

The European Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences  
EJSBS Volume XXII, Issue II (e-ISSN: 2301-2218)

## EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND FAMILIES' PSYCHOLOGICAL NATURE

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore students' perception of the relationship between their academic success and their families' psychological nature. A quantitative research design utilising a relational descriptive model was used to evaluate the relationship between families' psychological nature and the academic success level of the students. A total of 523 6th and 7th grade students participated in the study. The Personal Information Form, Family Structure Assessment Tool (FSAT) (1992) and school reports were employed as the primary methods of data gathering. T-test, ANOVA and LSD Scheffe Test were used to analyse the data. Results of the study indicate that there are differences between the FSAT scores according to the students' gender; however, no differences between the class levels were seen. This study has established that there is a relationship between the perceived students' academic success and their families' psychological nature.

*Keywords:* Families' perceived psychological nature, academic success, family effect on academic success

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doi: 10.15405/ejsbs.236



## **1. Introduction**

Considerable research conducted in the field of educational sciences, have concluded that solidarity of schools and families has a significant importance on school success (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007; Wilder, 2013; Zellman & Waterman, 2010). The relationship and cooperation of families with school, participation in school processes and supporting schools are issues that have been emphasised (Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Povey et al., 2016). The time that students spend at school is limited in proportion to the time they spend with their families. For this reason, family support is needed in order to make better use of the time spent at school (Yıldırım & Dönmez, 2008).

In order to contribute to children's success at school and ensure that they are being prepared for life in a more high quality educational environment, families need to know their children well and support them (Kordi & Baharudin, 2010; McGrath & Repetti, 1995). The families who do not know their children well enough, who are not aware of positive and negative behaviors of their children and of their interests and tendencies in the said age group cannot provide sufficient support to develop school-family relationships and prepare their children for life (Aslanargun, 2007). A healthy relationship between schools and families is based on the provision of a healthy information flow regarding the student between the family and the school. This underscores the importance of families knowing their children and having enough knowledge about their interests, tendencies and behaviors (Mo & Singh, 2015).

Studies reveal that students who receive social support from their parents have less emotional and behavioral problems than others (Barry, Frick, & Grafeman, 2008); have higher levels of life satisfaction (Çivitçi, 2009); establish more positive relationships with people, present positive attitudes towards school and teachers (Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010) and have higher levels of academic achievement.

Reca (2005) stated that the responsibilities of the family toward the academic achievement of their children included being tolerant of their children, regularly attending class meetings, monitoring their children in their homework, trusting the school and teachers and instilling this feeling in their children, attending social events at school, buying tools and equipment required for their children's schoolwork, communicating with school and teachers, helping out in social events and ensuring their children understand the importance of such events, participating in parent-teacher association activities, performing activities that improve reading habits, and solving problems with the support of teachers and school management. Baltaş (2000) argues that, prior to the cooperation of school and families, the family unit should cooperate with each other so that the children can be successful in school. However, it should

be noted that it is impossible for families to help their children and contribute to their school success if the children themselves are uncooperative.

If there is a contradiction between what is taught in school and in the family, this would adversely affect the student's success (Fidan & Erden, 2001). Hollingsworth and Hoover argue that a positive behavior taught by the teacher at school can be easily negated by the parents at home (as cited in Çelenk, 2003). Circumstances such as wrong attitudes, indifference, harshness, the lack of love or conversely, falling all over their children, would cause students to be alienated from studying and experience fear and stress, and, accordingly, their academic achievement can be affected adversely (Areepattamannil, 2010; Brown & Iyengar, 2008; Ishak, Low, & Lau 2011; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

It cannot be denied that family involvement is of great importance in raising the academic achievement of children. Aforementioned opinions also support this. In contrast to this, Keçeli-Kaysılı (2008) reveal the existence of an important problem in their research on the relationship between participation of family and academic achievement: *different definitions* of family involvement. Some educators define the characteristics of family involvement as physical and active involvement of families, while others define it as providing academic support for children at home. Some researchers have examined family involvement in general by combining many features of involvement. However, it is known that uniting different components of family involvement (expectations of parents from their children with regard to school, communication between school-family and student, involvement of parents in school events, involvement of parents in learning events) under a single variable makes it difficult to determine which component ensures the relationship between family involvement and academic achievement. This research is usually centered on the child instead of assessing the parents. In most of the literature, the status of the family is used as the base and variables specific to the family are examined. In this study, the psychological nature of families was determined according to the students' perceptions with regard to their academic achievements. This study was based on the premise that the psychological nature of families could shape the academic achievement of their children.

In the studies in literature aimed at determining the relationship between family and academic achievement, "statements of students", "statements of families" and "statements of teachers" are used to assess the status of the family (Keçeli-Kaysılı, 2008). In the research, opinions of "students" were used to obtain objective data with respect to the psychological nature of families. It was considered that teachers would not have detailed information about

the psychological nature of families (not as much as students) and families might not provide objective answers. For this reason, it was decided to obtain data from students in the research.

In this research, class variables were evaluated to see if the scores of middle school students' evaluation of the psychological structure of their parents and their academic achievement levels change according to the class variable. The class variable, which in this study, referred to the second phase of primary education (in other words, the middle school period covering ages 12-15) was used as the basis in line with Piaget (as cited in Ummanel & Dilek, 2016) who claimed that the period in which the concrete thought precedes the abstract thought and, the way in which the child's environment is affected (such as family, school, peers, and environment), differs from previous ages. Evaluating the middle school students' perception of their family and how this affects their academic success and if they differ according to the classes have been found worth investigating. Another variant of this study is gender. In the literature, it has been emphasized that the gender factor is both effective in determining the child's family involvement and academic success and that girls have the advantage in this regard. For this reason, this study also aimed to evaluate whether this situation is valid in the Cypriot culture and provide a contribution to the literature.

## **2. Purpose of the study**

The aim of this study is to determine the psychological nature of families based on students' perceptions and examine the relationship between the perceived psychological nature of families and academic achievement of students. The research questions to which the answers will be sought within the scope of the study are as follows:

- 2.1 What is the distribution of scores obtained from views of students with regard to the psychological nature of their family?
- 2.2 Does the class level affect the students' perception regarding the psychological nature of the family?
- 2.3 Does gender affect the students' perception regarding the psychological nature of the family?
- 2.4 What is the relationship between the perceived psychological nature of the families and academic achievement of students?
- 2.5 Does the academic achievement levels of students affect the perceived psychological nature of families?

Achievement indicators used as a baseline by the Ministry of Education in Northern Cyprus are between 0 and 10 and their classifications are as follows: 8.50-10.00 Very Good; 6.50-8.49 Good; 5.00-6.49 Satisfactory and 0-4.99 Failure.

The answers to the questions above would highlight the family-school connection and provide insights for teachers, parents and counselors at schools. Teachers, school counsellors and parents should be knowledgeable about the school-family relationship to facilitate interclass applications and remove the obstacles for learning, know the students and parents, monitor social development and contribute to this development respectively. In this context, the aim of this study is to raise the awareness of teachers, counsellors at schools and parents through the findings of this research.

### 3. Method

A quantitative research design was used to conduct this study. The aim of this descriptive study was to describe the situation as completely and carefully as possible. One of the descriptive approaches, a "screening" model is used in the study. According to Karasar (2009), screening models are research approaches that aim to describe a past or existing situation. The psychological nature of families was determined with regard to perceptions of middle school students and the perceived psychological nature of families and school success of students are associated. Thus, the pattern of research is organized in accordance with the "relational screening model". The relational screening model is a research model aimed at determining the existence and/or degree of simultaneous change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2009).

#### 3.1. Study group

The study group comprised 523 students studying in 21 different classes of a middle school in Kyrenia province of Northern Cyprus. 44.55% of the respondents were females and 54.59% were males. 56.97% of students were in 6th grade and 42.25% were in 7th grade. Information regarding classes and genders of these students is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Information Regarding Genders and Class Levels of Students in Study Group

Variable			
Gender	233 (44.55%)	285 (54.49%)	5 (0.96%)
	Female	Male	Empty
Grade	298 (56.97%)	221 (42.25%)	4 (0.76%)
	6th Grade	7th Grade	Empty

### 3.2. Data collection tools

To collect the data, a "Personal Information Form", "Family Structure Assessment Tool" and "School Reports Showing academic achievement of Students" were used. Descriptions of these tools are provided below:

#### 3.2.1. Personal Information Form:

The personal Information Form comprised questions about students' grade and gender.

#### 3.2.2. Family Structure Assessment Tool (FSAT):

The FSAT is a measurement tool composed of 36 items which can be filled by literate persons older than 12. The items of the scale were developed by Aydan Gülerce in 1992 for children and parents separately. The questions of the scale are related to the dimensions of "communication", "unity", "management", "competence", "emotional context", "contradiction", "satisfaction" and "resistance".

The scale has a 10-stage rating beginning with "just like us" and ending with "total opposite of ours". The lowest score is 1 and the highest is 5 for every item of FSAT. Thus, if all items are marked 5, the FSAT score would be 180 and the lowest would be 36 (Gülerce, 1996).

Scores in the FSAT scale vary between 36 and 180. The academic standing scores of students are classified into 5 groups in this research. The FSAT scores are also classified into 5 groups by the researchers, in order to keep them coherent with the academic standing scores. Accordingly, 36-64 points were accepted as 1st level signifying the lowest level; 65-93 points as 2nd level; 94-122 points as 3rd level; 123-151 points as 4th level and 152-180 as the highest and 5th level.

#### 3.2.3. School Report Grades:

The school reports of the children were obtained to determine the respondents' academic achievement. "Period-End Success Averages", which is the average of all subjects in the students' school reports were taken into consideration. "Period-End Success Average" is established as a value ranging from 1 to 10 in middle and high schools under the Ministry of National Education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Upon obtaining the necessary permissions, the FSAT scale was implemented during classes and with the support of class teachers. Then, the school reports were accessed through school management and period-end success averages were recorded.

SPSS 15 software was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained by the respondents on the FSAT scale and the academic achievement scores were calculated to determine the frequency, percentage, and arithmetic means. In order to determine if gender and class affected FSAT scores and academic achievement scores, a t-test was run for independent groups (Data was distributed normally according to the Kolmogorov Smirnov test and distributed homogeneously according to the Levene test). Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the existence of a relationship between FSAT scores and academic achievement scores. ANOVA was used to determine FSAT scores were affected by academic achievement levels of students. LSD Scheffe Test was used to determine which groups benefitted from the difference.

## 4. Findings

In this section, the findings are presented according to the research questions accompanied by corresponding tables.

### 4.1. "What is the distribution of scores obtained from views of students with regard to the psychological nature structure of the family?"

Findings are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Psychological Nature of Families According to Students' Perception

Score		36-64		93		94-122		123-151		152-180		Total
		points		points		Points		points		points		
Grade	Gender	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
6th	Female	2	0.38	3	0.58	32	6.22	78	15.17	11	2.14	126
	Male	2	0.38	11	2.14	70	13.61	81	15.75	5	0.97	169
7th	Female	1	0.19	5	0.97	34	6.61	57	11.08	9	1.75	106
	Male	0	0	7	1.36	47	9.09	57	11.08	2	0.38	113
Total		5	0.97	26	5.05	183	35.60	273	53.11	27	5.25	514

The lowest score that can be obtained from FSAT scale is 36 and the highest score is 180. The psychological nature of families was revealed in accordance with the scores obtained

from FSAT scale and the results are presented at five levels. 0.97% of the students were in the range of 36-64 points; 5.05% in the range of 65-93 points; 35.60% in the range of 94-122 points; 53.11% in the range of 123-151 points, and 5.25% in the range of 152-180 points. Accordingly, when the score ranges in the scale are considered, the concentration was on level 4 and more than half of the students (53.11%) scored in the range of 123-151 points. This result shows that the perceived psychological nature of the families is positive, and the majority of the students have grown up in healthy family settings.

4.2. *“Does the class level affect the students’ perception regarding the psychological nature of the family?”*

The findings related to above question are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Student Views on Psychological Nature of Families According to Class Level

Variable	Grade	N	$\bar{X}$	S	Sd	T	p
Perceived psychological structure of the family	6	298	124.00	20.96	517	-0.229	0.819
	7	221	124.42	20.17			

\*p<.05

The t-test results in Table 3 for independent groups show a p-value greater than p>05 which means that there is no significant difference between the scores obtained by respondents as a result of their views on the psychological nature of the families.

4.3. *“Does gender affect the students’ perception regarding the psychological nature of the family?”*

The findings related to above question are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Students’ Perception on the Psychological Nature of Families According to Gender

Variable	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S	Sd	T	p
Perceived psychological structure of the family	Female	233	128.40	19.86	516	-8.805	0.000
	Male	285	120.40	20.63			

\*p<.05

The t-test results in Table 4 for independent groups show a p-value less than p>05, which shows a significant difference between the scores of female and male respondents. This



difference favors the female students who scored an average of 128.40, compared to the average score of male students was 120.40. This shows that female students' perceptions of the psychological nature of their families is significantly more positive than male students.

4.4. "What is the relationship between the perceived psychological nature of the families and academic achievement of students?"

The correlation result related to above question is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** The Relationship between the Perceived Psychological Nature of Families and Academic Achievement of Students

		Perceived psychological nature of the family	Academic Achievement
Perceived psychological nature of family	Pearson Correlation	1	.343**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	519	518
Academic achievement	Pearson Correlation	.343**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	518	518

\*\* . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is seen that there is a ( $r=.343$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) positive and significant relationship between the psychological nature of the family according to students' perceptions shown in Table 5 and academic achievement points of students.

4.5. "Does the academic achievement levels of students affect the perceived psychological nature of the family?"

The ANOVA result related to above question is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Perceived Psychological Nature of Family According to Academic Achievement Levels of Students

Variable		Squares	Average of	Squares	F	Sig.
		Squares	Degree of	Squares		
Perceived psychological nature of the family	Intergroup	2523.,379	3	8410.460	22.262	.000
	Intragroup	194185.465	514	377.793		
	Total	219416.844	517			

As seen in Table 6, the perceived psychological structure of families is significantly affected according to the academic achievement points of students (FSAT points). An LSD Scheffe test was conducted to determine the levels at which this difference occurs, and findings are given in Table 7 below.

**Table 7.** Comparison of Perceived Psychological Nature of Families According to Academic Achievement Levels of Students with LSD Scheffe Test

(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Very good	Good	10.04029*	2.70609	.000	4.7239	15.3566
	Medium	16.36667*	2.71034	.000	11.0420	21.6914
	Failed	23.59524*	3.12164	.000	17.4625	29.7280
Good	Very good	-10.04029*	2.70609	.000	-15.3566	-4.7239
	Medium	6.32637*	2.04319	.002	2.3123	10.3404
	Failed	13.55495*	2.56385	.000	8.5180	18.5919
Medium	Very good	-16.36667*	2.71034	.000	-21.6914	-11.0420
	Good	-6.32637*	2.04319	.002	-10.3404	-2.3123
	Failed	7.22857*	2.56834	.005	2.1828	12.2743
Failed	Very good	-23.59524*	3.12164	.000	-29.7280	-17.4625
	Good	-13.55495*	2.56385	.000	-18.5919	-8.5180
	Medium	-7.22857*	2.56834	.005	-12.2743	-2.1828

\*.The difference is significant at 0.05 level.

Table 7 reveals that respondents obtained higher points in the FSAT scale as their academic achievement point averages increase, meaning that high academic achievers perceive the psychological structure of their families more positively. 72 students were ranked "very good" in academic achievement obtained 137.17 in the FSAT scale point average, while 182 students were ranked as "good" obtained 127.3 points in the scale. 180 students were ranked "medium" obtained 120.80 while 83 students were ranked "weak" obtained 113.57 on the scale. According to the results of the LSD test, the FSAT points of the "very good" and "good" students were found to be significantly high in comparison to "medium" and "weak" students. Finally, the FSAT points of "medium" students are significantly higher than the points of the "weak" students.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

More than half (53.11%) of the students who participated in this research had scores in the range of 123-151 points in the Family Structure Assessment Tool. This result shows that

the perceived psychological nature of the families is positive, and the majority of the students have grown up in healthy family settings. Bulgan's (2006) study concurs with these findings where respondents stated that psychological nature of their families is healthy. In contrast, in Evirgen's (2010) research, the number of children who consider their domestic relationships as positive was less than those who think they have negative domestic relationships. However, Evirgen (2010) concluded that children who had positive relationships with family members developed more positive relationships with their peers and teachers than those who perceive their relationship as negative. Deal, Halverson, and Wampler (1989) revealed that the interactions between parents and children in families defined as healthy show a high level of positiveness and they can easily cope with problems.

While the perceived psychological nature of families does not differ with regard to class level, it differs with regard to gender. In terms of class level, 6th and 7th grade students are at the onset of adolescence and the age difference between the students who participated in this study can be considered insignificant. Hence, they would be quite similar in terms of their developmental characteristics. In this context, it can be assumed that there would not be any serious differences in the relationships of these students with their parents or in the way they perceive their families. Tokgöz (2009), whose sample was similar to this study's sample, did not find any significant difference in the dimensions of unity, management, competence, and emotional context of families. However, differences emerged between the means with regard to class level in the sub-dimension of communication between 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> grades and 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grades. It can be seen that students' thoughts regarding their family psychological nature becomes positive as their class level increases. According to Tokgöz (2009), the onset of adolescence and the lack of a settled self-conception to approach issues and events critically in 6<sup>th</sup> grade may be the causes of this attitude, whereas by 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the students would have matured considerably and become more settled in their outlook.

On the gender dimension of the research, it was seen that female students had higher scores on FSAT scale than male students and consider their parents' psychological structure more positively. In Başer's (2006) study, a significant difference was found in favor of females. This finding may be associated with the tendency of female children to be closer to their family than males, highlighting the premise that female children would view their family's psychological structure more positively. In fact, many studies (Colarossi, 2001; Selçuk, 1988; Sarason et al., 1993; Ekebaş, 1994; Güngör, 1996) revealed that females receive more support from their families (cited in Başer, 2006). Hasdemir (2007), on the other hand, found a

significant difference in favor of females only in one sub-dimension of FSAT which was emotional context.

Kılıçaslan (2001) states that when female children are compared with male children, female children are more sensitive in terms of showing personal love and interest and this is related to cultural values. Kılıçaslan (2001) revealed that female children are culturally conditioned to be more emotionally open, loving, demonstrative compared to male children who are culturally conditioned to be more emotionally restrained, tough and undemonstrative. Female children are generally expected to be more earnest, supple, obedient, and dependent. Male children, on the other hand, are perceived as authority figures and fathers see their male children as the authority figures after themselves and thus, they experience disciplinary behaviors more often.

Keenan and Shaw (1997) posit two possible explanations for gender differences. The first one is explained by the influence of different social practices of parents, where certain families prefer to use a more gentle persuasive approach towards female children and a more physical punishment approach towards male children. According to the second explanation, families can control their female children more easily; as female children's skills of language development, speaking and perceiving are better and faster than males. Therefore, the relationship between family and female children can be considered to be more positive and behavioural problems are less likely to occur.

In Tokgöz's (2009) study, an exact opposite result was obtained from the abovementioned research findings. When evaluating the psychological nature of the family, the average FSAT points of male students (119.05) were significantly higher than the averages of female students (114.69). In sub-dimensions, a significant difference was found in favor of males in the dimension of competence. Tokgöz (2009) explained the reason for this result lay in the sampling because "the region where the research was conducted, families were generally patriarchal (Kars province in Turkey) and the autonomy granted to males was not granted to females". It was stated that the traditional structure specific to females continues and female children submit to their family more than male children.

Currently, however, associating problematic behaviors only with gender is considered inappropriate. As stated by Lerner and Galambos (1998), although criminal behaviors are especially widespread among males in adolescence, there has been an increase of the same among females in recent years. Apart from the gender factor, anti-social or criminal behaviors of adolescents are affected by factors such as the impact of families, peer group, culture, belonging to a group, and acceptance by peer groups (Savi, 2008).

Finally, the relationship between the students' perceptions regarding the psychological nature of families and academic achievement of students was assessed in this study. A positive and significant relationship between the psychological nature of families emerged with regard to the students' perceptions and their academic achievement.

Many studies reveal that there is a positive relationship between authoritarian attitude and academic performance (Rivers, Mullis, Fortner & Mullis, 2012; Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009; Nyarko, 2011). In contrast, studies conducted in Turkey conclude that there is a negative relationship between school success and authoritarian attitude and a positive relationship between democratic attitude and school success. It is also understood that academic achievement improves when parents move away from being overprotective and practising oppressive discipline. In fact, academic achievement is at an optimal level as a result of a democratic attitude in relation to perceived attitudes of parents while the lowest academic achievement is caused by a permissive/negligent attitude. Positive family environment perception also affects achievement positively (Gelir, 2009). Similarly, Karadağ (2007) stated that academically successful students receive more positive support from their families as compared to unsuccessful ones, where they tend to get positive reactions from their families whether they are successful or not. These children can be honest about themselves or their schools to their families; they feel that they are important to their families and their families are really interested in them. Duman's (2006) study, found that students whose general achievement level is high are more influenced by the family factor.

In the studies where the opinions of families are studied, academic achievement is emphasised. According to Şen's (2011) research, one of the five values that families attach great importance to is education (others were religious values, being honest, being moral and being loyal to their families). Arslan's study (2008) revealed that children of families who "display consistent behaviors", "participate in their children's play", "consult with their children when they would make a decision related to them", "include their children in their conversations", "talk about problems easily and decisively to solve problems" are more successful. The same research found that academic achievement is reduced in families where the children are "negatively criticized", "raised in an environment of violence" and "where the father comes home late". Kocaman's (2009) research concluded that participation of children in the decision-making process of families, families taking care of their children, the presence of someone in the family to help with homework and talking about their emotions and thoughts with each other easily affect academic achievement of children positively.

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

6.1 The research shows that as points relating to student-perceived psychological nature of a family increase, their academic achievement levels also increase. Therefore, more studies to enhance the parent-child relationship can be carried out in schools. The goal of increasing academic achievements of students can be attained with qualified parent education.

6.2 Points relating to perceived psychological nature of the family are higher among female students than among male students. A special effort should be made to improve family relationships of male students to raise it the level of female students. Possible problems must be determined, and family-based problem-solving skills of male students should be improved.

6.3 The students in this sample perceived the psychological structure of their families favourably. The causal factors for this may be individual characteristics, the attitude of parents, and influence of teachers. Hence, more research can be conducted to determine the positive factors related to these dimensions.

6.4 Reasons for female students to perceive the psychological structure of their families more favourably should be further examined.

6.5 It can be investigated whether there are students with low academic achievement levels who assess the psychological nature of their families favourably and students with high levels of academic achievement who assess the psychological nature of their families unfavourably.

6.6 In this research, total FSAT points were used as the base. Sub-dimensions of FSAT (communication, unity, management, competence, emotional context) can be considered separately and a more detailed research can be conducted to provide a more in-depth analysis of these dimensions in helping to enhance children's academic achievement.

## Acknowledgements

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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