outcomes, the level of attainment of the objectives of fundamental education has always been a topic of global concern. Enhancing children's level of success in every discipline by assuring school attachment is one of the most essential factors in accomplishing the objectives of basic education. In this study, the influence of positive school experiences and school satisfaction on school attachment was investigated. In this context, the mediating effect of school satisfaction on the relationship between 3rd and 4th-grade primary school students' perceptions of positive experiences at school and their school attachment was examined. Using *the Positive Experiences at School Scale, the School Satisfaction Scale, and The School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents*, data were collected from 912 students enrolled in elementary school. The results indicated that positive school experiences had an effect on school attachment both directly and indirectly via the partial mediation effect of school satisfaction. Based on the findings, recommendations were formed.

Keywords: Attachment To School, Attachment to the Teacher, Attachment to Friends, Primary Education, Positive School Experience, School Satisfaction.

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Introduction

Text (Primary education is vital in acquiring essential life skills and establishing the building blocks of cognitive, social, and emotional development. Primary schools, where social life skills are developed (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2006), where children's capacity to recognize and perceive the world and the region in which they live is increased (Kızılcıaoğlu, 2006), and where scientific attitudes and behaviors are acquired (Yılmaz, 2007), are of great importance for both the individual and social development of children. In fact, UNICEF describes the significance of primary school as follows: *“Primary education forms the bedrock of development. It is in primary school that children learn foundational skills that prepare them for life, work and active citizenship.”*

Due to the aforementioned objectives, primary school is acknowledged globally as the foundational level of education that influences the quality of higher levels of education (Etor, Mbon, & Ekanem, 2013). Achieving these objectives in primary schools depends on children's commitment to school and their active and enthusiastic participation in all educational processes. Thus, the objectives and significance of primary school education are a basis for conducting this study on school attachment at the elementary level.

Existing literature demonstrates the positive impact of school engagement on students at various levels. Notably, research indicates that school engagement benefits academic performance and achievement (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Chase et al., 2014; Lee, 2014; Pehlivan & Özgenel, 2020; Wolohan, 2009). Furthermore, studies reveal a positive correlation between school engagement and academic aspirations (Koçak & Ay, 2020) and a negative correlation with academic procrastination behaviors (Erzen & Çıkrıkçı, 2018). Moreover, students with high levels of school engagement tend to possess elevated future expectations and self-esteem (Baş & Altun, 2020; Karababa, 2020). Additionally, there is evidence suggesting negative relationships between school engagement and adverse student behaviors such as dropout, burnout, depression, school delinquency, and violent tendencies (Li & Lerner, 2011; Özdemir, 2015; Robinson, 2016; Sağlam & İkiz, 2017; Wang, 2014).

It is evident that school attachment holds significant implications for students' educational experiences. While these effects may vary according to each level, they consistently yield positive outcomes. Research within the literature emphasizes the importance of enhancing the level of school attachment among primary school children. In fact, children's overall success and their motivation to pursue future educational paths are closely related to their level of school attachment. Therefore, the focal point of this study lies in identifying the factors that can enhance school attachment among primary school children, particularly investigating how positive experiences at school and school satisfaction may influence this attachment. Furthermore, since there is no research in the literature

simultaneously examining these three variables, so, this study can be valuable contribution to the existing literature.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate whether school satisfaction mediates the relationship between 3rd and 4th grade primary school students' perceptions of positive experiences at school and their level of school attachment. The study aims to determine the connections among students' perceptions of positive experiences at school, school satisfaction, and school attachment, while exploring the potential mediating role of school satisfaction. In this context, the research aimed to address the following questions:

- Do primary school students' perceptions of positive experiences at school have a significant relationship with their school satisfaction and school attachment?
- Does school satisfaction act as a mediating factor in the relationship between primary school students' perceptions of positive experiences at school and their level of school attachment?

Conceptual Framework

School Attachment

School attachment is a concept related to students' feeling of belonging to school (Osterman, 2000). It is explained by the willingness to actively participate in school activities and identification with the school (Finn, 1993; Finn & Voelkl, 1993); it is defined as a concept related to how involved or interested students are to their own learning process and how connected they are to their classrooms, institutions and each other (Axelson & Flick, 2010). In another definition, school attachment is defined as "The student's psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote." (Newman, Wehlage, & Laborn, 1992, 12).

School attachment is considered a protective factor that serves multiple developmental purposes, especially in terms of achieving high-performance outcomes (Savi, 2011). Given its multifaceted nature, the concept cannot be explained by a single definition; instead, it is approached through various indicators. In fact, the literature identifies several indicators of school attachment, including (i) academic performance and achievement, (ii) positive behaviors in the classroom, voluntary participation, and regular attendance in classroom activities, (iii) voluntary participation in extracurricular activities, (iv) positive interpersonal relationships, effective communication, cooperation, and support, and (v) a sense of belonging and positive attitudes towards school (Jimerson,

Campos & Greif, 2003). The multidimensional structure of school attachment necessitates its examination at cognitive, behavioral, and emotional levels in the literature.

Regarding academic motivation, cognitive engagement pertains to students assuming responsibility for their own learning processes and making a mental effort by employing diverse learning strategies. Within this form of engagement, students willingly strive to acquire the knowledge and skills imparted by their teachers. Behavioral engagement encompasses students' active involvement in classroom and extracurricular activities, adhering to classroom and school regulations, and fulfilling assigned tasks appropriately. Conversely, affective engagement involves students' sense of belonging to their school and their feelings towards their school, teachers, and peers (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). One classification for the dimensions of school attachment is "attachment to school, attachment to the teacher, and attachment to friends" (Savi, 2011).

Apart from its multidimensionality, another significant aspect of school attachment is its dynamic structure and potential for development through appropriate interventions. This implies that school attachment possesses a structure that is responsive to the student's environment and can constantly evolve under the influence of various factors and environmental conditions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). For instance, Finn (1993), in his model of school attachment, emphasizes the role of "the quality of educational process" in understanding school engagement, in addition to student characteristics. Similarly, Kırbaç (2019) suggests that democratic classroom management contributes to school engagement. Consequently, Abla and Fraumeni (2019) emphasized the continuous need to enhance all aspects of education and training processes in schools to either increase or decrease student engagement. Research further reveals that "quality of school life" is one of the crucial factors influencing school engagement, encompassing elements such as school management, teacher-student communication, student-student communication, instructional processes, in-school support, and social activities (Argon & İsmetoğlu, 2016; Baş & Altun, 2020; Dönmez, 2016). Furthermore, it is emphasized that the socio-emotional framework within the school serves as a crucial facilitator (Ali & Hassan, 2018). In a recent study conducted by Denizhan et al. (2023), factors at the school level that impact school attachment were identified as school administration, teacher quality, teaching methodologies, physical environment, and social activities. Based on these findings, it can be asserted that conducive conditions must be established to enhance school attachment to improve students' perceptions of positive school experiences and their overall satisfaction with the educational environment. The starting point of this study is the idea that perceptions of "school satisfaction" and "positive experiences at school" serve to influence school engagement.

School Satisfaction

School satisfaction is a subcomponent of life satisfaction, which is a part of subjective well-being according to existing literature (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Life satisfaction refers to an

individual's personal assessment of the degree to which their interests, needs, goals, and desires are fulfilled in their life (Frisch, 2000, p.24). Another definition characterizes life satisfaction as individuals' evaluation of their own lives, both cognitively and emotionally (Diener & Diener, 1996). In this context, school satisfaction can be defined as students' cognitive and emotional assessment of their quality of life within the school setting. Essentially, it reflects how satisfied students are with the opportunities, both material and moral, provided to them in school. Verkuyten and Thijs (2010) also associate this concept with students' perception and evaluation of the educational opportunities available to them, emphasizing the importance of identifying the factors necessary to ensure satisfaction.

Identifying the elements essential for ensuring school satisfaction and students' attainment of such satisfaction has positively affected their academic achievement, school adaptation, general well-being (Altunkum, Toğrul, & Çam, 2023), happiness (Gómez-Baya, 2021), subjective well-being (Gündoğan, 2022; Tian, Chen & Huebner, 2014), physical health, regular school attendance, and reduced inclination towards violence (Horanicova et al., 2022), hopefulness and life satisfaction (Yam & Kumcağız, 2020), perseverance and optimism (Telef, 2021), as well as school attachment (Kaplancı, 2018). These positive effects have accelerated research efforts focused on determining the factors influencing school satisfaction. Studies have demonstrated that school satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including the overall school climate (Coelho & Dell'Aglio, 2019; Daily et al., 2020), social support within the school environment (Ersoy, 2020), and peer relationships (Gempp & González-Carrasco, 2021). Hui and Sunb (2010) explored the factors impacting school satisfaction based on school-related factors, individual psychological states of students, and contextual factors. Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, and Patil (2003) evaluated these factors with the headings "*School social climate, classroom structures, goals, and practices, school organization, peer contexts, student academic ability, student mental health, family contexts.*" Consequently, it is clear that students can only experience satisfaction with school life when the necessary factors are established to fulfill their needs.

Positive Experiences at School

Educational researchers have shifted their attention towards positive psychology, leading them to prioritize the development of positive emotions rather than the negative ones like burnout, anxiety, and stress typically studied in traditional psychology research (Telef, 2016; 2021). Furthermore, instead of examining individual emotions, these studies now explore the combined impact of essential emotions in life (Wilkins, Boman, & Mergler, 2015). This concept, known as covitality, centers around four fundamental emotions that Furlong et al. (2013) identified as indicators of positive school experiences. According to them, the combined influence of "*gratitude, zest for life, optimism, and persistence*" resulting from positive school experiences promotes positive emotions in students.

Gratitude, which emerges as a reflection of positive experiences in school, is defined that individuals acknowledging and appreciating the positive situations they have been provided with (Park & Peterson, 2009). It involves being thankful for these circumstances and expressing gratitude towards those who have contributed, whether in material or spiritual terms, without expecting anything in return (Bono & Froh, 2009). From this definition, it becomes evident that building individual relationships plays a crucial role in developing gratitude. Zest for life, on the other hand, refers to the excitement and high energy individuals have towards various activities, lessons, projects, or studies in school, as well as the interactions and experiences associated with attending school. *Optimism* is another emotion generated by positive experiences. Carver, Scheier, and Segerstrom (2010) defined optimism as the state of having positive expectations for the future; they stated that with this emotion, students can develop positive expectations for the future and have a strong academic interest. The final emotional response in the positive experiences at school model is *persistence*, which means completing a task regardless of the obstacles and difficulties (Park & Peterson, 2009).

Numerous academic studies highlight the significance of providing students with positive experiences. In a particular study by Alsac (2019), positive school experiences were identified as significant predictors of school satisfaction. Additionally, Kösem (2019) revealed that positive perceptions regarding students' school experiences positively influence their school attachment, attendance, academic achievement, and subjective well-being. He also noted that developing positive experiences involves the active involvement of school administrators, teachers, and peer groups.

Method

This study investigated the relationships between students' perceptions of positive school experiences, satisfaction, and attachment was designed with the relational survey model. This study focused on the relationships between the variables of "positive experiences at school, school attachment and school satisfaction". The study analyzed the relationships between the variables using structural equation modeling (SEM). Relationships between variables were determined by the mediation test. Mediation tests are the calculation of the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Şimşek, 2007). In this study, the direct effect of positive experiences at school on school satisfaction and its indirect effect on school engagement were calculated. The researchers examined the structures that represent the relationships between the variables and the possibility of a mediating effect between students' school satisfaction, their perceptions of positive school experiences, and their school attachment.

Participants

The study was carried out among 3rd and 4th grade primary school students. A total of 912 students from 13 different primary schools participated in the data collection process. Table 1 presents detailed information regarding the characteristics of the study group.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the study group

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Female	475	52.1
	Male	437	47.9
<i>Grade</i>	3. Grade	411	45.1
	4. Grade	501	54.9
<i>Total</i>		912	

As the data presented in Table 1, the study included 52.1% female students and 47.9% male students. Among the participants, 411 (45.1%) were enrolled in the 3rd grade, while 501 (54.9%) were in the 4th grade at primary school.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, the measurement of students' perceptions of positive experiences at school was assessed using the Positive Experiences at School Scale, originally developed by Furlong et al. (2013) and adapted into Turkish by Telef (2016). Students' school satisfaction was evaluated using the School Satisfaction Scale, which was initially developed by Randolph et al. (2009) for children and later adapted by Telef (2014). To determine students' level of school attachment, the The School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents, initially developed by Hill (2005, as cited in Savi, 2011) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Savi (2011), was employed. The psychometric properties of the scales employed in the study are outlined as follows:

The Positive Experiences at School Scale

This scale was designed for primary school children, comprises four dimensions: Gratitude, Zest for Life, Optimism, and Persistence. It also consists of 14 items. During the adaptation process of the scale, a second-level confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using a five-point Likert scale. The results of the CFA: [$\chi^2/df= 2.46$, RMSEA= 0.04, SRMR= 0.03, GFI= 0.96, NFI= 0.95, RFI= 0.92, CFI= 0.96, IFI= 0.96]. The reliability coefficients for the scale were generally above 0.70, except for the optimism sub-dimension, which was reported to be at an acceptable level (Telef, 2016). In the context of this study, a validity analysis (CFA) was also performed for the scale, obtaining the following values: $\chi^2/df= 2.12$, RMSEA= 0.03, SRMR= 0.02, GFI= 0.98, NFI= 0.99, RFI= 0.98, CFI= 0.99, IFI= 0.99. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha values for each dimension were as follows: gratitude dimension (.73), zest for life dimension (.80), optimism dimension (.69), persistence dimension (.80), and for the entire scale, it was (.88). Based on these results, it was determined that the Positive Experiences at School Scale is a valid and reliable instrument suitable for use in this study (Kline, 2011).

The School Satisfaction Scale

This scale comprises a single dimension and consists of six items, utilizing a five-point Likert-type response format. The validity analyses conducted during the adaptation process confirmed that the scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool suitable for research purposes. The validity study of the scale (CFA) demonstrated the goodness-of-fit values as $\chi^2/sd= 3.45$, RMSEA= 0.06, GFI= 0.98, NFI= 0.99, RFI= 0.98, CFI= 0.99, IFI= 0.99. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .89 (Telef, 2014). In the present study, the CFA results indicated the following goodness-of-fit values: $\chi^2/sd= 4.8$, RMSEA= 0.06, SRMR= 0.02, GFI= 0.98, NFI= 0.99, RFI= 0.98, CFI= 0.99, IFI= 0.99. The internal consistency analysis for the scale's reliability demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .86. Based on these findings, it was determined that the scale is a valid and reliable instrument suitable for this study (Kline, 2011).

The School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents

It is a tool used to assess students' level of school attachment. It comprises 13 items organized into three dimensions: Attachment to school, attachment to teacher, and attachment to friends. The scale utilizes a five-point Likert-type response format. In a study evaluating the scale's validity and reliability, exploratory factor analysis revealed that the three-dimensional structure, in accord with Turkish culture, accounted for 58.69% of the variance. Reliability analysis, measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, found values of .82 for attachment to school, .74 for attachment to teacher, .71 for attachment to friends, and .84 for the entire scale (Savi, 2011). To establish the validity of the School Attachment Scale in the current study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The resulting values were as follows: $\chi^2/sd = 3.41$, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.03, GFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.98, RFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.99, and IFI = 0.99. Reliability calculations indicated Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of .84 for attachment to school, .80 for attachment to teacher, .80 for attachment to friends, and .90 for the entire scale. Based on the comprehensive analysis of these findings, it was determined that the scale exhibited both validity and reliability, rendering it suitable for use in this study (Kline, 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis

This research was conducted with primary school students in the 3rd and 4th grades. A total of 950 primary school students participated in the study after obtaining parental consent and student volunteers. The completion of the scales by the students took approximately 10-15 minutes. Before the analysis, missing data were identified, and outlier analyses were conducted. Consequently, a decision was made to utilize 912 pieces of data. The normal distribution of the data was assessed by evaluating kurtosis and skewness coefficients and analyzing scatter plots. The obtained values fell within the range of -1 and +1, indicating that the data exhibited a normal distribution. Confirmatory factor

analysis (CFA) was employed to establish the validity and reliability of each scale for the purposes of this research.

To determine the mediating role of school satisfaction in the relationship between the perception of positive experiences at school and school attachment, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed. Initially, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of all variables were computed, and multiple correlation analysis was conducted to assess the interrelationships between the variables. Preparatory analyses were performed before proceeding with the structural equation modeling. These analyses involved evaluating the measurement model and calculating values to address the issue of multicollinearity among independent variables. Notably, the Durbin-Watson coefficient was found to be below 2, the tolerance value exceeded 0.1, and the VIF value was below 10. Consequently, the correlation coefficients and the Durbin-Watson, tolerance, and VIF values indicated that there was no multicollinearity problem (Çokluk, 2010). Once the relevant prerequisites were fulfilled, the measurement model and the models shown in Figure 1 were tested.

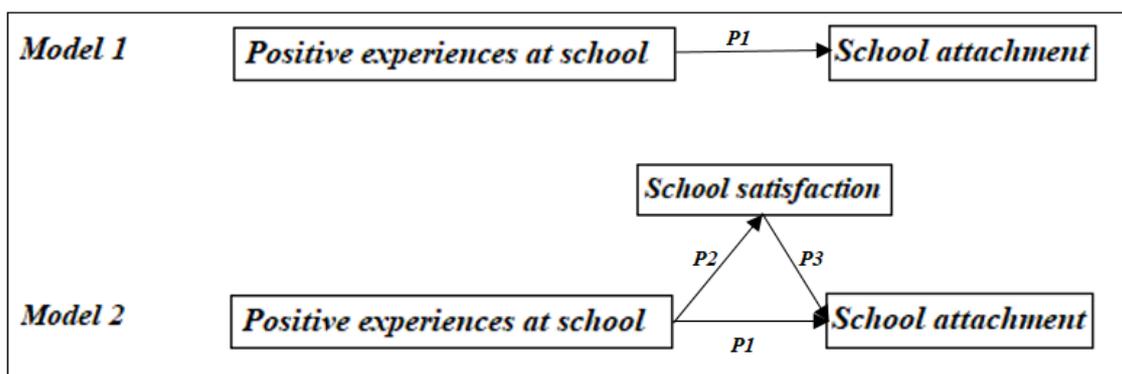


Figure 1. Research model

As shown in Figure 1, in order to determine the potential mediating effect of school satisfaction on the relationship between perceptions of positive experiences at school and school attachment, the structure (Model 1) that gives the path coefficient of P1 was first analyzed. Subsequently, the school satisfaction variable was added to the analysis and the structure (Model 2) was tested, providing values for P1, P2, and P3 collectively. The obtained values were then used to determine whether school satisfaction is a mediating factor in the connection between perceptions of positive experiences at school and school attachment. The evaluation also considered how the relationship coefficient between positive experiences at school and school attachment in the measurement model changed when the mediating variable was added to the model. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was conducted on the coefficients of model 1 and model 2. As stated by Şimşek (2007), one way to perform the mediation test is to first calculate the measurement model. Then, adding the mediator variable to the relationship between the dependent and independent variable and testing this model. The important thing here is that all paths are meaningful in the measurement model

and that the goodness of fit values are appropriate. The fit of the measurement model is a prerequisite for testing the mediation model. By applying Şimşek's (2007) criterion, this study examined the role of school satisfaction in mediating the relationship between positive experiences at school and school attachment. The values of the measurement model, which is a prerequisite for conducting the mediation test, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Values of the measurement model

<i>Measurement Model</i>	<i>Relation Coefficients Compliance Indices</i>
PEAS SA	.88*
PEAS SS	.96*
SS SA	.88*
χ^2	1809.052
df	484
χ^2 / df	3.73
RMSEA	.05
CFI	.91
TLI	.90
IFI	.91
SRMR	.04

(PEAS: Positive experience at school, SA: School attachment, SS: School satisfaction)

As seen in Table 2., the relations between the variables within the scope of the research are significant in the measurement model and the model's goodness-of-fit values are appropriate. In this case, the necessary prerequisite for conducting the mediation test has been met.

Findings

Based on the first research question of the study, the arithmetic mean and correlation coefficients of the variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients for the relationships between variables

	(\bar{X})	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Positive Sch.-Exp.	4.19	-	,729*	,879*	,762*	,783*	,795*	,715*	,687*	,552*	,628*
2. Gratitude	4.61		-	,552*	,482*	,455*	,661*	,653*	,666*	,449*	,603*
3. Zest for Life	3.75			-	,548*	,555*	,716*	,570*	,552*	,441*	,495*
4. Optimism	4.13				-	,437*	,618*	,605*	,570*	,521*	,468*
5. Persistence	4.36					-	,537*	,502*	,461*	,374*	,483*
6. <i>School Satisf.</i>	4.26						-	,748*	,743*	,574*	,634*
7. <i>School Attach.</i>	4.39							-	,889*	,864*	,835*
8. <i>School Attach.</i>	4.39								-	,625*	,698*
9. <i>Friend Attach.</i>	4.29									-	,537*
10. <i>Teacher Attach.</i>	4.51										-

N=912, *p < .01

According to the findings presented in Table 3, students' perceptions of positive experiences at school had a mean of \bar{X} =4.19. Among the different dimensions, the zest for life dimension had the

lowest mean of $\bar{X}=3.75$, while the gratitude dimension had the highest mean of $\bar{X}=4.61$. The mean score for students' school satisfaction was calculated as $\bar{X}=4.26$. Additionally, the mean score for primary school students' attachment to school was found to be $\bar{X}=3.58$. When examining the dimensions of attachment to school, it was observed that the lowest mean belonged to attachment to friends ($\bar{X}=4.29$), while the highest mean belonged to attachment to the teacher ($\bar{X}=4.51$).

Upon examining the correlation coefficients, it becomes evident that there exists a strong positive relationship between school attachment and the perception of positive experiences at school ($r_{se \times peas} = .715$; $p < .01$) as well as a significant positive correlation between school satisfaction ($r_{ss \times peas} = .748$; $p < .01$). When each dimension of school attachment is separately analyzed, it becomes apparent that the school satisfaction dimension consistently exhibits the strongest correlation with all aspects of attachment to school, including attachment to friends and attachment to the teacher [$(r_{se \times ss} = .748$; $p < .01$), $(r_{fe \times ss} = .574$; $p < .01$) $(r_{te \times ss} = .634$; $p < .01)$].

The corresponding goodness-of-fit values can be found in Table 4, which were tested models to address the main research question of the study.

Table 4. Structural paths, path coefficients and goodness of fit values

<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Regression Weights Compliance Indices</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Regression Weights Compliance Indices</i>
<i>PEAS</i> → <i>SA</i>	<i>.90*</i>	<i>PEAS</i> → <i>SA</i>	<i>.46*</i>
		<i>PEAS</i> → <i>SS</i>	<i>.96*</i>
		<i>SS</i> → <i>SA</i>	<i>.44*</i>
<i>χ²</i>	<i>1027.697</i>	<i>χ²</i>	<i>1809.052</i>
<i>df</i>	<i>315</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>484</i>
<i>χ² / df</i>	<i>3.26</i>	<i>χ² / df</i>	<i>3.73</i>
<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>.05</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>.05</i>
<i>CFI</i>	<i>.94</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>.91</i>
<i>TLI</i>	<i>.93</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>.90</i>
<i>IFI</i>	<i>.94</i>	<i>IFI</i>	<i>.91</i>
<i>SRMR</i>	<i>.04</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>.04</i>

* $p < .05$ (*PEAS*: Positive experience at school, *SA*: School attachment, *SS*: School satisfaction)

According to the findings presented in Table 4, the measurement model revealed significant relationships among the three variables. Specifically, a significant relationship coefficient of .88 ($p < .05$) was found between positive experiences at school and school attachment. In Model 1, a significant relationship was observed between positive experiences at school and school attachment, with a direct path coefficient of .90 ($p < .05$). The model exhibited a good fit when examining the goodness of fit values. In Model 2, another variable, school satisfaction, was added to the relationship between positive experiences at school and attachment to school. The direct path coefficient between positive experiences at school and attachment to school decreased from .90 to .46. It was determined that the goodness of fit values of Model 2 also exhibited a good fit. When the measurement model and the mediation model are evaluated as a whole, it was determined that school satisfaction demonstrated

a “partial mediation effect” in the relationship between positive experiences at school and attachment to school. In other words, the findings indicated that positive experiences at school had both a direct impact and an indirect impact on attachment to school through the partial mediation effect of school satisfaction.

Discussion

This study investigated the mediating role of school satisfaction between the perceptions of positive experiences at school and attachment to school among 3rd and 4th-grade primary school students. The research initially described the averages and relationships of the variables, followed by testing the mediation model and evaluating the obtained findings.

The analysis results reveal that there are high-level positive relationships between attachment to school, positive experiences at school, and school satisfaction. However, when examining the relationships between specific dimensions of positive experiences at school and attachment to school separately, it becomes evident that the gratitude dimension exhibits the highest correlation, followed by optimism, zest for life, and persistence dimensions, respectively. The fulfillment of the prerequisite for significant relationships between variables is observed in order to test the mediation model. These high-level relationships underscore the significance of offering positive experiences at school and enhancing school satisfaction among primary school children to foster their attachment to school. Achieving this requires creating an intellectually, emotionally, and socially appealing school environment for children. This involves employing age-appropriate and diverse teaching methods and techniques that generate excitement and enthusiasm among students. Özdemir and Sezgin (2011) stressed the importance of a positive learning environment, as it positively impacts attachment to school and satisfaction. When students’ learning needs are addressed, they have positive experiences at school and exhibit high-level school attachment. Notably, students who demonstrate high-level school attachment also tend to have academic success (Blum, 2005).

In the literature, it has been mentioned that attachment to school can be enhanced through intervention and by improving the surrounding conditions for children (Finn, 1993; Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). However, it is crucial to conduct these interventions in accordance with current circumstances and continually update them to address the evolving needs of children. In simpler terms, creating a school environment that adapts to the changing needs of children is essential for fostering positive experiences and ensuring their satisfaction with school. Without such an environment, it seems challenging to maintain children’s connection to school in today’s ever-changing and evolving world. Abla and Fraumeni (2019, 3) underscore this notion by stating, “Attachment may be malleable, but it can also be fleeting... People change, and students, by and large, feel less connected with school the longer they’re there.”

The mediation analysis conducted in this study revealed a “partial mediation effect” of school satisfaction in the relationship between positive experiences at school and attachment to school. Accordingly, the results indicated that primary school students’ positive experiences at school played a role in their attachment to school both directly and indirectly through their school satisfaction. This finding suggests the significance of primary school children’s fostering positive emotions and experiences in their school life. But, it is crucial to provide students with positive experiences that cultivate gratitude, enthusiasm for life, optimism, and persistence. Moreover, the concept of “synergistic effect together,” referred to as covitality in the literature, offers a valuable framework for understanding the enhancement of subjective well-being (Wilkins, Boman, & Mergler, 2015).

In the context of Covitality, a noteworthy detail highlighted in the research findings is that the dimension with the lowest mean score was the zest for life, followed by optimism. Alsaç (2019) also observed similar results when examining positive experiences among primary school students. Likewise, Kösem (2019) found that the zest for life dimension had the lowest average score in his study with middle school students. These consistent findings across multiple studies suggest that the lower zest for life at school, compared to other dimensions, should be considered by educational institutions. Notably, zest for life at school was found to be higher among primary school students compared to other dimensions. The key factor influencing zest for life at school is the school climate, as supported by studies conducted by Şahin & Atbaşı (2020), Şişman & Turan (2004), and Wei (2003). Another significant finding that should be considered in relation to schools is that primary school students have the second lowest mean in the optimism dimension. This situation regarding optimism can be linked to the happiness of primary school students at school. Those who experience happiness at school tend to hold positive attitudes towards it (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Huebner & Gilman, 2006; Özdemir, Yılmaz-Hiğde, & Sağkal, 2021). Establishing a positive school climate that is needed for the zest for life and optimism, is crucial to achieve a desired synergistic effect. Indeed, Wilkins, Boman, and Mergler (2015) emphasize the emergence of covitality through the interaction of strengths, highlighting the importance of each emotion. Furthermore, they suggest that considering these emotions as a whole provides valuable information to schools regarding intervention and prevention programs.

When examining the individual pathways in the mediation model, the initial observation reveals that the positive experiences of elementary school students within their school environment have a positive impact on their level of attachment to school. Previous research has highlighted various factors that contribute to school engagement, such as the material and spiritual aspects associated with the quality of school life (Argon & İsmetoğlu, 2016; Baş & Altun, 2020). Furthermore, Abla and Fraumeni (2019) emphasized the importance of establishing effective, strong, and genuine communication and interaction with students, striking a balance between the school’s structure and student autonomy, integrating technology to engage today’s children, fulfilling their

sense of curiosity, fostering student motivation, and connecting subjects with the outside world to generate excitement for learning. According to Kırbaç (2019), having a democratic classroom management system that fosters positive experiences in school is crucial for enhancing school engagement. These aspects contribute to students' sense of appreciation, gratitude, optimism, perseverance, and zest for life, consequently promoting their active involvement in school activities. In simpler terms, favorable school experiences are vital in maintaining students' motivation to attend school, fostering positive attitudes toward their educational environment, and establishing a stronger sense of connection to their schools. In fact, Ali and Hassan (2018) suggest that the socio-emotional context of students is among the key factors influencing their level of engagement. Therefore, students' attachment or detachment to their schools is determined by their perceptions of the socio-emotional environment and the positive experiences it offers them.

The second pathway in the model suggests that positive experiences encountered at school contribute to increased levels of school satisfaction. Hui and Sung (2010) discovered that factors such as teacher support and academic performance are significant predictors of school satisfaction. Furthermore, promoting effective peer relationships through the efforts of teachers and administrators (Gempp & González-Carrasco, 2021) and implementing a goal-oriented and activity-based educational approach are recognized as key elements in fostering student satisfaction with their schools (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003). Essentially, all these factors that influence school satisfaction are positive life experiences provided for students at school. Therefore, it becomes crucial for teachers and school administrators to engage in activities that enhance students' positive emotions and to structure the educational process based on providing positive experiences.

Support from teachers plays a crucial role in fostering positive emotions and satisfaction among primary school children. In the primary school setting, teachers serve as role models who are respected and admired, making their support indispensable. Additionally, fostering a fun environment that encourages peer interaction, socialization, and acquiring basic social skills further contributes to a positive school experience. Alongside this, children at this stage also enjoy receiving positive reinforcement for academic performance. This enhances children's sense of gratitude towards their teachers and peers, leading to an optimistic outlook on their future. Moreover, when teachers maintain high expectations for their students and adopt an encouraging approach to classroom management, students can demonstrate persistence in fulfilling their responsibilities. Indeed, for primary school children, teachers' perspectives about themselves have great importance for them. Moreover, children's zest for life can enhance with their teachers' offerings of exciting experiences. Specifically, in the case of primary school children, engaging them in play-based activities tailored to their age and developmental stage, along with harnessing the healing potential of play, can increase their enthusiasm and motivation for learning, thereby fostering satisfaction with their school experience (Şimşek, Araz, & Yıldız, 2016; Tuğrul, 2017; Angın & Çetinkaya, 2021). By synergistically combining these factors,

children can be satisfied with their schools. Consequently, to ensure primary school children's satisfaction with their educational environment, providing them with positive school experiences and actively facilitating positive emotions is crucial. This is because school satisfaction is important not only for school attachment but also for them to benefit from their fundamental right to education. Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) emphasize the vital role of school satisfaction in enhancing children's overall quality of life, emphasizing its status as a fundamental educational right.

The third pathway in the model indicates that school satisfaction plays a role in enhancing school attachment. Consequently, if school administrator aims to promote school attachment, they should establish a social school climate (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003; Coelho & Dell'Aglio, 2019; Daily et al., 2020) and foster a school culture that fosters mutual social support (Ersoy, 2020). Furthermore, Denizhan et al. (2023) identified additional factors that contribute to increased school attachment, which include: (i) effective management and instructional leadership within the school, (ii) the physical conditions of the school, encompassing learning opportunities, health, nutrition, and safety, (iii) classroom structure with appropriate attendance policies, (iv) effective teachers possessing instructional leader characteristics, (v) integration of subjects taught with real-life applications, (vi) utilization of diverse teaching methods and techniques, and (vii) participation in extracurricular social activities. All these efforts aim to provide students' satisfaction with the school and with the opportunities they are offered. Accordingly, they can exhibit cognitive, affective, and behavioral dedication to their educational institutions, which is the key factor for fostering their attachment with their schools. Moreover, benefiting from a place and being satisfied with the opportunities offered is a fundamental requirement for developing an attachment to that particular setting. This principle applies equally to children.

When assessing the model as a whole, it becomes evident that positive experiences at school improve school attachment both directly and indirectly by increasing school satisfaction. This observation highlights the need for a comprehensive perspective when examining school engagement. As a matter of fact, school engagement is a multifaceted concept that is influenced by various individual and environmental factors and requires a holistic evaluation and the utilization of diverse developmental resources (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). Hence, educators and administrators who aims to enhance students' school attachment should addresses both individual and organizational aspects of attachment, while evaluating the factors that contribute to increased attachment within the system's framework. The fact that all the paths were found significant in this study underscores the insufficiency of one-sided perspectives when attempting to explain the concept of school attachment. Furthermore, it is crucial to take into account various factors such as the students' school and family environment, their unique interests and needs stemming from individual differences, as well as their age and developmental stages. Only by considering these elements, students can develop a positive

perception of school life, experience satisfaction with their educational journey, and consequently form a strong attachment to the school.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this research, investigating the mediating role of school satisfaction in the relationship between positive experiences at school and school attachment demonstrated two important findings. Firstly, positive experiences at school positively influence school attachment by enhancing school satisfaction. Secondly, positive experiences at school directly impact school attachment as well. Consequently, teachers and administrators should identify appropriate strategies tailored to primary school students' age and developmental stage to foster positive school experiences. Similarly, it is crucial to identify the factors specific to each school's context and student needs, which can enhance school satisfaction among primary school students. To enhance the satisfaction of primary school students, there are several actions that educational administrators and teachers can take. Firstly, it is crucial to ensure that the school's physical structure, landscaping, and learning environments align with child-friendly principles. The presence of appropriately-designed playgrounds is essential for students' school satisfaction. Playgrounds serve as a key factor that establishes a connection between primary school children and their school, thereby contributing to overall satisfaction. Another important factor to consider is the ergonomic design and suitability of the school's educational spaces for academic activities. Primary school classrooms should be spacious, and the inclusion of modular desks is highly recommended. Creating an environment that supports interactive learning through in-class play and drama activities is also vital for promoting students' satisfaction with their school.

There are various ways to enhance positive experiences at school, extending beyond the options mentioned. It is crucial to plan activities outside of the classroom and school setting to promote education and training. This can include organizing visits to museums, engaging in study and reading sessions at both the school and public libraries, learning from professionals and skilled individuals, and participating in hands-on workshops for crafts and other practical skills.

The main factor of primary school students' satisfaction with their school experience lies in their classroom teacher. One of the most pivotal opportunities in a primary school student's life is having a competent and compassionate teacher. The teacher's attitude, serving as the principal factor that influences the student's positive emotions towards both school and life, is an issue recognized by all stakeholders involved in education.

Quantitative methods were employed in this study to examine the relationships between variables based on data collected through measurement tools. Given that contextual factors and student characteristics impact perceptions of positive school experience, school satisfaction, and school attachment, conducting qualitative studies involving students from diverse backgrounds would be

beneficial. By conducting context-specific investigations, valuable insights into the development of these three variables can be gained.

Policy Implications

Primary education is a the level that the foundations of students' cognitive, social and affective development are provided. In other words, it is vital in establishing the building blocks of essential life skills. In this respect, it is of great importance in terms of the development of the country and the externalities of education, and is largely carried out by the states. For this reason, different educational policies for primary education processes are of great importance in general educational policies.

The findings of this research provided various suggestions for policy decisions to increase students' school attachment in basic education. Because school attachment positively affects students' academic achievement (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Chase et al, 2014; Lee, 2014; Pehlivan & Özgenel, 2020; Wolohan, 2009); and it reduces negative student behaviors such as dropping out of school, burnout, depression, and violence at school (Li & Lerner, 2011; Özdemir, 2015; Robinson, 2016; Sağlam & İkiz, 2017; Wang, 2014). This situation indicates that measures should be taken to increase school attachment in primary education for education politicians.

According to the research findings, one of the important features that will increase school attachment is to provide positive experiences at school. One of the effective ways of this is to improve the quality of school life (Argon & İsmetoğlu, 2016; Baş & Altun, 2020) and to strengthen the material, sociological and psychological elements in school. In this respect, it is of great importance to implement educational policies regarding the development of human and material resources of all schools, the enrichment of all schools in terms of opportunities offered to students, and the provision of exciting experiences to students in the course content. In addition, policies regarding supporting the technological infrastructure in all schools and integrating technology into education-teaching processes will also be effective in providing positive experiences at school. As a matter of fact, Abla and Fraumeni (2019) emphasized the importance of ensuring technology integration at school and satisfying students' sense of curiosity and they emphasized that course topics should be created in a way that makes learning exciting for students.

Another factor supporting school attachment within the scope of the research was determined as the development of school satisfaction. Studies show that one of the important factors that ensure students' satisfaction with school is teacher support (Hui & Sung, 2010). However, attention is drawn to the importance of teachers and school leaders who can keep peer relationships strong (Gempp & González-Carrasco, 2021). It is of great importance that teachers carry out an effective classroom management and that leaders maintain a successful school management in terms of ensuring school satisfaction of students. In this respect, it is also important to develop and update policies related to the training and in-service training of human resources.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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