The effectiveness of the psychoeducation program developed to increase school attachment

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the results of the psychoeducational group counseling program which is prepared to increase the students' attachment to school. With this purpose in mind, the study tries to seek an answer to the question: "Is the psychoeducational group counseling program prepared to increase the 4th-grade primary school students' school attachment effective in increasing their school attachment?" The sample of the study consisted of 10 students in a primary school in Şahinbey town of Gaziantep city in the 2018-2019 school year. The results show that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the students who attended the school attachment scale. Based on these results, it can be said that the psychoeducational program, which was established to increase the student's school attachment, has a significant effect on increasing the school attachment levels of the students in the experimental group.

Keywords: primary school; psychoeducational; school attachment; students.

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1. Introduction

With its certain responsibilities that it has to fulfill, the school is an institution that makes a great contribution to our socialization. These responsibilities are making sure individuals who are adjusted to society are raised, teaching certain learning patterns, and contributing to the provision of emotional needs (making friends, problem-solving, conflict resolution, etc.) (Yavuzer, 2002; de Sousa & da Costa Padovani 2021). For students, school is the place where most of their day is spent and, in this sense, it has a central place in their lives (Kızmaz, 2006). The school also fends them off from many risk factors. It helps their behavior to be more adjustable with society, makes them learn social rules and adjustment, and increases healthy behaviors (Nutbeam et al., 1993). Family, school, peers, and society are important socialization units to which children are attached (Catalano et al., 2004). Students feel a belonging to their school is possible in a positive and supportive school environment which leads to better school governance and development of the school (Fortus & Touitou 2021; Mayes 2020; Marangell & Baik 2022). It is very difficult for individuals to feel comfortable and realize themselves when they are not happy (Roeser & Eccles, 1998). In this sense, it is necessary to pay attention to the feeling of belonging and having an attachment to the school the students go to.

School attachment is a basic psychological need. It involves students' belief that they are a member of the school, thus they are valuable and respected (Osterman, 2000). School attachment refers to an approach that includes students' belief in value and competence towards school activities, being in harmony with all the school staff, and students' learning motivations and extracurricular activities (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). While Maddox and Prinz (2003) defined school attachment as students' feeling of belonging to the school, feeling pride about their school, and feeling safe while at school; Mengi (2011) listed various emotions and behaviors in association with school attachment such as feeling positive about school, forming positive associations about education, feeling of belonging to the school, developing positive relationships with school staff and other students, attending school, taking part in decisions in the classroom, and allocating time to school work. School attachment has three dimensions, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Jimerson et al., 2003). The behavioral dimension refers to students' participation in academic and social activities in schools, whereas the affective dimension involves students' positive and negative reactions towards their teachers, classmates, and school and the cognitive dimension refers to students' flexible approach to problem-solving, their feeling of desire and their ability to use coping strategies in the face of negative situations (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The studies in the literature on students' levels of school attachment have been mostly relational. In schools where students with high levels of school attachment are present, aggression is less common, and students' motivation, achievement, and self-confidence increase (Maddox & Prinz, 2003). School attachment is related to the well-being of children and adolescents (Savi, 2011). Low-attached students have lower motivation to study and lower interest in the course. According to Cemalcılar (2010), students with high school attachment form more positive relationships with their teachers and friends and have higher self-esteem and life satisfaction. There are significant associations between peer support, friend relationships, positive classroom climate, school attachment, and school satisfaction (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Ramazan et al., 2023; Simpkins et al., 2020). Positive peer relationships also increase students' self-esteem, school achievement, motivation, attendance, and school adjustment (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008; Sidelinger & BoothButterfield, 2010; Crisol-Moya et al., 2022). Another study argued that students with high school attachment adjusted to school rules better (Kuş & Karatekin, 2009). In the literature, no experimental study on school attachment was found as of date. Thus, there is a need for an up-to-date and original psychoeducation program to increase students' school attachment.

1.1. Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to assess the results of the psychoeducation program developed to increase students' school attachment. In line with this purpose, the answer to the question "Is the

psychoeducation program aimed at increasing 4th-grade students' school attachment effective in increasing students' school attachment?" was sought. To find the answer to the study problem, the sub-problem of "Is there a significant difference between students' school attachment pretest scores and their posttest scores after the psychoeducation activity?" was developed.

1.2. Study Significance

In today's education system, the concept of school attachment is a significant issue that has many effects on elementary school students' love for school, their satisfaction with their time spent at school, their ability to communicate positively with their friends, teachers, and school personnel, their ability to adjust to school rules, etc. In this respect, it would be beneficial to examine the developmental results of school attachment on 4th-grade students and consider it among the protective factors in preventive studies for elementary school children in terms of psychological counseling and guidance services. In the direction of this purpose, at the end of the study, the effectiveness of the program developed to increase school attachment in students will be revealed.

2. Materials and method

The study employed a quasi-experimental design. The psychoeducation program developed to increase students' school attachment was implemented and assessed. The study was conducted according to a one-group pretest and posttest design (Table 1).

Table 1
One-Group Pretest, Posttest Design

	Pretest	Implementation	Posttest
Experimental Group	S1	Group Guidance Program Implementation	S2

In line with the one-group pretest and posttest design, the School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents was administered to the study sample as a pretest. For the psychoeducation program for school attachment to achieve its purpose, students with low school attachment must participate in the study. For this reason, the students who received the lowest scores on the scale were selected as participants. Accordingly, the study participants were selected using the purposive sampling method. Afterward, the psychoeducation program developed to increase school attachment was implemented. The School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents was also administered as a posttest after the experiment.

2.1. Participants

The study group consisted of 20 students from Emine-Fevzi Uslu Elementary School located in the Şahinbey district of Gaziantep. Of these students, 10 of those who scored lower than the total average score were selected for the experimental group. The remaining 10 students were included in the control group. The experimental group consisted of five (X=50.00) female students and five (X=50.00) male students. The participants' ages were 10. Since the students in the study group were young, the number of students in the group was limited to 10 to carry out the activities more efficiently. All the participants were elementary school 4th graders.

2.2. Ethics

The participants in this study volunteered for participation, in accordance with all ethical considerations. In addition, permissions from the appropriate authorities were sought.

2.3. Data collection tools

This section includes the Demographic Information Form developed to obtain participants' demographic information, the School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents adapted to Turkish by Savi (2011), and the information about the validity and reliability of the measurement tools used in the criterion-related validity study.

School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents: Developed by Hill & Werner (2006) and originally named as School Attachment Scale (SAS), the scale was adapted into Turkish by Savi (2011). Item-test correlation made to calculate the correlation of the scale items with the total score revealed that the relationship between the items and the total score was between 0.66 and 0.85. The scale items consisted of three factors explaining 58.69% of the total variance. Items 4 and 14, which had low common variance and were found to decrease the scale's internal consistency, were removed from the scale. For this reason, while there are 15 items in the original scale, the final version of the scale consists of 13 items. Three scale sub-dimensions are Attachment to School, Attachment to Teacher, and Attachment to Friend. The test-retest reliability coefficient is 0.85 for the whole scale, and the split-half reliability is .78. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale. A high score on the scale indicates high school attachment. The score that can be obtained from the scale varies between 13 and 65 (Savi, 2011).

2.4. Data Analysis

In the study, for demographic information, descriptive analysis results were reported. Also, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for related measurements was performed to compare participants' satisfaction scale pretest and posttest scores within the group. The reason for using this test was to determine the direction and size of the difference in the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group and whether the difference, if any, was significant.

2.5. Procedure

After the participating students were determined, parental permissions regarding their participation in the psychoeducation work one period a week were taken. After the necessary permissions, psychoeducation program activities developed by the researcher were applied to the students in the study sample for six weeks in 40-minute sessions once a week. The program consisted of topics such as communication, relationships with friends, recognizing and expressing emotions, developing empathy towards their teacher, creating a sense of responsibility, and expressing their feelings and thoughts about the acquired skills. In general, the aims of the program were realizing the right ways of communication, the importance of the concept of friendship, their responsibilities, positive and negative emotions, developing empathy for their teacher, and expressing their feelings and thoughts about the acquired skills.

Table 2

School Attachment Psychoeducation Program

Session	Learning Objective	Activity
1st Session	Recognizes the right ways of communication	Introduction, Target Setting, and Understanding Communication Ways
2nd Session	Understands the importance of the concept of friendship	I Love My Friends
3rd Session	Realizes his/her responsibilities	I Know My Responsibilities
4th Session	Recognizes positive and negative emotions	World of Emotions
5th Session	Develops empathy for their teacher	My Teacher, My Dear Teacher
6th Session	Realizes his/her feelings and thoughts about the acquired skills	Time to Say Goodbye

In the first session, the members were met. In the meeting activity, the group members introduced themselves by giving various information about themselves. Afterward, it was explained to the group members that the group aimed to increase their school attachment by ensuring that the members were happy in their school life and learning processes and that they liked the school. Information about how the group process would work was also given. Then, the rules to be followed in the group were determined with the participation of its members. While determining the rules, special attention was paid to the issues of confidentiality, attendance to sessions being on time, listening to each other and not interrupting, not fighting, and behaving respectfully. Next, the concepts

of communication and respect for differences were discussed. Later, worksheets with speech bubbles on them were distributed to the group members, allowing each group member to talk in turn about whether there were any communication mistakes on the speech bubbles and what should be in the bubbles instead of the mistakes. Finally, the session was evaluated and concluded by stating that they should have positive communication with their classmates afterward and they would be sharing their experiences with the group in the next session.

In the second session, for them to understand the importance of face-to-face communication, as a warm-up game, the group members first talked to each other face-to-face and later they talked to each other by turning their backs to each other. They were asked how they felt in both situations. Next, the concept of friendship was discussed, and the group members were asked what comes to their minds when hear the word friendship and the characteristics of their closest friends. Then, a sample scenario was read to the group members and they were asked what were the mistakes in the scenario. Afterward, each group member selected a card with a similar example to the scenario written on it from a basket. They role-played how the scenario on the card would turn out positively and negatively. After the session was evaluated, the group members were given homework about showing their two friends who were arguing this week the wrong ways of communication and the right ways of communication so that they do not harm their friendship.

The third session aimed to make students realize the importance of responsibility. The activity started by motivating students with a word formation game consisting of the letters of the word "responsibility". Then, they were asked what responsibility means and what are the responsibilities. Small note papers were distributed to the students. They wrote down the responsibilities they had the most difficulty in doing while they were at school, and later they folded and put them in a box. Next, the cards drawn were read in order and the students discussed what could be done for the responsibilities that they had difficulty in doing at school. In the end, they were instructed to tear up the cards they wrote these responsibilities. While they were tearing the cards, they were asked to think that they would no longer be afraid of that responsibility and that they could do it now. Afterward, the students evaluated the session. In the end, they were told that they would be sharing in the next session how they felt when they fulfilled these responsibilities, they normally had difficulty in the next week.

The fourth session started with a warm-up game to raise group members' awareness about emotions. Then, brief information was given on emotions and their importance, and the emotion cards to be used in the activity were introduced. After all the emotions were introduced, sample situations were read and the group members were asked to pick up the card of the emotion they might feel when faced with these situations. When each situation was read, the members picked up the emotion card that might represent that emotion. After all the situations were discussed, the members were asked to divide their emotion cards into two positive and negative emotions and to choose the negative emotion they had experienced the most.

In the fifth session, students were asked what characteristics they wanted a school to have. They were specifically asked how they want their teachers to be, and how they want the physical environment to be in the school. Then, the teacher's duties at school were discussed. The researcher asked if they knew the concept of empathy. Next, the concept of empathy is explained and Appendix 1 (Imagine being a teacher) was distributed to all group members. Group members were asked to write in sentences their feelings and thoughts in Appendix 1, respectively, and share. In the end, the researcher wanted students to think about an unforgettable memory they had with their teacher at home to share in the next session.

In the sixth and last session, small papers were distributed to the group members for them to share their feelings about the group process. They were asked to write down their feelings and thoughts about the group process. The students shared their written thoughts with the group and the leader explained her feelings and thoughts about the group process to the members. After the

goodbyes and good wishes, the School Satisfaction Scale for Children was administered again to determine the effectiveness of the program.

3. Results

In line with the study purpose, the School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents was administered to the participants as a pretest and posttest to determine whether the program developed significantly increased school attachment. The pretest and posttest results are given below.

Table 3
Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group Students

	N	$\overline{X}$	Ss	Lowest	Highest
Pretest	10	39.50	4.25	34	46
Posttest	10	51.60	7.21	43	65

*Based on Negative Ranks

As seen in Table 3, the pretest mean score was 39.50, whereas the post-test mean score was 51.60. While the lowest score in the pretest was 34, the highest score was 46. The lowest score from the posttest was 43, while the highest score was 65.

Table 4
Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control Group Students

	N	$\overline{X}$	Ss	Lowest	Highest
Pretest	10	53.5	2.95	50	59
Posttest	10	54.1	3.10	50	60

* Based on Negative Ranks

As seen in Table 4, the pretest mean score of the control group was 53.5, whereas the post-test mean score was 54.10. While the lowest score in the pretest was 50, the highest score was 59. The lowest score from the posttest was 50, while the highest score was 60.

Table 5
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the Experimental Group's School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents Scores Before and After the Experiment

Posttest Pretest	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	P
Negative Ranks	0	.00	.00	2.810*	.005
Positive Ranks	10	5.50	55.00		
Ties	0				

* Based on Negative Ranks

Table 6
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the Control Group's School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents Scores Before and After the Experiment

Posttest Pretest	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	P
Negative Ranks	5	4.10	20.50	-.238	.812
Positive Ranks	4	6.13	24.50		
Ties	1				

* Based on Negative Ranks

As seen in Tables 5 and 6, according to the study results, there was a significant difference between the participating students' Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents pretest and posttest scores scale (z =2.810, p<.05). Considering the rank totals of the score difference, the difference was in favor of the positive ranks, that is the posttest scores. According to these results, the psychoeducation program developed to increase students' school attachment had a significant effect on the experimental group students' school attachment levels.

4. Discussion

The study results revealed that the psychoeducation program developed to increase school attachment levels had a significant effect on elementary school 4th-grade students' school attachment. McNeely et al., (2002) state that to ensure individuals' attachment to an institution, it is necessary to establish their attachment to other people. Also, Marks (2002) determined that students who receive support from their friends in the classroom have a high level of school attachment. Based on this research, it can be interpreted that having good relationships with other students will positively affect the student's school attachment. It is expected that students who understand the concept of friendship and have the ability to make friends will be more attached to their school and classroom. Firestone & Rosenblum (1988) expressed that students with low school attachment exhibit attendance and behavioral problems and have poor academic achievement. Similarly, Fin and Rock (1997) put forth a positive relationship between school attachment and educational outcomes such as academic achievement and school attendance. In addition, Roeser et al., (1996) stated that high school attachment increases academic achievement. Based on these studies, it can be said that the academic achievement of students who are responsible and fulfill the duties expected of them will increase, thus their school attachment will be positively affected. Students' first behavioral attachment at school is affected by their relationship with their teacher (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Mengi (2011) argued that the perceived social support from the teacher affects the students' school attachment positively. In parallel, Osterman (2000) and Chang & Hall (2022) suggested that feeling a sense of trust in the teacher will have a positive effect on students' attachment levels. In addition, Marks (2000) suggested that students who cannot establish a positive relationship with their teachers and cannot receive support may have low school attachment, thus their probability of dropping out will increase. These findings reveal the effect of the level of relationship established between the teacher and the students on students' school attachment. Blum (2005) stated that students with high school attachments are less likely to display negative behaviors. Similarly, Hallinan (2008) found that students who receive praise from their teachers and feel respected are more attached to school than students who do not.

5. Conclusion

The study is limited to 20 students who were 4th graders during the 2018-2019 academic year. Also, the study is limited to the psychoeducation activities developed to increase school attachment. In the study, pretest and posttest information was collected by using the School Attachment Scale for Children and Adolescents. The study findings concluded that psychoeducation activities developed to increase school attachment had a positive effect on students' school attachment. This psychoeducation program, which was designed to increase students' school attachment levels, can be implemented by school psychological counselors to increase school attachment of students with low attachment levels. It can help to have more interaction with students with low school attachment.

There are some limitations in the study. Since there was no cut-off score in the measurement tool used in the study, while determining the students with low school attachment, students with a total score below the mean were included in the study. Therefore, school attachment scores may vary in future studies. In addition, since the study is limited to elementary school 4th-grade students, a psychoeducation program can be developed for preschool and high school students in the future to increase their school attachment. Psychoeducation programs designed to increase school attachment can be developed for students at different levels, and comparisons can be made.

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