

## Play Activities in Kindergarten: Their Effects on School Liking and Relationships with Teachers

### Anaokulunda Oyun Etkinlikleri: Okulu Sevme ve Öğretmenlerle Olan İlişkilere Etkisi

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of play activities in kindergarten on school liking and relationships with teachers. For this purpose, an experimental method with experimental and control groups was used. Two experimental groups and one control group were included in the study. The sample group consisted of 70 children aged 5 years who attended three classes in a kindergarten located in southwestern Turkey. The data was collected using the following measures: the School Liking and School Avoidance Questionnaire (child, teacher, and parent forms), which was developed by Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman (1996) and Ladd, Buhs and Seid (2000) and whose Turkish validity and reliability studies have been conducted, and the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). As a result of the study, compared to those of the children who played less, the levels of school liking of the children who played more actively and regularly, increased, while their school avoidance levels decreased. Levels of closeness with teachers increased among the children, who played more, whereas their conflict and dependency levels decreased.

**Key words:** School liking, school avoidance, kindergarten children, play activities, student-teacher relationships

#### Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, anaokulundaki oyun etkinliklerinin okulu sevme ve öğretmenlerle olan ilişkilere etkisini incelemektir. Bu amaçla deney ve kontrol gruplu deneysel yöntemden yararlanılmıştır. Araştırmada iki deney ve bir kontrol grubu yer almaktadır. Çalışma grubunu Denizli ilinde bir anaokulunda üç sınıfa devam eden 5 yaş grubundan 70 çocuk oluşturmaktadır. Veriler; Ladd, Kochenderfer ve Coleman (1996) ve Ladd, Buhs ve Seid (2000) tarafından geliştirilen ve Türkçe geçerlik ve güvenilirlik çalışmaları yürütülen School Liking ve School Avoidance Questionnaire (child, teacher, parent form) ve Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001) ile toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, daha fazla sayıda hareketli ve düzenli oyunlar oynatılan çocukların daha az oyun oynayan çocuklara göre okulu sevme düzeyleri artmış, okuldan kaçınma düzeyleri azalmıştır. Daha fazla oyun oynayan çocukların öğretmenlerle yakınlık düzeyleri artmış, çatışma ve bağımlılık düzeyleri azalmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Okulu sevme, okuldan kaçınma, anaokulu çocukları, oyun etkinlikleri, öğrenci-öğretmen ilişkileri

#### Introduction

Liking one's school means having love and positive perceptions related to one's school and is defined within the context of school adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997). There is a significant correlation between school liking and school adjustment (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014). Children who like school display significant academic progress (Ladd & Dinella, 2009).

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### ***The Factors Affecting School Liking and School Avoidance***

Today, human beings spend a considerable proportion of their time being educated in schools from early childhood to university. Given that schools are locations where children meet with other children, schools play an important role in the socialization of the child. Therefore, children's school adjustment and school liking are important. Various factors affect children's school liking, such as children's characteristics, family relationships, peer relationships, student-teacher relationships and school environments.

Children with attention, thinking, and misconduct problems are more likely to avoid school (Ladd & Burgess, 2001). For example, in the study conducted by Inglese (2011) comparing the school liking levels of children with normal development and of those with autism, it was found that the school liking scores of autistic children were lower. Disturbing, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors displayed by autistic children caused them to be excluded by other children and thus have negative feelings against the school. Berlin, Dunning and Dodge (2011) also stated that children with behavioral problems liked school less. Aggression and attention problems reduce school liking (Gest, Welsh & Domitrovich, 2005). Children's ages have also been found to affect school liking. In studies conducted with children from kindergarten to 6th grade, the children's school liking scores decreased as they progressed to higher grades (Smith, 2011). The studies conducted by Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold and Kannas (1998) and Haapasalo, Välimaa and Kannas (2010) also support this result. In a study conducted in China, a positive correlation was found between early behavioral inhibition and school attitudes in future years (Chen, Li, Chen & Wang, 2009). Shyness in children also leads school liking scores to decrease (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). Honma and Uchiyama (2016) found a correlation between role-taking ability and school liking. It was found that while children with a high level of role-taking ability liked school, those with a low level of role-taking ability avoided school. On the other hand, children with high effortful control like school more, since they can pay their attention for a long period of time (Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant & Castro, 2007). The gender of the child also affects school liking. It has been found that girls like school more than boys (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Ireson & Hallam, 2005). A study conducted among Finnish children found that boys liked school more (Haapasalo, Välimaa & Kannas, 2010).

The parent-child relationship also affects children's school liking. Children who have more family support are more likely to like school than children who do not have family support. Children of families with high socioeconomic levels like school more than those of families with low socioeconomic levels (Haapasalo, Välimaa & Kannas, 2010).

Another factor influencing children's school liking is peer relationships. While children attending classes with familiar peers like school more, those who spend time with younger children avoid school more (Ladd & Price, 1987). Whereas peer acceptance and number of friends positively affect school liking (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1997), peer victimization (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1997) and peer rejection (Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006; Ladd & Burgess, 2001) are associated with school avoidance. Children, who perceive their friends as very helpful, like school more (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996).

Children are often in contact with their teachers at school. While close relationships between teachers and students foster children's school liking, conflict and dependent relationships can lead the child to experience school avoidance (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Huan, Quek, Yeo, Ang & Chong, 2012). The emotional and instrumental support of teachers encourages school liking among children (Murray, Murray & Waas, 2008).

The school environment is also important for school liking. Children like school more when they feel safe at school (Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold & Kannas, 1998) and feel a sense of belonging to the school (Honma & Uchiyama, 2016). Too much homework is also a reason for school avoidance (Honma, & Uchiyama, 2014).

### ***Play and Young Children***

Young children differ from older children and adults. While older children and adults are interested in academic success, play is the most important thing for young children. Play is a developmental (Ginsburg, 2007), spontaneous, and desired activity (Bodrova & Leong, 1998) performed by children to entertain and occupy themselves (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005); it is expressed through different forms and actions (Tannock, 2008).

Play is necessary for development. During play, a child develops the following skills: physical skills, such as running, jumping, balance and coordination (Fjørtoft, 2001); language skills, such as self-expression and, new word acquisition (van Oers & Duijkers, 2013); social skills, such as sharing, cooperation, helping each other, taking turns, social competence, and peer acceptance (Eggum-Wilkens et. al., 2014; Newton & Jenvey, 2011); creativity (Howard-Jones, Taylor & Sutton, 2002); literacy skills (Saracho, 2004); affective skills (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005); and cognitive skills (Bergen, 2002).

Peer play is one of the most important factors influencing school liking (Eggum-Wilkens et. al., 2014). Child recognizes his/her environment through play (Ginsburg, 2007), and play is the most effective way of learning for children. For example, task-based programs and play-based programs were compared in the Netherlands, and it was found that the children who had play-based programs learned more words than the children in the other program did (van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). In another study, it was found that through play, children discovered concepts of mathematics, such as counting, measuring, and helping to recognize the letters (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Play is more effective if academic skills, such as mathematics, literacy, and language skills, are acquired through the integration of play with relevant lessons (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Play plays an important role in children's learning by helping them develop mathematical skills, literacy and scientific concepts (Ray & Smith, 2010).

Researchers have classified play in different ways, together with children's mental activities and forms of social communication that increase developmentally. Parten (1933) classified play behaviors in young children as unoccupied behavior, solitary play, onlooker behavior, parallel play, associative play, and cooperative play. The studies on play behaviors have revealed that while children aged 1-2 years display onlooker or parallel play behaviors, children aged 3-6 years display associative and cooperative play behaviors. Most of the play behaviors of the children aged 3-6 years are composed of social and cooperative interaction and onlooker, solitary and parallel play behaviors continue to be observed at the least (Puckett, Black, Wittmer & Petersen, 2009). On the other hand, Smilansky (1968) described play as functional, constructive, dramatic and plays with rules. The play classification of Smilansky is based on mental activities, and the play classification of Parten is based on social interaction.

In this study, children are engaged in active outdoor play with rules and free play. Active outdoor play with rules improves children's autonomy and social relations and positively influences well-being by providing an outlet for physical energy (Bjørger, 2015). Active outdoor play helps develop the imagination of the child. Children learn through their imaginations. In play, learning is promoted by encouraging children's concept formation (Fleer, 2011). Children's cognitive abilities, such as metacognition, problem solving, and social cognition, develop with play (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003).

### ***Half-Time Kindergarten in Turkey***

In Turkey, early childhood education is provided with independent kindergarten and preprimary school. While children aged 3-6 years attend independent kindergarten, children aged 5-6 years attend preprimary school. Children start primary school at the age of 6, and kindergarten or preprimary school is not compulsory. Some children who start primary school may attend kindergarten for 3 years, some of them may attend kindergarten or preprimary school for one year, and some of them may never attend kindergarten or preprimary school. While kindergartens give more weight to play-based activities, the pressure from parents to teach academic skills in preprimary school forces teachers to provide such training.

In Turkey, all state kindergartens and preprimary schools use the national Early Childhood Education Program (Ministry of National Education, 2013). Although the early childhood education program is a play-based program, the task-based program is still applied. It is recommended that play be performed both as an activity and as a method in other activities (Ministry of National Education, 2013). In Turkey, kindergartens and preprimary schools provide half-time education (five hours).

As academic skills are considered to be more important in Turkey, sedentary activities are included more often. Children are expected to sit silently and learn academic skills. The parents also expect teachers to teach academic skills to their children. Therefore, as the teacher focuses on academic skills, they allocate less time to play activities. Cardon, Labarque, Smits, and De Bourdeaudhuij (2009) state that it is necessary to include the structured active play activities in early childhood institutions. Play is an activity that children like and need. For this reason, the fact that there are more play activities in kindergartens may positively influence children to like school and their relationships with teachers. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of free and active play with rules for children aged 4-5 years attending kindergarten on their school liking, school avoidance, and relationships with teachers.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

For the purposes of examining the effect of the play time of children aged 4-5 years in kindergarten on their school liking, school avoidance, and relationships with the teachers, an experimental method with pretest- posttest experimental and control groups was used. This experimental study included 70 children who attended a formal independent kindergarten affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in the city of Denizli, Turkey. There were a teacher and a trainee in each class. The class and yard were designed for young children with normal development.

*Children.* In this study, 70 children attending the formal independent kindergarten were included. The children were 4-5 years old (range 4.5 to 5.6;  $M=58.68$ ,  $SD=4.35$ ). While 33 of the children were girls (47%), 37 were boys (52%). The children had normal development. These children were from middle-income families. Approximately 50% of the children attended the same class last year.

*Teachers.* Three teachers participated in the study. All of them were female and had a bachelor's degree in the field of preschool education. The three teachers had 17 years, 11 years, and 9 years of experience.

*Parents.* Seventy parents participated in the study. A total of 27 (38%) of the parents participating in the study were fathers, and 43 (61%) were mothers. Two (7%) had a master's

degree, 19 (70%) of the fathers had a bachelor's degree, and 6 (22%) were high school graduates. Fifteen (34%) of the mothers had a bachelor's degree, 18 (41%) were high school graduates, 8 (18%) were secondary school graduates, and 2 (4%) were primary school graduates. Among fathers, seventeen (62%) were civil servants, 7 (25%) were workers, and 3 (11%) were self-employed. On the other hand, among mothers, 14 (32%) were civil servants, 10 (23%) were workers, and 19 (44%) were housewives.

*Determination of experimental and control groups.* The three classes were selected in the determined kindergarten with the random method. The three classes were assigned as experimental group 1 (M=58.96, SD=4.56), experimental group 2 (M=58.25, SD=4.18), and the control group (M=58.85, SD=4.45) again with the random method. While there were 25 children (12 girls, 48%; 13 boys, 52%) in experimental group 1, there were 24 children (11 girls, 45.8%; 13 boys, 54.1%) in experimental group 2. There were 21 children in the control group (10 girls, 47.6%; 11 boys, 52.3%). All children in the three classes participated in the study. First, permission was obtained from the children's parents for their participation in the study. The researcher participated in the activities of these three classes for one week. The researcher helped the teacher in the activities, and he/she communicated with the children, and played with them. Thus, the children were ensured to become acquainted with the researcher. Then, the children were interviewed one-on-one in a quiet environment outside of class. The researcher completed the School Liking and School Avoidance Questionnaire-Child Form (C-SLAQ) by conducting face-to-face interviews with children. Additionally, the School Liking and School Avoidance Questionnaire-Parent Form (P-SLAQ) was sent to the parents of the children. The teachers of the children were asked to fill out the School Liking and School Avoidance Questionnaire-Teacher Form (T-SLAQ) and Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). There was no significant difference among the pretest scores of the 70 children in the three classes in terms of test results ( $p>.05$ ). This result signified that the children had similar characteristics before the experimental study.

### ***Instruments***

*School liking and school avoidance questionnaire- child form (C-SLAQ; Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996).* The C-SLAQ is a self-report questionnaire with 14 items that measures children's school liking and school avoidance. While the subscale of school liking has 9 items, the subscale of school avoidance has 5 items. The items are rated using the following 3-point scale: 1= *no*, 2= *sometimes*, 3= *yes*. Two examples are "Is school fun?" and "Do you wish you did not have to go to school?" Three items on the subscale of school liking are reverse scored. With reverse scoring, higher scores indicate higher school liking. In the original version of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient varies between .76 and .90 (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996).

Within the scope of this study, the Turkish validity and reliability studies of the C-SLAQ were conducted. The Turkish translation of the questionnaire was performed by 5 English linguists. After the translation was completed separately by five people, the scale was back translated into English by another English linguist. After the comparison of the items on the original version of the scale and the items on the translated version of the scale was deemed appropriate, the scale was given to a Turkish linguist and a preschool teacher to evaluate the conformity of the translation to Turkish grammar and to the characteristics of the group to which the scale would be applied. The required revisions suggested by the experts were made on the translated scale items. The validity and reliability study of the scale was performed with 208 kindergarten and preprimary school children. Cronbach's alpha calculated within the scope of reliability studies of the questionnaires was .86 in the school liking subscale of the child form and .78 in the school avoidance subscale. The fit statistics calculated by

confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the two-factor structure of the C-SLAQ were as follows:  $\chi^2/df=2.29$ , Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) =.85, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) =.89 and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .07. AGFI and GFI values above .85 and RMSEA values below .08 are considered to be acceptable (Erkorkmaz, Etikan, Demir, Özdamar & Sanisoğlu, 2013). According to the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, it can be asserted that the C-SLAQ is a valid model with an acceptable fit.

*School liking and school avoidance questionnaire - teacher form (T-SLAQ; Ladd, Buhs & Seid, 2000).* The T-SLAQ is a scale with 13 items assessing the views of teachers concerning children's school liking and school avoidance. While the subscale of school liking involves 7 items, the subscale of school avoidance involves 6 items. The items are rated using the following 3-point scale: 0= *doesn't apply*, 1= *sometimes applies* 2= *certainly applies*. Two examples are "Likes to come to school" and "Makes up reasons to go home from school." Three items on the subscale of school liking are reverse scored. With reverse scoring, higher scores indicate higher school liking. In the original version of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha varies between .82 and .87.

The Turkish translation process applied to the C-SLAQ was also applied to the T-SLAQ. The validity and reliability study of the questionnaire was applied to 208 teachers working in kindergartens and preprimary schools. In reliability studies of the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .87 in the school liking subscale of the teacher form and .94 in the school avoidance subscale. The fit statistics calculated by confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the two-factor structure of the T-SLAQ were as follows:  $\chi^2/df=2.27$ , AGFI=.87, GFI=.91 and RMSEA= .07. An AGFI value above .85 and a RMSEA value below .08 are considered to be acceptable values. AGFI value above .90 is considered to be a good fit value (Erkorkmaz, Etikan, Demir, Özdamar & Sanisoğlu, 2013). According to the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, the T-SLAQ is a valid model with an acceptable fit.

One item on the T-SLAQ related to the school nurse was not answered by all the teachers included in the study because nurses are not employed in schools in Turkey. Therefore, this item was omitted from the questionnaire and the calculation was performed.

*School liking and school avoidance questionnaire - parent form (P-SLAQ; Ladd, Buhs & Seid, 2000).* The P-SLAQ is a scale consisting of 10 items that assess the views of parents concerning children's school liking and school avoidance. While the subscale of school liking involves 5 items, the subscale of school avoidance also involves 5 items. The items are rated using the following 5-point scale: 1= *almost never*, 2= *not much*, 3= *sometimes*, 4= *a lot*, 5= *almost always*. Two examples are "Enjoys school activities or events" and "Makes up reasons to stay home from school." Three items on the subscale of school liking are reverse scored. With reverse scoring, higher scores indicate higher school liking. In the original version of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha varies between .76 and .81.

The Turkish translation process applied to the C-SLAQ was also applied to the P-SLAQ. The validity and reliability study of the questionnaire was applied to 208 parents with children attending kindergarten and preprimary schools. Cronbach's alpha calculated within the scope of reliability studies of the questionnaires was .83 in the school liking subscale of the parent form and .84 in the school avoidance subscale. The fit statistics calculated by confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the two-factor structure of the P-SLAQ were as follows:  $\chi^2/df=1.88$ , AGFI=.91, GFI=.94 and RMSEA= .06. AGFI and GFI values of above .90 are considered indicate a good fit. RMSEA values below .08 are considered to be acceptable (Erkorkmaz, Etikan, Demir, Özdamar & Sanisoğlu, 2013). According to the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, it can be asserted that the P-SLAQ is a valid model with an acceptable fit.

*Student-teacher relationship scale (STRS; Pianta, 2001).* The STRS is a self-report measurement with 28 items designed to evaluate a teacher's perception of his/her relationship with a certain student. The items are rated using the following 5-point scale: 1= *definitely invalid*, 2= *invalid*, 3= *neutral*, 4= *valid*, and 5= *definitely valid*. It is an assessment instrument consisting of 3 subscales designed for children aged 4-8 years. The conflict subscale (12 items) measures the negative interactions and conflict between the student and the teacher. The closeness subscale (11 items) includes the close and positive relationship between the student and the teacher. The dependency subscale (5 items) measures dependency between the student and the teacher. Two items are reverse scored (Pianta, 2001). The Turkish validity and reliability studies of STRS were conducted by Şahin (Şahin, 2014). In this study, Cronbach's alpha is .72, for the overall scale, .84 for the conflict subscale, .88 for the closeness subscale, and .64 for the dependency subscale.

### Procedure

A play program was applied to the experimental groups. The aim in the program was to provide more opportunities for play among the children in the experimental group than among the children in the control group. Free play is the play in which children play with natural materials, such as sand, water, and plants in the yard, or with toys together with their friends in the classroom. Play with rules is the play with other children in accordance with predetermined rules.

The children in experimental group 1 played two days a week (1.5 hours, 3 hours a week) in schoolyards freely; their play was active and was governed rules given by their teachers. In addition, on the remaining three days, the children in this group also played actively with rules, along with engaging in free play in their classroom. The children in this group engaged in 26 sessions of active play with rules in the yard and 60 sessions of active play with rules in the classroom for 12 weeks. Experimental group 1 spent 30% of their time at school playing. While experimental group 1 engaged in free play in the yard in the first 45 minutes of the school day, they engaged in play with rules in the yard for two hours until the end of the school day.

Table 1. The Amount of Play for Experimental Group 1

Week	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12		Total
Day	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	24
Number of play sessions with rules in the classroom	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	60
Number of play sessions with rules in the yard	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26

The children in experimental group 2 engaged in free play one day a week (1 hour) in the schoolyard and in active play with rules given by their teachers. The children in this group also played an active game along with engaging in free play on one day of each week in their classes. The children in this group engaged in a total of 12 sessions of active play with rules in the yard and 24 sessions of active play with rules in the classroom over 12 weeks. Experimental group 2 spent 20% of their school time playing. Experimental group 2 engaged in free play in the yard in the first 30 minutes of the school day, whereas they engaged in play with rules in the yard one and a half hours before the end of the school day.

Table 2. The Amount of Play for Experimental Group 2

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Day	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	Thu	12
Number of play sessions with rules in the classroom	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	8
Number of play sessions with rules in the yard	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	8

In the control group, children did not engage in play sessions other than the ones included by the teacher in his/her plan. On some days, the children engaged in only free play, and on other days, they engaged only in play sessions with rules. The play sessions with rules were scheduled less frequently and irregularly in the control group, compared to in the experimental groups. The children were engaged in free play in the yard only 8 times over 12 weeks, and it was determined by their teachers that they engaged in 8 active play sessions with rules. While the children in the control group engaged in free play in the classroom and rarely in the yard, the children in the experimental groups engaged in free play in the yard. They also rarely engaged in play with rules while in the classroom; instead, children were more involved in academic activities. The control group spent 10% of their school time playing.

Table 3. The Amount of Play for the Control Group

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Day	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	Tue	12
Number of play sessions with rules in the classroom	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	24
Number of play sessions with rules in the yard	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12

The play sessions included active play with rules structured by the teacher, such as hide-and-seek, blind man's bluff, duck-duck-goose, and what time is it, Mr. Fox? For example, in duck-duck-goose, one child is designated as "it". All children form a circle in which each child faces each other. The child who is "it" gives a napkin to one of the children at his/her back without showing anyone. In addition, he/she starts walking around the circle singing duck duck goose. The child who is given the napkin at the back tries to catch the other child. Then, the child who is given the napkin at the back becomes "it".

The teacher did not intervene in free play sessions that took place in the yard and in the classroom; however, she guided children and usually observed them when necessary. In the play sessions with rules, the teacher guided some of the play without participating, and on the other hand, he/she participated in some play sessions. The same national early childhood education program was applied in all three kindergarten classes where the study was conducted. There was no loss because the children in the experimental group engaged in play sessions with rules and free play during their time at school. In this study, only the effect of engaging in more play sessions was examined. In the other activities, no application was performed with respect to school liking. All three classes performed play activities, but the rates of play were different (experimental group 1: 30%, experimental group 2: 20%, control group: 10%).



After three months of application, posttests were administered to the children in the experimental and control groups. Additionally, parents and teachers were asked to complete their designated scales.

### Data Analysis

A normal distribution of the data was determined as a result of the pretest and posttest evaluations of the experimental and control groups. Therefore, the difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of the groups was determined using the paired samples t test. While the one-way ANOVA was used to examine the pretest and posttest mean scores of the experimental and control groups, the LSD test was applied to determine the difference between the groups.

### Results

In this section, the results of the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups are provided.

Table 4. Paired Samples t test Results of the Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of the Children in Experimental Group 1

		n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	df	p
School Liking (child form)	Pre-test	25	20.88	3.55	-3.96	24	.00*
	Post-test	25	23.96	1.36			
School Avoidance (child form)	Pre-test	25	9.04	2.31	2.17	24	.03*
	Post-test	25	7.84	2.37			
STRS	Closeness	Pre-test	25	32.72	-5.53	24	.00*
		Post-test	25	35.76			
	Conflict	Pre-test	25	27.12	6.29	24	.00*
		Post-test	25	25.08			
	Dependency	Pre-test	25	20.64	5.90	24	.00*
		Post-test	25	16.44			

\*p<.05

As shown in Table 4, when the pretest and posttest mean scores of the children in experimental group 1 were examined, a statistically significant difference was found in the favor of the posttest among the mean scores of the school liking-child form ( $t=-3.96$ ,  $p<.05$ ), school avoidance-child form ( $t=2.17$ ,  $p<.05$ ), STRS closeness subscale ( $t=-5.53$ ,  $p<.05$ ), STRS conflict subscale ( $t=6.29$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and STRS dependency subscale ( $t=5.90$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

A statistically significant difference was determined in favor of the posttest between the mean scores of the school liking-teacher form ( $t=-7.40$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and school avoidance-teacher form ( $t=3.72$ ,  $p<.05$ ), which were administered to the teachers, and between the mean scores of the school liking-parent form ( $t=-5.51$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and school avoidance-parent form ( $t=5.36$ ,  $p<.05$ ), which were administered to the parents, of the children in experimental group 1.

Table 5. Paired Samples t test Results for the Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of the Children in Experimental Group 2

		n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	df	p	
School Liking (child form)	Pre-test	24	21.87	3.49	-2.18	23	.03*	
	Post-test	24	22.75	2.17				
School Avoidance (child form)	Pre-test	24	8.04	2.71	4.50	23	.00*	
	Post-test	24	6.58	1.71				
STRS	Closeness	Pre-test	24	34.70	5.16	-4.76	23	.00*
		Post-test	24	36.50	4.39			
	Conflict	Pre-test	24	25.66	3.86	4.22	23	.00*
		Post-test	24	24.04	3.73			
	Dependency	Pre-test	24	18.37	4.20	2.68	23	.01*
		Post-test	24	16.66	3.53			

\*p&lt;.05

As seen in Table 5, when the pretest and posttest mean scores of the children in the experimental group 2 were examined, a statistically significant difference was determined in favor of the posttest among the mean scores of school liking-child form ( $t=-2.18$ ,  $p<.05$ ), school avoidance-child form ( $t=4.50$ ,  $p<.05$ ), STRS closeness subscale ( $t=-4.76$ ,  $p<.05$ ), STRS conflict subscale ( $t=4.22$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and STRS dependency subscale ( $t=2.68$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

A statistically significant difference was determined in favor of the posttest between the mean scores of the school liking-teacher form ( $t=-2.20$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and school avoidance- teacher form ( $t=2.93$ ,  $p<.05$ ), which were administered to the teachers, and between the mean scores of the school liking-parent form ( $t=-2.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and school avoidance- parent form ( $t=2.17$ ,  $p<.05$ ), which were administered to the parents, of the children in experimental group 2.

Table 6. Paired Samples t test Results for Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of the Children in the Control Group

		n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	df	p	
School Liking (child form)	Pre-test	21	21.33	1.90	.75	20	.45	
	Post-test	21	20.85	2.41				
School Avoidance (child form)	Pre-test	21	8.42	2.15	-1.65	20	.11	
	Post-test	21	9.28	2.12				
STRS	Closeness	Pre-test	21	33.71	4.62	1.93	20	.06
		Post-test	21	32.90	5.55			
	Conflict	Pre-test	21	26.38	3.49	-1.31	20	.20
		Post-test	21	27.47	3.91			
	Dependency	Pre-test	21	19.04	3.93	.22	20	.82
		Post-test	21	18.85	2.76			

As shown in Table 6, when the pretest and posttest mean scores of the children in the control group were examined, no statistically significant difference was determined between the mean scores of school liking-child form ( $t=.75$ ,  $p>.05$ ), school avoidance- child form ( $t=-$

1.65,  $p > .05$ ), STRS closeness subscale ( $t = -1.93$ ,  $p > .05$ ), STRS conflict subscale ( $t = -1.31$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and STRS dependency subscale ( $t = .22$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

No statistically significant difference was determined between the mean scores of the school liking-teacher form ( $t = 1.87$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and school avoidance- teacher form ( $t = -2.04$ ,  $p > .05$ ), which were administered to the teachers, and between the mean scores of the school liking-parent form ( $t = 1.67$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and school avoidance- parent form ( $t = -1.70$ ,  $p > .05$ ), which were administered to the parents, of the children in the control group.

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA Results for Posttest Mean Scores of the Children in the Experimental and Control Groups

			n	$\bar{x}$	SD	F	p
School Liking (child form)	Experiment group 1		25	23.96	1.36	13.71	.00*
	Experiment group 2		24	22.75	2.17		
	Control group		21	20.85	2.41		
School Avoidance (child form)	Experiment group 1		25	7.84	2.37	9.33	.00*
	Experiment group 2		24	6.58	1.71		
	Control group		21	9.28	2.12		
STRS	Closeness	Experiment group 1	25	35.76	4.34	3.51	.03*
		Experiment group 2	24	36.50	4.39		
		Control group	21	32.90	5.55		
	Conflict	Experiment group 1	25	25.08	4.31	4.28	.01*
		Experiment group 2	24	24.04	3.73		
		Control group	21	27.47	3.91		
	Dependency	Experiment group 1	25	16.44	4.02	3.18	.04*
		Experiment group 2	24	16.66	3.53		
		Control group	21	18.85	2.76		

\* $p < .05$

When Table 7 was examined, a significant difference was determined between the experimental and control groups in terms of the posttest mean scores of the school liking-child form ( $F = 13.71$ ,  $p < .05$ ), school avoidance-child form ( $F = 9.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and STRS closeness subscale ( $F = 3.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ), STRS conflict subscale ( $F = 4.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and STRS dependency subscale ( $F = 3.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). As a result of post hoc LSD analysis, differences were found among the three groups with respect to the C-SLAQ between experimental group 1 and the control group and between experimental group 2 and the control group on the closeness, conflict and dependency subscales of the STRS.

A statistically significant difference was also determined between the posttest mean scores of the school liking-teacher form ( $F = 5.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and school avoidance- teacher form ( $F = 3.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which were administered to the teachers, and the school liking-parent form ( $F = 3.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and school avoidance- parent form ( $F = 3.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which were administered to the parents, of the children in the experimental and control groups. As a result of post hoc LSD analysis, a difference was determined between experimental group 1 and the control group and between experimental group 2 and the control group with respect to both the T-SLAQ and the P-SLAQ.

A follow-up test was applied to the children, teachers and parents in the experimental and control groups 8 weeks later. No difference was found between the posttest and the follow-up test ( $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

The results of this study investigating the effect of more frequent active and regular play sessions on kindergarten students' school liking, school avoidance and relationships with teachers revealed that school liking levels increased and school avoidance levels decreased, based on the pretest and posttest scores of the children in experimental group 1, who engaged in active and free play two days a week in the schoolyard and every day in the classroom, and those of the children in experimental group 2, who engaged in free and active play one day a week in the schoolyard and two days a week in the classroom. While the level of closeness with the teacher increased in both experimental groups, their conflict and dependence levels decreased. This finding can be interpreted as regular daily active play having a positive effect on children's school liking and relationships with their teachers. It is recommended that young children engage in active plays for at least 60 minutes per day (Strong et al., 2005). In a study conducted among children between the ages of 3-12 years, 64% of the children still engaged in active catching play along with indoor play, such as television, computer play, and video play. In the same study, mothers also noted that out-of-class play improved the social and communication skills of their child (Clements, 2004). In the study conducted by Pearson (2008) on kindergarten children, it was determined that children who engaged in play displayed more positive emotions towards school compared to the children who did not engage in play. In their study comparing 5 to 8 year-old children who participated in play programs requiring special education and those who did not, O'Connor and Stagnitti (2011) showed that while a significant decrease was observed in the playing deficits of the children participating in the play program, they had more social relationships and showed less disruptive behaviors. These results are compatible with the results of this study. Free and active play positively affected preschool children's school liking and relationships with teachers.

When the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups were compared, it was determined that while school liking and levels of closeness with the teacher increased in favor of the experimental group, school avoidance, conflict with the teacher and dependency decreased. There was a statistically significant difference between experimental group 1 and experimental group 2 in terms of the C-SLAQ, whereas no difference was found between these experimental groups in terms of the T-SLAQ and the P-SLAQ. In this study, there was an incompatibility among the child, teacher and parent evaluations only in this respect. This finding signified that providing more play opportunities to children in kindergarten was more effective in promoting their school liking. The results of the follow-up test also showed that the experimental study had a long-term effect.

There were no differences among the classes in terms of age, curriculum, or child-teacher interaction, except for more opportunities for play for the children in the experimental group. The STRS pretest results also showed that there was no significant difference among the classes in the teacher-student relationship. Only the experiences of the teachers were different. The teacher of experimental group 1 had 17 years of experience, the teacher of experimental group 2 had 9 years of experience, and the teacher of the control group had 11 years of experience. The fact that the teacher of experimental group 1 had more experience may have provided him/her to be more effective in the play activities. Additionally, approximately half of the children attended the same class before (experimental group 1: 45%, experimental group 2: 46%, control group: 43%). The fact that children attended the

same class before may foster within them a sense of belonging towards school and a sense of familiarity with the teacher and peers (Honma & Uchiyama, 2016).

In the pretest and posttest results of this study, a decrease in school liking levels and an increase in school avoidance levels were observed, and this decrease was not statistically significant. This finding may be associated with the effect of the experiences obtained during the school year. Ladd, Buhs and Seid (2000) expressed that 10% of kindergarten children in fall measurements and 19% of kindergarten children in spring measurements stated their negative feelings about the school.

In this study, not only was the C-SLAQ used, but the T-SLAQ and the P-SLAQ were also used to determine whether the information obtained from the children was consistent. Information obtained from the teacher and the parents was also consistent with the information obtained from the children. Some studies reveal low agreement among the teacher, parent and child reports (Murray, Murray & Waas, 2008; Pearson, 2008).

In this study, the school liking levels of the kindergarten children were found to be above average, and their school avoidance levels were below average. In terms of their relationships with the teachers, their closeness levels with the teachers was above average, but their conflict and dependency levels were below average. Since the activities in kindergartens are play-based, children are expected to like school. Again, since kindergarten teachers are children's first teachers and because children need more adult support during this period, they also need close relationships with their teachers. In one study, the conversations between mothers and children were recorded after they came from school, and it was observed that the kindergarten children expressed positive feelings about school rather than negative feelings (Flannagan & Perese, 1998). In the study by Amsden et al., (2005), more than 80% of kindergarten children were reported to have a positive attitude towards school and like being present at school. In the same study, 86% of the parents reported that their children looked forward to going to school.

The following recommendations can be presented in line with the findings of this study. According to the study results, outdoor activities and play with rules in the classroom may have a positive effect on kindergarten students' school liking and relationships with teachers. Researchers of the early childhood period suggest that the most suitable developmental activity for young children is play-based education (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Approximately 5% of schools in the Netherlands administer play-based developmental education programs (van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). In Canada, due to the expectations of the academic program, the teachers define play separately from learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). This rate is quite low even in developed countries, such as Canada and the Netherlands. In developing countries such as Turkey, play-based education is provided at a rather low rate. For this reason, the involvement of more play-based education in early childhood education may positively affect children's development and their love of school and their teachers. Parental pressure on teachers to teach academic skills leads to fewer play activities in early childhood education institutions. In this study, it was revealed that the increase in play activities in kindergartens increased children's school liking and play activities in preprimary school, which gives more weight to the teaching of academic skills, and will lead to more important findings. For this reason, it would be more effective to conduct such a study in preprimary schools. Given that increasing age also reduced children's school liking, increasing active play activities and play-based education in more advanced classes, such as elementary school, secondary school, and high school will increase older children's school liking. Kindergarten classes using different approaches (such as Montessori, Waldorf) can be compared in terms of their attitudes towards school. More studies on the quality, problems, and nature of early

childhood education should be conducted in developing countries such as Turkey. Parents can be guided to encourage positive attitudes in their children towards school and help them with school adjustment. Education programs can be developed for children who have school adjustment problems or low levels of school liking.

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## **Geniş Özet**

### **Giriş**

Okulu sevme, okula ilişkin sevgi ve olumlu algılamalara sahip olma anlamına gelir. Günümüzde insanoğlu erken çocukluk döneminden üniversiteye kadar eğitim almak için okullarda zamanının önemli bir bölümünü geçirir. Okullar, çocukların diğer çocuklarla karşılaştığı yerlerdir ve çocuğun toplumsallaşmasında önemli bir yere sahiptir. Bu nedenle çocuğun okula uyumu ve okulu sevmesi önemlidir. Çocuğun okulu sevmesinde çocuk özellikleri, aile ilişkileri, akran ilişkileri, öğretmenle ilişkiler ve okul ortamları gibi farklı faktörler etkilidir.

Yapılan araştırmalar; çocukların olumlu davranışları olması ve normal gelişim göstermelerinin, yaşlarının küçük olmasının, dışa dönük ve rol yeteneği olmasının, aile desteğine sahip olmalarının, olumlu akran ilişkilerine sahip olmalarının, öğretmenleriyle olumlu ilişkileri olmalarının ve okulun fiziki koşullarının uygun olmasının da çocukların okulu sevmelerini sağlayıcı faktörler olduğunu göstermektedir.

Okulu sevme üzerinde bütün bu etkenlere rağmen okulda düzenlenen etkinliklerle çocuğun okulu sevmesi sağlanabilir. Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında hareketli oyun etkinliklerinin yerine daha çok oturarak yapılan etkinlikler yapılmaktadır. Özellikle okul öncesi dönemde hareketli oyun etkinlikleri çocuğun okulu sevmesini ve öğretmenleriyle ilişkilerini olumlu yönde etkileyebilir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, anaokuluna devam eden 5 yaş grubu çocukların serbest ve hareketli olarak düzenlenen oyun etkinliklerinin okulu sevme, okuldan kaçınma ve öğretmenleriyle ilişkileri üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesidir.

### **Yöntem**

Anaokuluna devam eden 5 yaş grubu çocukların oyun oynama sürelerinin okulu sevme, okuldan kaçınma ve öğretmenleriyle ilişkileri üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi amacıyla ön test-son testli, deney ve kontrol gruplu deneysel yöntemden yararlanılmıştır. Araştırmada iki deney, bir kontrol grubu yer almaktadır. Çalışma grubunun tamamını Denizli ilindeki MEB'e bağlı resmi bir bağımsız anaokulundaki üç sınıfa devam eden 5 yaş grubundan normal gelişim özellikleri gösteren çocuklar oluşturmuştur.

Veri toplama araçları olarak Okulu Sevme ve Okuldan Kaçınma (çocuk, öğretmen ve ebeveyn formu) ve Öğretmen-Öğrenci İlişki Ölçeği kullanılmıştır.

Deney grubu 1'deki çocuklar haftada iki gün (1,5 saat, haftada 3 saat) okul bahçelerinde serbest ve öğretmenleri tarafından oynatılan kurallı ve hareketli oyunlardan oynamışlardır. Bu gruptaki çocuklar sınıflarında da her gün serbest oyunların yanı sıra hareketli bir oyun oynamışlardır. Bu gruptaki çocuklara 12 hafta boyunca açık alanda 24 hareketli oyun, sınıf ortamında da 50 hareketli oyun oynatılmıştır.

Deney grubu 2'deki çocuklar haftada bir gün (1 saat) okul bahçelerinde serbest ve öğretmenleri tarafından oynatılan kurallı ve hareketli oyunlardan oynamışlardır. Bu gruptaki çocuklar sınıflarında da her hafta iki gün serbest oyunlarının yanı sıra hareketli bir oyun oynamışlardır. Bu gruptaki çocuklara 12 hafta boyunca açık alanda 12 hareketli oyun, sınıf ortamında da 24 hareketli oyun oynatılmıştır.

Kontrol grubunda ise oyunla ilgili özel bir düzenleme yapılmamıştır. Çocuklar açık alanda 12 hafta boyunca sadece 8 kez serbest oyunlar oynamışlar, sınıfta da 8 tane hareketli oyun oynadığı öğretmenleri tarafından belirtilmiştir. Üç aylık uygulamanın ardından deney ve kontrol grubundaki çocuklara son testler uygulanmıştır.

### **Sonuçlar ve Tartışma**

Anaokuluna devam eden çocuklara daha fazla sayıda hareketli ve düzenli olarak oynatılan oyunların çocukların okulu sevme, okuldan kaçınma ve öğretmenlerle olan ilişkileri üzerindeki etkisinin incelendiği bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre; haftada iki gün bahçede ve her gün de sınıfta hareketli ve serbest oyunlar oynatılan deney grubu 1'deki çocukların ve

haftada bir gün bahçede ve her hafta iki gün sınıfta serbest oyunlarının yanı sıra hareketli bir oyun oynatılan deney grubu 2'deki çocukların ön ve son test sonuçlarına göre okulu sevmeye düzeyleri artmış, okuldan kaçınma düzeyleri azalmıştır. Her iki deney grubundaki çocukların öğretmenlerle yakınlık düzeyleri artmış, çatışma ve bağımlılık düzeyleri azalmıştır. Bu durum düzenli olarak her gün oynatılan hareketli oyunların çocukların okulu sevmeye ve öğretmenlerle ilişkileri üzerinde olumlu etkisi olduğu şeklinde yorumlanabilir.

Deney ve kontrol gruplarının son test puanları karşılaştırıldığında, deney gruplarının lehine okulu sevmeye ve öğretmenle yakınlık düzeyleri artmış, okuldan kaçınma, öğretmenle çatışma ve bağımlılık düzeyleri azalmıştır. Okulu Sevmeye ve Okuldan Kaçınma-Çocuk Formunda deney grubu 1 ile deney grubu 2 arasında istatistiksel olarak önemli bir farklılık çıkarken, Okulu Sevmeye ve Okuldan Kaçınma-Öğretmen Formu ve Okulu Sevmeye ve Okuldan Kaçınma-Ebeveyn Formunda iki deney grubu arasında bir farklılık çıkmamıştır. Bu araştırmada sadece bu açıdan çocuk ile öğretmen ve ebeveyn değerlendirmeleri arasında uyumsuzluk çıkmıştır. Bu durum anaokullarında çocukların oyun etkinliklerine daha fazla yer verilmesinin okulu sevmelerinde daha fazla etkisi olduğunu göstermektedir. İzleme testi sonucu da deneysel çalışmanın etkisinin uzun süreli olduğunu göstermektedir.

Bu çalışmada kontrol grubunda ön ve son test sonuçlarında istatistiksel olarak önemli olmayan okulu sevmeye düzeyinde azalma okuldan kaçınma düzeyinde artma görülmüştür. Bu durum okul yılı boyunca geçirilen deneyimlerin etkisinden kaynaklanabilir.

Bu çalışmada anaokulu çocuklarının okulu sevmeye düzeyleri ortalamanın üstünde, okuldan kaçınma düzeyleri ortalamanın altında çıkmıştır. Öğretmenlerle ilişkileri açısından onlarla yakınlık düzeyleri ortalamanın üstünde, çatışma ve bağımlılık düzeyleri ortalamanın altında çıkmıştır. Anaokullarında etkinlikler oyun temelli olduğu için çocukların okulu sevmeleri beklenen bir durumdur. Yine anaokulu öğretmenleri çocukların ilk öğretmenleri olduğu için ve çocukların bu dönemde yetişkin desteğine daha fazla ihtiyaç duyması da çocukların öğretmenleriyle yakın ilişkiler içinde olmasını gerektirir.

Bu araştırma doğrultusunda şu öneriler sunulabilir: Araştırma sonuçlarına göre sınıf dışında açık hava etkinlikleri ve sınıf içinde yapılandırılmış oyun etkinliklerinin anaokulu çocuklarının okulu sevmeye ve öğretmenle ilişkileri üzerinde olumlu etki oluşturabilmektedir. Bu nedenle anaokullarında açık ve kapalı alanda düzenli olarak oyun oynatılmalıdır.