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## **Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială**

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

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Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2015, vol. 48, pp. 164-182

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Published by:

Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA

is indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters - Social Sciences Citation Index

(Sociology and Social Work Domains)



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# The Investigation of Primary School Students' Perception of Quality of School Life and Sense of Belonging by Different Variables

Ramin ALIYEV<sup>1</sup>, Erhan TUNC<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess whether the perception of quality of school life and sense of school belonging to differs in public and private primary school students by school type, gender, grade level, family socio-economic status and parental education level. The participants of the study are composed of sixth, seventh, and eight grade students in public and private primary schools in the Province of Gaziantep during the 2011-2012 academic years. The participant sample included 650 students from nine school districts in the city of Sahinbey and Sehitkamil. The data was collected through the use of a personal information form prepared by the researcher, Quality of School Life Scale (QSLs), and School Sense of Belonging Scale (SSBS). The data analysis was done through descriptive statistics, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). According to the data analysis, while QSLs average sub-scale ranged from 3.13 to 3.91, the average total scores were 3.52. In terms of school type variable; QSLs subscale scores of the student-to-student communication and feelings of rejection in students who attended public school were significant; while teacher-to-student, feelings for school and sense of school belonging mean scores significantly differed in students who attended private schools. In terms of gender differences, the sense of school belonging and SSBS total scores significantly differed in favor of female students and feelings toward school significantly differed in favor of male students. As a result of the research, we can state that because there were significant differences between the different variables of school type, gender, and parents' educational levels; the quality of school life and sense of school belonging can be affected by these variables.

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*Keywords:* quality of school life, sense of school belonging, perception, emotional connections

## **Introduction**

Sense of belonging of primary school students to their group mainly depends on being approved and accepted by the group and the feeling of being a precious member of the group. Need for belonging which is regarded to be one of the fundamental needs of human being since the early years of life corresponds to the need of love. Need for belonging has a significant place among identity seek and identity needs which emerge in adolescence period and identity needs. Adaptation of an individual to the society is based on the satisfaction level of the need for belonging.

The arrangement of education environment to meet need for belonging of the adolescent defines the quality of school life. Leonard (2002) defines quality of school life as the synthesis between positive and negative experiences in certain fields of school life and other feelings and reports that fundamental indicators of quality of school life refer to stress and satisfaction of teachers and students in these certain fields. Quality of school life refers to the quality experienced by students in education places where they feel safe, good and motivated. According to Karatzias, Papadioti Athanasiou, Power and Swanson (2001), quality of school life is one of the general well-being indicators of children and can be considered as a general well being which is a result of adaptation of students to school life and their integration with this environment. Integration of people with the environment which they take place in is associated with the level of sense of belonging to this environment. According to Alantar and Maner (2008), the attachment theory explains the tendency for establishing more solid emotional connections with others and emotional problems such as anxiety, nerve, depression which develop during undesirable separations and losses. In addition, this theory gives clues about how to cope with individual differences and problematic life experiences on the basis of person's interaction with connection objects. Balkis, Duru and Bulus (2005), used the words of "attachment to school" instead of the concept of "sense of belonging" to define student's sense of school belonging. A student who accepts himself/herself as a part of the school has positive feelings about the school. Activities to be conducted to improve quality of school life will help to meet needs of students related to the adolescence period and improve their sense of belonging. Quality of school life has impact not only on sense of belonging but also on students' academic success and other education outputs; thus this field has attracted the attention of pedagogues and many research have been conducted on students' well being in school (Mok & Flynn, 1997; Sinclair & Fraser, 2002). According to the findings of Mok and Flynn (1997), school satisfaction has

positive effects on adoption of educational values and school and children's motivation.

Hunt-Sartori (2007), it was found that students' perceptions towards quality of school life have significant relationships with less discipline problems and higher academic success. Tangen (2009) states that quality of school life is underestimated despite its importance. However, Johnson and Johnson (1993) report that the quality of experiences obtained in school affects attitudes and behaviors of students and students' positive opinions about school, intraclass activities and teachers are important for general mental health of students and improve the targeted acquisitions of school. Negative opinions, feelings and attitudes of students towards their school make daily life in school unsatisfactory for students and pose an obstacle for learning. For example, in a study conducted by Leonard (2002), it was found that students who perceive their schools as unhappy places have negative perceptions towards every aspect of school life while those who perceive quality of school life to be high, have lower absence rates. Moreover, if quality of school life decreases students can be affected by more serious negative factors. For example Curelaru, Iacob and Abalasei (2009) found that students who experienced violence in school was suffered from own self-esteem, loneliness, depression, anxiety, absenteeism etc.

In a research conducted by Bourke and Smith (1989), the effects school environment on students' well being and success were investigated. In this research, it was found that students having a better school life have higher academic success. Perception of quality of school life not only affects academic success but also has a significant role on sense of belonging. It was found that the number of studies conducted to investigate the perception of quality of school life is limited in Turkey (Doganay & Sari, 2006; Sari, 2007; Sari, Otunc & Erceylan, 2007; Sari & Cenkseven, 2008; Durmaz, 2008; Korkmaz, 2009; Inal 2009; Alaca, 2011). Furthermore, it can be said that this study is important as it brings suggestions to determine and improve primary school students' perceptions towards life quality in their schools.

It is believed that this research will contribute to fill a significant gap in the literature as it determines students' sense of school belonging and investigates the relationship between results related to the sense of belonging and perceptions towards quality of school life on primary school students. The actuality of this issue can be understood considering the fact that this is the first research, which has compared public school with private school. In literature, we can find various researches, which investigated quality of school life and sense of school belonging however, there is no research which was conducted on these two factors comparing public and private schools. Therefore, the research conducted on primary school students sought answer to the question of "Do students' perceptions towards quality of school life and sense of school belonging differ by school type (public school, private school) and some other variables?" The research aims to determine

whether the perception of quality of school life and sense of school belonging differ by some variables for primary school students in Sahinbey and Sehitkamil districts of the Province of Gaziantep. In line with this general objective, it was investigated whether students' perception of school life and sense of school belonging significantly differ by the school type, gender, grade level, income levels of parents, education levels of parents.

## **Methodology**

This research is a descriptive study in screening model, which was planned to investigate primary school students' perception of quality of school life and sense of school belonging. Screening model is a research approach, which aims to describe an ongoing or past situation as it is. The researched event, person or object is defined within its own conditions and with bare facts (Karasar, 2005).

### ***Sample***

The research sample consists of 650 6th, 7th and 8th grade students in 6 public and 3 private primary schools in 2011–2012 academic years in Sahinbey and Sehitkamil districts of the Province of Gaziantep. Of the all participants, 264 are male and 386 are female.

### ***Data Collection Tools***

Quality of School Life Scale (Sari, 2007), Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993) and Personal Information form, which was developed by the researcher, were used to collect student information such as school type, gender, grade, socio-economic level of family and education level of parents. Detailed information about these data collection tool is presented below. Quality of School Life Scale Sari (2007) is a Likert-type assessment instrument, which was developed to determine 4th to 8th grade primary school students' perception of the quality of school life. Factor structure and reliability of the scale was reconstructed by Sari in 2011 and a new structure which is similar to the previous one was obtained. The scale consists of 35 items within sub-dimensions of "Teacher-to-Student Communication" (9 items), "Student-to-Student Communication" (9 items), "Feelings for School" (8 items), "School Management" (6 items) and "Status" (3 items). Cronbach internal consistency coefficients of these five dimension which explain 46.92% of total variance are .83, .80, .82, .77 and .69, respectively. QSLs is answered with a five-point grading system (1. Strongly Disagree – 5. Strongly Agree) 15 negative statement in the scale (3., 4., 7., 8., 10., 14., 16., 18., 22., 23., 25., 27., 29., 32. and 35. items) are scored in

reverse. A total score can be obtained from QSLs and also sub-dimensions can be used to measure total scores.

The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale developed by Goodenow (1993a) and adopted by Sari in Turkey is a Likert-type instrument consisting of 18 items which were developed in order to assess students' levels of sense of feeling an important part of school, feelings for being valued and integrated with group, connections with school, teacher and peers. The answers are collected through a five-point scale (1. Completely false 5. Completely true). Items in the scale developed for primary school students consist of statements, which define personal, subjective perspectives of students towards school rather than an objective assessment. The scale includes items such as "Here, teachers are interested in people like me", "Teachers in this school treat me as a friend", "Being in this school makes me angry". Five items in the scale (3, 6, 9, 12 and 16. items) are negative statements. When these negative items are scored in reverse, average value of all items is measured for each student or students' scores can be measured on the basis of sub-scales as well. High scores to be obtained from the scales indicate high sense of school belonging. Results of factor analyses conducted by Sari (2011) indicate that items gather under two components and these two factors explain 28.90% and 9.59% of the total variance. The first factor (Sense of School belonging) comprises 13 positive statements of the scale while the other factor (Sense of Rejection) comprises 5 negative statements of the scale. Factor loads of the items differ between 0.44 and .66 in first factor; between 0.46 and 0.75 in second factor. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients of sub-scales were found to be .84 and .78, respectively. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of scale scores was found to be .84 when negative items were scored in reverse. Item-total score correlations of items differ between .31-.61. The results of t-test conducted on 27% sub and top groups show that all items can recognize groups significantly ( $p < .001$ ). After the research sample was determined, data collection tools (Personal Information Form, Quality of School Life Scale, (Sari, 2007), Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993) used in the research were applied on 3 private and 6 public school students. Students were informed about the objective of the research and explanations were made about giving more objective answers to data collection tools in schools where the scales would be applied. Data of 650 candidates who completed the practice without error were considered to be valid.

### *Analysis of Data*

Descriptive statistics, t-test and one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) were used to analyze the data. SPSS 17 statistic package program was used for analyses. T-tests were conducted to investigate students' perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by variables of school type and gender. In addition, one-way variance analyses were conducted to investigate whether

students' perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging differs by grade, education and income levels of parents and income level of families. Significance level was considered as .05 to interpret the differentiation of findings is significant or not.

## Findings

### *Findings of Public and Private Primary School Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life*

The first question of the research was "Is there any significant difference between students' perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by school type (private school, public school)?". Independent-group t-test analyses were conducted for school type variables to answer this question and the related findings are presented in following table.

Table 1. *Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, t and p Values on Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by School Type*

Sub-scales	Public School (N=420)		Private School (N=230)		t	p
	$\bar{X}$	Ss	$\bar{X}$	Ss		
Teacher-to-Student Communication	3.13	.82	3.91	.91	3.182	.000*
Student- to-Student Communication	3.55	.87	3.21	.73	1.613	.004*
Feelings for School	3.41	.71	3.66	.77	2.610	.008*
School Management	3.17	.65	3.11	.88	2.160	1.631
Status	3.38	.75	3.42	1.54	1.560	.092
<b>QSLs Total</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>.85</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>.93</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>1.331</b>
Sense of School Belonging	3.23	.77	3.42	.59	.827	.007*
Sense of Reject	3.66	.53	3.35	.88	1.912	.004*
<b>SSBS Total</b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>.66</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>.81</b>	<b>2.098</b>	<b>1.112</b>

\*p<.05

According to Table 1, mean values calculated for students in public schools were found to be 3.13 in teacher-to-student communication dimension, 3.55 in student-to-student communication dimension, 3.41 in feelings for school dimension, 3.17 in school management dimension, 3.38 in status dimension and 3.57 in total scores of QSLs. Arithmetic mean values calculated for students in private school were found to be 3.91 in teacher-to-student communication dimension, 3.21 in student-to-student communication dimension, 3.66 in feelings for school dimension, 3.11 in school management dimension, 3.42 in status dimension and 3.51 in total scores of QSLs. Mean values calculated for students in public schools were found to be 3.23 in sense of school belonging dimension, 3.66 in sense of reject dimension and 3.45 in total scores of SSBS. Mean values calculated for students in private schools were found to be 3.42 in sense of school

belonging dimension, 3.35 in sense of reject dimension and 3.44 in total scores of SSBS.

It was found that public school students' mean scores in Student-to-student Communication, School Management, Total QSLs Scores, Sense of Reject and Total SSBS Scores were higher compared to those in private schools. According to the data obtained from other sub-scale scores, it was found that private school students have higher scores compared to those in public schools. T-test was used to investigate the significance of the difference between score means. It was found that mean values in Student-Student Contact and Sense of Reject differ in favor of public school students while mean values in Student-Teacher Communication, Feelings for School and Sense of School Belonging differ in favor of private school students ( $p < .05$ ). Differences between score means of School Management, SSBS and QSLs were not found to be statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

### ***Findings of Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Gender***

The second question of the research was "Is there any significant difference between students' perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by gender?". Independent-group t-test analyses were conducted for the gender variable to answer this question and the related findings are presented in following table.

Table 2. Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, t and p Values on Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Gender

Sub-scales	Female (N=264)		Male (N=386)		t	p
	$\bar{X}$	Ss	$\bar{X}$	Ss		
Teacher-to-student Communication	2.99	.65	2.87	.96	2.710	.060
Student-to-student Communication	3.44	.77	3.09	1.06	1.503	.000*
Feelings for School	3.23	.91	3.41	.91	3.432	.009*
School Management	3.11	.81	3.23	.99	2.324	.166
Status	3.68	.83	3.71	.81	2.139	.556
<b>QSLs Total</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>.81</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>.72</b>	<b>3.786</b>	<b>.053</b>
Sense of School Belonging	3.53	.66	3.31	.71	3.184	.007*
Sense of Reject	3.62	.91	3.71	.68	.804	.079
<b>SSBS Total</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>.76</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>.61</b>	<b>3.098</b>	<b>.002*</b>

\* $p < .05$

According to Table 2, mean values of scores were found to be 2.99 for female and 2.87 for male students in teacher-to-student communication dimension; 3.44 for female and 3.09 for male students in student-to-student communication



dimension; 3.23 for female and 3.41 for male students in feelings for school dimension; 3.11 for female and 3.23 for male students in school management dimension; 3.68 for female and 3.71 for male students in status dimension; 3.29 for female and 3.44 for male students in total scores of QSLs; 3.53 for female and 3.31 for male students in sense of school belonging dimension; 3.62 for female and 3.71 for male students in sense of reject and 3.60 for female and 3.39 for male students in total scores of SSBS.

It was found that female students have higher scores in “student-to-student”, “feelings for school”, “sense of school is belonging” and “total SSBS scores” than male students do while male students have higher mean values in other sub-scale scores compared to girls. T-test was used to investigate the significance of the difference and significant differentiations were found in “student-to-student”, “feelings for school”, “sense of school belonging”, and “total SSBS scores” in favor of female students and in “feelings for school” dimension in favor of male students ( $p < .05$ ). Differences between score means of other sub-scales were not found to be statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

***Findings of Students’ Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Grade Level***

The third question of the research was “Is there any significant difference between students’ perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by grade level?”. One-way variance analyses were conducted for the grade variable to answer this question and the related findings are presented in following table.

Table 3. *Findings of Students’ Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Grade Level*

Variable	Grade Level	N	$\bar{X}$	Ss	df	F	p
Perception of quality of school life	6	192	3.42	.66	2	.178	.694
	7	215	3.51	.59			
	8	243	3.48	.22			
Sense of School Belonging	6	192	3.35	.71	2	.592	.454
	7	215	3.44	.77			
	8	243	3.29	.81			

$p < .05$

According to Table 3, mean values of scores obtained in Quality of School Life Scale were found to be 3.42 for sixth grade students; 3.51 for seventh grade students and 3.48 for eighth grade students while mean values of scores obtained from Sense of School Belonging Scale are 3.35 for sixth grade students, 3.44 for seventh grade students and 3.29 for eighth grade students. No significant

difference was found between mean values of scores obtained from both assessment instruments by students' grade ( $p > .05$ ).

***Findings of Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Income Level of Parents***

The fourth question of the research was "Is there any significant difference between students' perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by income level of parents?". One-way variance analyses were conducted on the variable of income level of parents and the related findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Findings of Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Income Level of Parents*

Variable	Income	N	$\bar{X}$	Ss	df	F	p	Significant Difference (LSD)
Perception of quality of school life	Alt	140	3.11	.37	2	2.24	.003*	Medium>High, Low
	Medium	329	3.92	.69				
	High	190	3.07	.71				
Sense of School Belonging	Low	140	3.79	.63	2	7.56	.002*	Low>High, Medium
	Medium	329	3.43	.58				
	High	190	3.52	.68				

\* $p < .05$

According to Table 4, mean values of QSLs scores of students by income level of family were found to be 3.11 for students whose families are in low income group; 3.92 for those whose families are in medium income group and 3.07 for those whose families are in high income group. Mean values of SSBS were found to be 3.79 for students whose families are in low income group; 3.43 for those whose families are in medium income group and 3.52 for those whose families are in high income group. ANOVA was used to find out the significance of the difference between these mean values and it was found that there is a significant difference between both QSLs and SSBS scores of students with different income groups ( $p < .05$ ). According to the results of LSD test which was conducted to investigate the main reason of this difference, it was found that QSLs score means differ in favor of students whose families are in medium income group compared to those in high and low income groups while SSBS score means differ in favor of students whose families are in low income group compared to those in medium and high income groups.

**Findings of Students’ Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Education Level of Mother**

The fifth question of the research was “Is there any significant difference between students’ perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by income level of parents?”. One-way variance analyses were conducted on the variable of income level of mother and the related findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Findings of Students’ Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Education Level of Mother

<i>Perception of Quality of School Life</i>							
<b>Mother Education</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>Ss</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Significant Difference (LSD)</b>
Illiterate	19	3.48	.53	5	6.161	.004*	Secondary school graduate > Illiterate
Only literate	38	3.51	.67				Secondary school graduate > Only literate,
Graduate (primary school)	79	3.58	.61				Secondary school graduate > High school graduate,
Graduate (secondary school)	173	3.72	.61				Secondary school graduate > University graduate,
Graduate (High school)	195	3.36	.60				Secondary school graduate > High school graduate,
Graduate (University)	146	3.39	.58				Secondary school graduate > University graduate,
<i>Sense of School Belonging</i>							
<b>Mother Education</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>Ss</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Significant Difference (LSD)</b>
Illiterate	19	3.91	.66	5	8.090	.002*	Illiterate>Only literate
Only literate	38	3.68	.59				Illiterate > Primary school graduate
Graduate (primary school)	79	3.72	.57				Illiterate > Secondary school graduate
Graduate (secondary school)	173	3.71	.59				Illiterate > High school graduate
Graduate (High school)	195	4.03	.60				Illiterate > University graduate
Graduate (University)	146	3.66	.55				High school graduate > Primary school graduate
							High school graduate > Secondary school graduate
							High school graduate > University graduate

\* $p < .05$

According to Table 5, mean values of QSLs scores were found to be 3.48 for students whose mothers are illiterate, 3.51 for those whose mothers are only literate, 3.58 for those whose mothers are primary school graduate, 3.72 for those whose mothers are secondary school graduate, 3.36 for those whose mothers are

high school graduate and 3.39 for those whose mothers are university graduate. Mean values of SSBS scores were found to be 3.91 for students whose mothers are illiterate, 3.68 for those whose mothers are only literate, 3.72 for those whose mothers are primary school graduate, 3.71 for those whose mothers are secondary school graduate, 4.03 for those whose mothers are high school graduate and 3.39 for those whose mothers are university graduate. The differences between scores obtained from QSLs and SSBS sub-scales of student groups were found to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

According to the results of LSD test which was conducted to investigate the main reason of the significant differences between group means, it was found that QSLs score means differ in favor of students whose mothers are secondary school graduate compared to those whose mothers are illiterate, only literate, primary school graduate, high school graduate and university graduate while SSBS score means differ in favor of students whose mothers are in university graduate compared to those whose mothers are illiterate, only literate, primary school graduate, secondary school graduate and high school graduate.

***Findings of Students’ Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Education Level of Father***

The fifth question of the research was “Is there any significant difference between students’ perceptions of quality of school life and sense of school belonging by income level of parents?” One-way variance analyses were conducted on the variable of income level of father and the related findings are presented in Table 6.

*Table 6. Findings of Students’ Perceptions of Quality of School Life and Sense of School Belonging by Education Level of Father*

<b>Perception of Quality of School Life</b>						
<b>Father Education</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>Ss</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Illiterate	2	3.42	.57	5	2.917	.061
Only literate	5	3.29	.68			
Graduate (primary school)	.73	3.30	.66			
Graduate (secondary school)	215	3.37	.63			
Graduate (High school)	195	3.41	.71			
Graduate (University)	160	3.31	.53			
<b>Sense of School Belonging</b>						
<b>Father Education</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>Ss</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Illiterate	2	3.81	.51	5	7.021	.079
Only literate	5	3.78	.59			
Graduate (primary school)	.73	3.83	.67			
Graduate (secondary school)	215	3.72	.60			
Graduate (High school)	195	3.84	.72			
Graduate (University)	160	3.83	.58			

$p < .05$

According to Table 6, mean values of QSLs scores were found to be 3.42 for students whose fathers are illiterate, 3.29 for those whose fathers are only literate, 3.30 for those whose fathers are primary school graduate, 3.37 for those whose fathers are secondary school graduate, 3.41 for those whose fathers are high school graduate and 3.39 for those whose fathers are university graduate. Mean values of QSLs scores were found to be 3.81 for students whose fathers are illiterate, 3.78 for those whose fathers are only literate, 3.83 for those whose fathers are primary school graduate, 3.72 for those whose fathers are secondary school graduate, 3.84 for those whose fathers are high school graduate and 3.83 for those whose fathers are university graduate. The differences between group means were found to be significant in terms of QSLs and SSBS scores ( $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

In this research, according to the investigation by school type (public school, private school) of students, it was found that mean scores of students in public school are 3.13 in dimension of teacher-to-student communication; 3.55 in dimension of student-to-student communication; 3.41 in dimension of feelings for school; 3.17 in dimension of school management; 3.38 in dimension of status and 3.57 in total QSLs scores. Arithmetic mean values calculated for students in private school were found to be 3.91 in teacher-to-student communication dimension, 3.21 in student-to-student communication dimension, 3.66 in feelings for school dimension, 3.11 in school management dimension, 3.42 in status dimension and 3.51 in total scores of QSLs. Mean values calculated for students in public schools were found to be 3.23 in sense of school belonging dimension, 3.66 in sense of reject dimension and 3.45 in total scores of SSBS. Mean values calculated for students in private schools were found to be 3.42 in sense of school belonging dimension, 3.35 in sense of reject dimension and 3.44 in total scores of SSBS. Significant differences were found in “Student-to-student Communication” and “Sense of Reject” scores in favor of public school students and in “Teacher-to-student Contac”, “Feelings for School” and “Sense of School Belonging” scores in favor of private school students ( $p < .05$ ). Differences between score means of School Management, Status SSBS and QSLs were not found to be statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

Taking stand from these results, we can say that people’s perception of quality of school is closely associated with their communication types with others in the school (teacher and other students). For example Booker (2004) reports that students start to have higher level of attachment to the school community when they have positive and supportive interactions with their friends and teachers. According to Perdue, Manzeske and Estell (2009), the quality in friendships, support taken from peers and aggressive behaviors against students are closely

associated with students' attachment to school. As the positive qualities of school climate improve, students' aggressive behavior rates decrease (Birnbaum et al., 2003). On the other hand, McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum (2002) report that students have less tendency towards substance abuse in early ages, get involved in violence or sexuality when they feel that they are cared by others in their school and they consider themselves as part of the school. Karatzias, Power and Swanson (2002) who found that the perception of quality of school life is the most important predictor of getting involved in bullying, found that those getting involved in bullying have more negative perception of quality of school life and these students have higher level of school-related stress and they emphasize that these findings indicate the relationships between school satisfaction and bullying.

According to investigation of research results by gender, it was found that mean values of scores were found to be 2.99 for female and 2.87 for male students in teacher-to-student communication dimension; 3.44 for female and 3.09 for male students in student-to-student communication dimension; 3.23 for female and 3.41 for male students in feelings for school dimension; 3.11 for female and 3.23 for male students in school management dimension; 3.68 for female and 3.71 for male students in status dimension; 3.29 for female and 3.44 for male students in total scores of QSLs; 3.53 for female and 3.31 for male students in sense of school belonging dimension; 3.62 for female and 3.71 for male students in sense of reject and 3.60 for female and 3.39 for male students in total scores of SSBS.

It was found that scores of female students in "student-to-student", "feelings for school", "sense of school belonging" and "total SSBL scores" were higher than scores of male students and mean values of male students in other sub-scale scores were found to be higher than those of female students. T-test was used to investigate the significance of the difference and significant differences were found in "student-to-student", "feelings for school", "sense of school belonging" and "total SSBL scores" in favor of female students.  $p < .05$  Differences between score means of other sub-scales were not found to be statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

Comparing students' perception of quality of school life by gender, it was found that female students' scores obtained from all dimensions of SSBS and total scale scores were higher than male students and the differences between groups are generally significant. These findings are in conformity with the research findings in the literature. For example Alaca (2011), Bourke and Smith (1989), Doganay and Sari (2006), Hunt-Sartori (2007), Inal (2009), Marks (1998) and Mok and Flynn (2002) found that female students have more positive perception of quality of school life compared to male students. Based on this research and the findings of other research in the literature, we can say that female students have higher satisfaction in school than male students do. This satisfaction is more apparent in female students than it is in male students in terms of the teacher-to-student relationships dimension (for female students  $\hat{=}$ 3.97; for male students

3.56); feelings for school dimension (for female students 4.06, for male students 3.61); status dimension which refers to feel valuable in school (for female students 4.05; for male students 3.85) through which quality of school life differs significantly by gender, feelings for school. Considering these three dimensions which can be clearly seen that they develop in parallel with each other, we can say that female students have sufficient satisfaction from their communication ways with their teachers and they feel as a valuable member of their school community and in this scope, their feelings for school develop in a more positive way. Various research reports that female students perceive their teachers' behaviors in the class more positive (Cemalcilar, 2010; Un-Acikgoz, Ozkal and Gungor-Kilic, 2003), they have higher scores and they like academic activities than male students do. Haapasalo, Valimaa and Kannas (2010) found that female students feel more safe in school, they like being in school and school activities, they find school rules more fair, they can perceive their teachers more friendly than male students do and in this direction, they have more positive perception of school in general sense compared to male students.

According to the research results, mean values of scores obtained from Quality of School Life Scale were found to be 2.94 for sixth grade students; 3.51 for seventh grade students and 3.48 for eighth grade students while mean values of scores obtained from Sense of School Belonging Scale are 3.35 for sixth grade students, 3.84 for seventh grade students and 3.41 for eighth grade students. No significant difference was found between mean values of scores obtained from both assessment instruments by students' grade ( $p > .05$ ). Primary school years are the most important years for both academic self-confidence development of students and psychological and social development. School is one of the most important lie areas in adolescence period and students spend approximately 30-35 hours/week in this area within close relationship with their teachers and friends. Capps (2003) emphasizes the importance of psychological acceptance and social support to be granted by teachers and other friends in adolescence period in which motional fluctuations are especially common.

According to the research results, mean values of QSLS scores of students by income level of family were found to be 3.11 for students whose families are in low income group; 3.92 for those whose families are in medium income group and 3.07 for those whose families are in high income group. Mean values of SSBS were found to be 3.79 for students whose families are in low-income group; 3.43 for those whose families are in medium income group and 3.52 for those whose families are in high income group. It was found that there are significant difference between both QSLS and SSBS scores of students with different income groups ( $p < .05$ ). According to the results of LSD test which was conducted to investigate the main reason of this difference, it was found that QSLS score means differ significantly in favor of students whose families are in medium income group compared to those in high and low income groups while SSBS score means differ

significantly in favor of students whose families are in low income group compared to those in medium and high income groups.

We can say that low level of perception of quality of school life in children of families with high income level is the result of the fact that schools do not meet the high expectations of the family and low level of perception of quality of school life in children of families with low income level is the result of conditions offered by schools. It can be said that school environment and sense of self of students with low income level determine the perception way of quality of school life. The significantly high score means obtained from the sense of school belonging scale by students with low income can be resulted from the fact that need for love cannot be satisfied sufficiently due to poor socio-economic conditions.

Families in low-income level may have many different priorities other than education, which is a very long-term investment and yet could not guarantee a good income and social status despite to this long term. As stated by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), the neglect of low-income families for school can be related to their poverty and these families give priority to meet their fundamental living needs. On the other hand, it was observed that children of high-income families obtained low scores from the scale as they assess their good living conditions and school environment through high life quality expectations. It can be said that low SSBS scores of children of low-income families are related to the fact that self-design of children growing up in low-income family environment affects their assessment on school environment. Ozkan (1994) found that self-respect is related to the income level of family. Self-respect is highly associated with the interest of the family. Self-respect of young people whose families are interested in them is at high rates. As the interest decreases, this rate decreases as well.

## Conclusions

According to the investigation on research results by education level of mother, mean values of QSLs scores were found to be 3.48 for students whose mothers are illiterate, 3.51 for those whose mothers are only literate, 3.58 for those whose mothers are primary school graduate, 3.72 for those whose mothers are secondary school graduate, 3.36 for those whose mothers are high school graduate and 3.39 for those whose mothers are university graduate. Mean values of SSBS scores were found to be 3.91 for students whose mothers are illiterate, 3.68 for those whose mothers are only literate, 3.72 for those whose mothers are primary school graduate, 3.71 for those whose mothers are secondary school graduate, 4.03 for those whose mothers are high school graduate and 3.66 for those whose mothers are university graduate. Differences between QSLs and SSBS scores of students groups were found to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).



According to the results of LSD test which was conducted to investigate the main reason of the significant differences between group means, it was found that QSLS score means differ significantly in favor of students whose mothers are secondary school graduate compared to those whose mothers are illiterate, only literate, primary school graduate, high school graduate and university graduate while SSBS score means differ significantly in favor of students whose mothers are university graduate compared to those whose mothers are illiterate, only literate, primary school graduate, secondary school graduate and high school graduate. Differences between QSLS scores were found to be significant in favor of students whose mothers are high school graduate compared to those whose mothers are illiterate, only literate, primary school graduate, secondary school graduate and university graduate.

According to the investigation on research results by education level of father, mean values of QSLS scores were found to be 3.42 for students whose fathers are illiterate, 3.29 for those whose fathers are only literate, 3.30 for those whose fathers are primary school graduate, 3.37 for those whose fathers are secondary school graduate, 3.41 for those whose fathers are high school graduate and 3.31 for those whose fathers are university graduate. Mean values of SSBS scores were found to be 3.81 for students whose fathers are illiterate, 3.78 for those whose fathers are only literate, 3.83 for those whose fathers are primary school graduate, 3.72 for those whose fathers are secondary school graduate, 3.84 for those whose fathers are high school graduate and 3.83 for those whose fathers are university graduate. The differences between group means were found to be significant in terms of QSLS and SSBS scores ( $p > .05$ ).

In line with these discussed results; education institutions can define the factors, which determine students' perception levels of quality of school life and sense of school belonging and conduct studies to improve school environment. Studies to attract attention to the importance of quality of school life and sense of school belonging for school managers and other educationalists can be planned and some criteria can be determined to develop quality of school life and sense of school belonging as a target in strategic plans of schools. Further research can be conducted on this matter in different school types (science, Anatolian, social sciences, religious, vocational high school etc.) and the relationship between perception of quality of school life and sense of school belonging and also whether these two factors are predictors for each other can be investigated. Studies can be conducted to find out whether families' attitudes towards school affect students' perception of quality of school life and sense of school belonging. Higher scores of female students in teacher-to-students, student-to-student communication sub-scales and sense of school belonging scale than the scores of male students may require developing different criteria for gender in assessment.

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