



THE EFFECT OF FRIENDSHIP SKILLS TRAINING ON FRIENDSHIP QUALITY AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the effects of friendship skills training on the quality of friendship and subjective well-being of adolescents. In order to determine the experimental and control groups, the Friendship Quality Scale and the Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale were administered to 311 students in 9th, 10th and 11th grade classes from a state school in İskenderun in Hatay during the 2015-2016 education year. As a result, 21 students who had lower than average scores were included in the study. Students who participated in the study were assigned to the experimental and control groups randomly. An 8-session psycho-education program ("Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training") which were developed by Morganett (2013) have been conducted with the students in the experimental group while the control group received no treatment. After the sessions, the same measurement tools were applied on both the experimental and control groups. The data gathered was analyzed by using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test to examine the effectiveness of the training program. The analysis of the data has indicated an increase in the friendship quality and subjective well-being of the students who attended the friendship skills training group while there was no change in the friendship quality and subjective well-being of the students in control group.

Keywords: friendship skills, friendship quality, subjective well-being

1. Introduction

Adolescence has been defined in various ways by many different approaches. Despite emphasizing the period which starts at age ten and ends towards the beginning of the twenties, it is not possible to describe the exact adolescence starting and ending age. It

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can be defined as starting with the end of childhood and completed with the acquisition of a sense of identity and it includes many developments biologically, psychological and socially. This period can be categorized into three stages: the beginning (early adolescence), middle adolescence and late adolescence (Derman, 2008). During adolescence, adolescents perform various developmental tasks in terms of moral, cognitive and psycho-social perspectives. They are sometimes in search of something, which might result in conflicts with society and family, and they experience a deep imbalance. Friends are the most anchor for adolescents during this period (Cüceloğlu, 1999). Adolescents take opportunities to support their social and emotional developments through communicating with both their families and friends. By means of these friendships, adolescents interact with changes to know themselves better. Friends play a reflective role for adolescents by giving more varied and objective feedback than their families, which enables them to realize both negative and positive sides of themselves. Additionally, friends play a crucial role in adolescents' self-esteem and self-confidence composition (Dekovic & Meeus, 1979). An increasing number of friends and interaction with the opposite sex makes adolescents' social relations more complicated. The development of social skills, which can be described as behaviors underlying effective communication with others, gains more significance during this period (Canbay, 2010). Indeed, Rigby (2000) revealed that as the social support sources of adolescents decrease, their well-being is influenced negatively.

Happiness, which is described as a well-being in the literature, can be defined as an agent's cognitive and affective assessments about his/her own life. Subjective well-being consists of three components: *positive affectivity*, *negative affectivity* and *life satisfaction*. Positive affectivity and negative affectivity compose the affective dimension of subjective well-being while life satisfaction is related to the cognitive dimension (Diener and Diener, 1996). Positive affectivity refers to the senses of joy, contentment and energy while negative affectivity refers to feeling pessimistic, sad, exhausted and depressed. Life satisfaction indicates an integrative assessment of an agent's own life in terms of life standards s/he has determined beforehand (Morsünbül, 2011). Life satisfaction on various sides of life, such as work life, family and friendship relations has great influence on subjective well-being. The adolescents who successfully manage to complete developmental tasks such as establishing healthy relationships with peers can be said to possess a high level of subjective well-being (İşleroğlu, 2012). When adolescents effectively communicate with their peers, they feel themselves competent and satisfied with their relationships with their friends, which can be said to increase their subjective well-being because friendships have many important functions over children's lives and friends develop children's social skills through games and play. They provide positive behaviors concerning anger management and opposite sex relations (Asher & Renshaw, 1981). According to Bingül (1995; cited: Yücel, 2009), when

an adolescent is unable to establish a friendship or to participate in a group, s/he tends to become angry, peevish, selfish, furious, bullying and insecure towards his environment and to possess unreliable characteristics as well as becoming an individual who isolates himself from society, has self-confidence problems and adopts a shy characteristic, which might result in negative affectivity and thus, decrease subjective well-being level.

For the sake of abolishing all these negativities and increasing the subjective well-being of adolescents, activities which improve friendship among adolescents during this period which coincides with the years in which they spend most of their time at school, are of great significance. Additionally, since adolescence includes more mental fluctuation than adulthood, that adolescents develop peer relations and increase their sources of social support will contribute to their subjective well-being too (Steinberg, 2007).

Considering the fact that adolescence is a sensitive stage in an individual's development, we can imply that studies for maintaining and supporting psychological health of adolescents will be considerably important. Due to the fact that communication styles which are inherent to adolescence with authority figures such as parents, teachers etc. generally increase the possibility of conflicts with these figures who are older than them, it is a necessity to support adolescents' friendship skills which are among the most essential social support sources. The adolescents who improve their friendship skills have healthier psychological structures and feel better, thus their subjective well-being is supported, which is of considerable significance.

2. Study Goal

This study has two goals. The first goal is to examine the effects of "Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training" on adolescents' friendship quality. The second goal of the study is to analyze the effects of Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training" on adolescents' subjective well-beings. In this sense, the following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

2.1 Hypothesis

1. The "Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training" will increase the participant adolescents' friendship quality significantly compared to the other adolescents who do not receive any psycho-therapy program.
2. The "Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training" will increase the participant adolescents' subjective well-beings significantly compared to the other adolescents who have not attended any psycho-therapy program.

3. Method

Examining the effects of friendship skills training on adolescents' friendship quality and subjective well-being, this study is a semi-experimental research including experimental and control groups. The study made use of pre and post-test measures, 2x2 split-plot design with control and experimental groups, and factorial (mixed) design (Büyüköztürk, 2007). In this design, the first factor shows the independent groups (control and experimental), the other factor displays the repetitive measurements under different conditions related to dependent variable (pre-test and post-test).

Table 1: Research Design

Groups	Pre-test	Process	Post-test
Experimental	FQS ASWBS	Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training	FQS ASWBS
Control	FQS ASWBS	-	FQS ASWBS

Before the experiment, both groups were given the "Friendship Quality Scale" (FQS) and Adolescents' Subjective Well-being Scale" (ASWBS). And after 8 weeks of psycho-educational practices, the instruments were applied to both the control and experimental groups again.

While the experimental group received "Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training", which was developed by Morganett (2013), the control group received no such training.

3.1 The Composition of Experimental and Control Groups

With the aim to compose control and experimental groups, FQS and ASWBS were applied to 311 students studying in 9th, 10th and 11th grade classes at a state school in İskenderun, Hatay in the 2015-2016 education year. The 21 students who scored 1 point lower than standard deviation (FQS:sd= 22.20; ASWBS:sd= 9.23) from the average of both scales (FQS:̄= 78.3773; ASWBS: ̄= 47.4711) were included in the study. The students were randomly separated into experimental and control groups equally in terms of gender. The students in the experimental group were informed about the psycho-education program beforehand by the school psychological counselor. The students were explained the principals of psycho-education groups such as willingness, privacy, respect etc.

3.2 Assessment Instruments

In the study, the *Friendship Quality Scale*, which was developed by Thien, Razak and Jamil and adapted into Turkish by Akın, Adam, Karduz and Akın (2014), and the

Adolescents' Subjective Well-being Scale, which was developed by Eryılmaz (2009) were used.

3.3 Friendship Quality Scale (FQS): FQS is a 6-type Likert scale which consists of four sub dimensions and 21 items: intimacy (6 items), assistance (3 items), acceptance (4 items) and safety (8 items). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .82 for the safety sub dimension, .75 for the intimacy sub dimension, .77 for the acceptance sub dimension, .81 for the assistance sub dimension, and .91 for the total scale. The revised item total correlation coefficients of the scale ranged between .38 and .67 (Akin, Karduz Adam & Akin, 2014).

3.4 Adolescents' Subjective Well-being Scale (ASWBS): ASWBS is a 4-type Likert scale which consists of four sub dimensions and 15 items: satisfaction with family relationships (4 items), satisfaction of the relationships with important others (4 items), life satisfaction (3 items) and positive affect (4 items) (Eryılmaz, 2009).

The reliability of the instrument was tested through internal consistency and total item correlation methods. The Cronbach alpha consistency coefficient of the total scale was .86, and Spearman Brown value was .83. Also, reliability of the scale was measured with test retest method. With this aim, the instrument was applied to the same group with two weeks gaps. The stability factor was found as .83 (Eryılmaz, 2009).

4. Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, non-parametric tests were used since the study sample included less than 30 agents (Corder & Foreman, 2014). In this sense, the Mann-Whitney U Test was applied to determine whether the difference between the groups was meaningful; and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was implemented to determine whether the difference within the group was statistically meaningful. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.

The significance value was accepted as .05 for all analysis.

5. Findings

The aim of the study is to examine the effects of Beginning Friendships, Maintaining and Protecting Training on adolescents' friendship quality and subjective well-being. Before testing the hypothesis, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of the both control and experimental groups' scores from FQS and ASWBS were measured before and after the process. The values obtained are shown in Table 2.

Assessment Groups		N	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			*	sd	*	sd
FQS	Experimental	8	40.26	12.68	96.88	15.45
	Control	7	44.58	7.52	60	14.29
ASWBS	Experimental	8	34	5.4	47.88	7.08
	Control	7	35.57	4.28	35.43	8.18

As seen in Table 2, an increase can be observed in the experimental group's FQS pre-test and post-test averages when compared to the FQS pre-test and post-test averages of the control group. On the other hand, the arithmetic average of the ASWBS post-test increased while a decrease was seen in the ASWBS post-test arithmetic mean of the control group.

The Mann-Whitney U Test was applied to reveal whether there was a statistically meaningful difference between the FQS and ASWBS pre-test scores of both the experimental and control groups.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test results related to FQS and ASWBS pre-test scores of both Experimental and control groups

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	U	p
FQS	Experimental	8	7.25	58	22	0.487
	Control	7	8.86	62		
ASWBS	Experimental	8	7.75	62	26	0.817
	Control	7	8.29	58		

As Table 3 shows, there is no statistically meaningful difference in both experimental and control groups FQS [$U_{(15)}= 22, p > .05$] and ASWBS [$U_{(15)}= 26, p > .05$] pre-test scores.

In parallel with the aim of the study, the Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to see whether there was a statistically meaningful difference between the FQS and ASWBS post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U Test results related to FQS and ASWBS post-test scores of both experimental and control groups

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	U	p
FQS	Experimental	8	11,19	89,50	2,50	0,003
	Control	7	4,36	30,50		
ASWBS	Experimental	8	10,88	87	5	0,008
	Control	7	4,71	33		

As seen in Table 4, there was a significant difference in the post-test scores from FQS [$U_{(15)}= 2.5, p < .05$] and ASWBS [$U_{(15)}= 5, p < .05$]. With the aim to reveal the source of that difference between the pre and post application processes of the training, the pre-

test and post-test scores that both experimental and control groups scored in FQS and ASWBS were analyzed with the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

Table 5: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results which was applied so as to determine whether there was a statistically meaningful difference between FQS and ASWBS pre and post-tests scores of the experimental group

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	z	p
FQS (pre-test and post-test)	Negative ranks	0	0	0		
	Positive ranks	8	4.50	36	-2.521	0.012
	No difference	0				
ASWBS (pre-test and post-test)	Negative ranks	1	1	1		
	Positive ranks	7	5	35	-2.383	0.017
	No difference	0				

In a review of Table 5, a meaningful difference in FQS ($z = -2.521$, $p < .05$) and ASWBS ($z = -2.383$, $p < .05$) pre-test scores of the experimental group can be seen. The in-group changes in the control group were also checked by the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test before and after the training.

Table 6: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results which were applied so as to determine whether there was a statistically meaningful difference between FQS and ASWBS pre and post-tests scores of control group

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	z	p
FQS (pre-test and post-test)	Negative ranks	1	1	1		
	Positive ranks	6	4.5	27	-2.197	0.028
	No difference	0				
ASWBS (pre-test and post-test)	Negative ranks	3	4	12		
	Positive ranks	3	3	9	-0.316	0.0752
	No difference	1				

As Table 6 demonstrates, there is a statistically meaningful difference between pre-test and post-test scores obtained from FQS ($z = -2.197$, $p < .05$) while not such a difference was observed between pre-test and post-test scores obtained from ASWBS ($z = -.316$, $p > .05$).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The friendship skills training program positively influenced both adolescents' friendship quality and subjective well-being which includes cognitive and affective assessments towards their own lives. The study findings suggest that although there was a difference in the post-test scores of the control and experimental group from FQS, the differences found between pre-test and post-test scores of the adolescents in the

control group was also meaningful. In other words, the friendship quality of the adolescents in the control group has increased when compared to before the training. This can be explained with the application time of the psycho-education program. That the training started at the first weeks of the spring terms when the weather gets warmer and the adolescents spend more time outside and that post-tests were completed towards the beginning of summer when they perform more physical activity might be influential on the efficiency of the program. Indeed, in its study emphasizing the importance of physical activity for children and adolescents, the Turkey Public Health Care Institution (2014) confirmed the positive contributions of physical activity to develop children and adolescents' social relations, communication skills and positive sense of self.

Adolescence is a downturn transition period for adolescents. For adolescents who try to adapt to both the physical and cognitive changes they undergo, the quality of the peer relations is of crucial importance for a healthy overcoming of that period. In his screening study, Bayraktar (2007) pointed out that peer relations is an important factor in adolescents' developing healthy attachment styles, and that the adolescents who possess positive friendship skills are psychologically more healthy.

It was concluded that the psycho-education program for increasing adolescents' friendship skills imposed positive effects on both their perceived friendship quality and subjective well-being. This finding is supported by similar research results too (Stevens, 2001; Laugeson, Frankel, Gantman, Dillon, & Mogil, 2012).

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