



## **Schools Through the Perspective of Students from Different Countries: The Case of Spain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Turkey\***

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### **Abstract**

This research was carried out to determine the perceptions of schools of students studying in five European Union countries (Spain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania) and the candidate country Turkey. In the study, the data were obtained through the student opinion form created by the researchers and analyzed by content analysis. In the study, it was determined that most of the students had a positive perception towards the school and described the school with positive concepts, metaphors, emotions, and values. Students with a positive perception of school have described school with the concepts of learning, friendship, future, development, entertainment, life, responsibility; positive emotions such as success, happiness, trust, pleasure, interest, love, joy, and respect; value expressions such as helpfulness, friendship, empathy; and with the house, family, home metaphors. It has also been understood that some of the students (13%) have a negative perception of school, they do not like school, and they continue to school because it is compulsory. It was among the findings of the research that the students with a negative perception of school have described school by metaphors expressing physical and emotional discomfort such as boredom, suffering, headache, burnout; and metaphors emphasizing the restriction of freedom such as prison, captivity, and watch tower. In addition, it has been determined that students with negative perceptions have individual and organizational reasons for these perceptions. In the research, it was concluded that there are common meanings in students' perceptions of school in different countries towards the school, and no matter what

language they speak, the students describe the school with similar thoughts and feelings. In this direction, suggestions have been made to increase the awareness of executives and policymakers about students' perceptions of school, to consider the interests and needs of students in the physical design of schools, to implement support programs that will enable students to develop a positive perception of the school, and to conduct longitudinal studies examining the reasons for these perceptions of students with negative perceptions.

Keywords: School dropout, Schools in Europe, Students' perception of school

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## **A. Introduction**

School is the most important organization in which individuals acquire cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, and aesthetic skills. Discussions about schools have been going on for many years because of its importance. According to some scientists, writers and philosophers, the school has been transferring people's knowledge to future generations since the Sumerians, preparing young people for life (Kremer, 2014), raising them as good people, good citizens, good producers, and good consumers (Aydin, 2019, p. 7) is a meaningful and important institution that revives the masses (Ucak & Dogan, 2020). According to some, it is an organization whose structure needs to be changed and updated (Dewey, 1956; Kilpatrick, 1921; Montessori, 1988). According to some, it is a structure that explains the opposite of those. In addition to the authors who envision a life without school (Illich, 2018), there are those who define school by concepts such as "mind murder" (Key, 1909), "weapon of mass destruction" (Gatto, 2019), "free education prison" (Inbar, 1996). For example, according to Andersson & Strander (2004), school is a place where students attend and spend more and more time not because they really want to, but because society has nothing else to offer them.

The school, which has managed to preserve its existence with different structures, different philosophical approaches, and methods in the historical process, mediates the shaping of civilization with its role in the lives of both individuals and states in the modern age. The school, which provides individuals the opportunity of profession, status, income, and cultural wealth, provides the states the opportunity to raise citizens who will be the guarantee of their existence and in this way to become a global power. Inbar (1996) states that from a Gestalt point of view, the school and the schooling process mean more than the sum of the structure, process and participants that make up the whole. Accordingly, it can be said that despite all the criticized aspects of the school, it continues to be the most critical institutional phenomenon for the empowerment, development, and improvement of individuals (Ucak & Dogan, 2020). As a matter of fact, it can be said that the origin of all these positive and negative views in the literature is the shaping of an education approach that responds to the needs of the people of the age and ultimately the effort to equip the

schools with the qualifications that can meet these needs. The ability of schools that undertake such important tasks to achieve their determined goals and how they will continue to function in the future is closely related to how they are perceived by the students, who are their *raison d'être*.

Individuals' perceptions of school affect many variables in their student and adult lives. Studies show that when students' perceptions of the school are positive, their psychological well-being is also positive (Donmez & Tayli, 2018), they look at the future more positively, and they can effectively solve the problems they encounter (Andersson & Strander, 2004). In addition, there are also studies showing that positive perception towards school reduces students' burnout (Ozdemir, 2015), increases self-confidence (Kpolovie, Joe & Okoto, 2014), school engagement, attendance levels (Adiguzel & Karadas, 2013; Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007 academic achievement (Donmez & Tayli, 2018; Kpolovie et al., 2014). On the contrary, as students' positive perceptions towards school decrease, they engage in negative behaviors such as dropping out the school (Gulcemal, 2019), absenteeism (Gubbels, van der Put & Assink, 2019; Hoşgorur & Polat, 2015), failure, violence against their teachers and friends, and tendency to guilt (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Kpolovie et al., 2014) increase. Moreover, it is understood from the literature that individuals with a negative perception of school have problems such as unemployment, dislike of their current job, housing problems, and physical and mental illnesses (Andersson & Strander, 2004; Gubbels, et al., 2019) in adult life due to school dropouts. For this reason, it can be said that the most destructive result of students' negative perception of school is school dropout.

School dropout describes the withdraw of school before the legal period of being in school expires and without acquiring the necessary qualifications (Yuner & Ozdemir, 2017), the loss of the right to education, which is the most basic human right. However, school dropout is not a phenomenon that occurs suddenly. Rather, it emerges when students stay away from school due to changes in their feelings, thoughts, and lives for many years (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). In other words, school dropout is a complex, long-term and multifactor phenomenon. In this context, it can be said that students' negative perception of school is a crucial determinant of the process that results in school dropout. As a matter of fact, this situation has been revealed in numerous studies (Alexa & Baciu, 2021; Eryilmaz-Balli & Kartal, 2020; Karacabey & Boyaci, 2018; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). For example, in the meta-analysis study conducted by Gubbels et al. (2019), it was determined that the risk factor with the largest effect in school absenteeism for the student was "having a negative school attitude", and one of the important risk factors for school dropout was "negative school attitude". Based on the results in the literature, it can be said that in many countries, including the European Union (EU) member countries, the negative perception of students towards school plays an important role in the root cause of school dropout, and this situation deprives many individuals from school life and the chance of a life with good conditions.

It is of great importance to reveal the school perceptions of the students in increasing the emotional attachment of the students to the school, ensuring their

continuity and success, and increasing the effectiveness of the schools and the quality of education. Revealing the perceptions of students in different countries towards school and the reasons for this perception can be an effective way to understand the problems faced by schools and education systems better. However, studies aiming to determine students' perceptions of school are limited in the literature (Andersson & Strander, 2004). For this reason, in this study, it is aimed to contribute to the empirical knowledge in the literature about the school perception of the students by determining the perceptions of the students towards the school in five member countries of the European Union, and the candidate country Turkey, from a practical point of view. Also, based on students' perceptions, important outputs are expected from policymakers, administrators, and teachers, such as making schools a learning center, designing them to appeal to Z and Alpha generation students, and contributing to the improvement studies to be carried out in terms of structure and process. In this context, answers to the following questions are sought:

1. How do students who have a positive perception towards school perceive the school?
2. How do students who have a negative perception towards school perceive the school?

## **B. Research Methodology**

### **1. Pattern of the Research**

The study was carried out with the qualitative research method. Qualitative research allows an inductive and holistic understanding of individuals' experiences (Patton, 2018, p. 69) and focuses on how people construct reality through interactions in their own lives (Merriam, 2018, p. 22). Qualitative research can be conducted in different patterns. In this research, basic qualitative research, which is described by Merriam (2018, p. 22) as the most appropriate design in understanding how individuals construct reality, was adopted. It has been concluded that the basic qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach in understanding how students attribute meaning to the concept of school, what their positive and negative perceptions are towards the school, and what metaphors they describe the school with (Merriam, 2018, pp. 22-23). While the focus of the research is the qualitative approach, quantitative data are also included. Thus, it was aimed to understand the general view of the students' views.

### **2. Characteristics of the Schools Which the Research was Conducted**

The research was carried out in one school each from Spain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Turkey. The schools which the research was conducted have carried out an Erasmus+ KA229 project together to increase the commitment of their students to the school. For this reason, schools have common features such as being a public school at the basic and secondary education level; students with the habit of absenteeism, immigrants, having no parents, living under state protection, having severe economic conditions, special education needs, and students with different disadvantages.

The school participating in the research from Spain is in the city of Burgos. The school has 1650 students and 120 teachers at kindergarten, primary, secondary, and high school levels. The school participating in the research from Italy is in the city of Bernalda in

the Basilicata Region. It is a combined school that includes a kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school. 1370 students between the ages of 3-14 are studying at the school. The school participating in the research from Poland is in Starachowice in the southeast of the country. 55 teachers work in the school, where 600 students between the ages of 6-15 are educated. The school participating in the research from Portugal is in the city of Faro in the Algarve Region. The school has 835 students and 185 teachers. The school offers special education, basic education at the second and third levels. The school participating in the research from Romania is in the city of Targu Frumos. The primary and secondary school program is implemented in the school, which has 681 students and 65 teachers. The school participating in the research from Turkey is in the capital Ankara. 57 teachers work at the school, where 657 students between the ages of 11-14 are educated.

### 3. Working Group

Qualitative research is generally carried out with a purposefully selected sample. For this reason, purposive sampling strategies were used in the research. In the determination of the participants, being educated in the schools where the research was conducted and being a secondary and high school student were determined as criteria. There are no rules that are ideally applied in qualitative research and generally accepted for every qualitative research (Ozden & Saban, 2019, p. 25). Creswell (2020, p. 66) explains this situation by the fact that qualitative research has a flexible structure and does not have strict rules. In other words, every qualitative research is unique. This uniqueness is also evident in the number of participants in qualitative studies. In the literature, there are qualitative studies conducted with participants ranging from one person to hundreds (Creswell, 2020).

Table 1. Personal Information of the Students in the Study Group

Country	Gender	Perception Of Success	University Goal	Immigrant
Spain	Girls (n=106)	Low (n=10)	Yes (n=172)	Yes (n=5)
	Male (n=77)	Mean (n=103)		
	Total (n=183)	High (n=70)	No (n=11)	No (n=178)
Italy	Girls (n=60)	Low (n=5)	Yes (n=116)	Yes (n=15)
	Male (n=60)	Average (n=78)		
	Total (n=120)	High (n=37)	No (n=4)	No (n=105)
Poland	Girls (n=77)	Low (n=12)	Yes (n=109)	Yes (n=5)
	Male (n=62)	Average (n=81)		
	Total (n=139)	High (n=46)	No (n=30)	No (n=134)
Portugal	Girls (n=158)	Low (n=8)	Yes (n=255)	Yes (n=36)
	Male (n=135)	Average (n=192)		
	Total (n=293)	High (n=93)	No (n=38)	No (n=257)
Romania	Girls (n=90)	Low (n=2)	Yes (n=152)	Yes (n=40)
	Male (n=84)	Average (n=81)		
	Total (n=174)	High (n=46)	No (n=22)	No (n=134)
Turkey	Girls (n=146)	Low (n=7)	Yes (n=232)	Yes (n=3)
	Male (n=97)	Average (n=133)		
	Total (n=243)	High (n=103)	No (n=11)	No (n=240)

Personal information about the students in the study group of the research is shown in Table 1. According to this, 183 students from Spain, 120 from Italy, 139 from Poland, 293 from Portugal, 174 from Romania and 243 from Turkey, a total of 1152 students took part in the research. Of the participating students, 637 (55.3%) were girls and 515 (44.7%) were boys. Participating students are between the ages of 10 and 19. Most of the participating students (n=306) are thirteen years old. 44 students (3.8%) evaluated their school success as low, 688 (59.7%) students as medium and 395 students (34.2) as high. 116 (10%) of the students stated that they do not want to go to university. In addition, 104 students (9%) are children of immigrant families in the country where they reside.

#### **4. Data Collection Tool**

The data in the study were obtained through the student opinion form. For the form developed in seven stages, in the first stage, studies examining students' perceptions of school and data collection tools used in these studies were examined. In the second stage, a draft form in Turkish and English was created with the information obtained from the literature for the purposes of the research. In the third stage, the draft form was presented to the opinion of three academicians who took education administration. After all the experts in the field of education administration stated that the form was suitable for the purpose of the research, in the fourth stage, the draft form was presented to the Turkish and English teachers to be examined in terms of meaning and grammar rules. Necessary corrections were made in line with the suggestions of two Turkish teachers and two English teachers. In the fifth stage, the English draft form was delivered to the collaborating English and mother tongue teachers in Spain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Romania. The form was translated into the local language by one English and one mother tongue teacher from each country. In the sixth stage, a pilot study was carried out with five students in each country. After the students, who carried out the pilot application, expressed their opinion that the form was easy to understand, an explanatory directive was added to the form, and it was made ready for application.

#### **5. Data Acquisition and Analysis**

In the research, the data were obtained by digitally editing (Google Forms) student opinion forms prepared in six languages and applying them to the students. The link addresses of the digital forms prepared separately for the students of each country were delivered to the students through the collaborating teachers. The parents of the students were informed by the collaborating teachers and their volunteering was ensured. After the students completed the opinion forms in about two weeks, the data were transferred to a table arranged on the Microsoft Word page by the researchers. In this way, the raw data classified for each country were delivered to the collaborating native language and English teachers. Collaborative teachers were asked to translate the raw mother tongue data into English. The data translated into English have been read several times by the researchers. In addition, it was ensured that the translations were read by two English speakers working

in Turkey, and the opinion forms that were not sufficiently understood were requested to be re-translated by the collaborative teachers. After these processes, data analysis was started.

In the research, the data were analyzed by content analysis. Content analysis can be defined as the systematic and objective examination of the characteristics of the item under analysis. Basically, there are two methodological options in content analysis: human coding and computer-aided coding (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2016). In this study, the analysis of the data was carried out by the researchers (Patton, 2018, p. 442). In the analysis of the data, firstly, the data translated into English were processed into tables prepared separately for each country on the Microsoft Word page. The demographic information of the students was recorded in the first column, and the answers they gave to the research questions in the second column. The third column was used for analysis and the codes were processed by reading the data several times by the researchers. Afterwards, the data of students with positive perceptions about the school and students with negative perceptions were separated and the analysis continued in line with the research questions.

## **6. Ensuring Validity and Research Ethics**

Validity and reliability are the two most important criteria used to increase the credibility of the research results. There are some suggestions in the literature to increase the quality, validity, and reliability of qualitative research. For example, Merriam (2018) states that triangulation, participant validation, appropriate and sufficient data collection, researcher's position, expert evaluation, supervision, rich description, and maximum variety are the validity and reliability strategies frequently used in qualitative research (p. 221). In this direction, triangulation was provided by consulting the opinions of participants from different countries in the research. By including many participants in the study, data saturation was achieved, and participant verification was carried out by ensuring that the participants answered the opinion forms themselves. Expert evaluation was applied at various stages of the research (preparation of the interview form, translation of the data into mother tongue and English, etc.). Maximum diversity was achieved by ensuring that the participants were of different genders, classes, achievements, and income levels. In addition, the interview forms that were transcribed in the coding and theme creation process in the research were sent to an educational administration academician, and the percentage of agreement between the coders was calculated using the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, and the percentage of agreement was calculated as 92.85. The research process was reported in detail, and the participants' views were directly included in the presentation of the findings. In addition, coding was done in the presentation of the students' opinions to ensure the privacy of their identities. The coding process is followed by the international code of the country (IT; PL...TR), which indicates which country the student is from, followed by the sequence number (S-1, S-2...), age (10, 11...19) and gender (Female-F Male-M) form. Accordingly, the student identified by the code (PT-S-214,12-M) is a 12-year-old male student who participated in the study from Portugal and ranked 214th.

### C. Findings

In the analyzes carried out, it was evaluated that the students who describe the school with positive concepts, feelings, values, and metaphors have a positive perception of school, while the students who describe it with negative opinions, feelings and metaphors have a negative perception of school. Accordingly, it was determined that most of the students (n= 994) had a positive perception of school, and some (n=146) had a negative perception. It was understood that a small number of students (n=12) did not express enough opinions about their perceptions of school, although they answered the demographic questions in the student opinion form.

#### 1. Findings Related to School Perceptions of Students with Positive Perceptions of School

In the research, it was understood that the students who were determined to have a positive perception of school explained their views with some concepts, metaphors, expressions of emotions, and values.

##### a) Opinions of Students Defining School with a Concept

As can be seen in Table 2, the school perceptions of students who have a positive perception of school are shaped around the concepts of "learning, friendship, future, development, entertainment, life, responsibility". While some students associated school with only one of these concepts, some explained it with more than one concept.

Students explaining the school with the concept of "learning" have described it as place where values, teamwork, living with other people, life, being a good citizen, academic knowledge, science, culture, history, and success are learned. For example, a student (ES-S-24,12-F) who participated in the study from Spain stated that the school "...a way of learning. Because you learn a lot of new things that you didn't know before." as learning new information. A student from Italy (IT-S-3,11-M) who participated in the study said, "The place where you learn to live life. We learn many new things and learn to live with our peers. It is understood from the words" that school is perceived as the place where life is learned.

Table 2. Findings Regarding the Views of Students Explaining School with a Concept

Concept	Number of Concepts and Opinions that Students Define School ES (Spain); IT (Italy); PL (Poland); PT (Portugal); RO (Romania); TR (Turkey)	Total
Learning	ES (122); IT (65); PL (86); PT (114); RO (87); TR (110)	737
Friendship	ES (10); IT (45); PL (44); PT (50); RO (36); TR (25)	240
Future	ES (53); IT (23); PL (10); PT (66); RO (37); TR (49)	238
Development	ES (8); IT (13); PO (3); PT (19); RO (14); TR (2)	59
Entertainment	ES (19); IT (6); PO (1); PT (2); RO (3); TR (23)	54
Life	PO (5); PT (5); RO (7); TR (21)	38
Responsibility	PO (8); PT (3); RO (4); TR (3)	14

Students explaining the school with the concept of "friendship" have described it as a place where they have a good time with their friends, have fun, play, interact, learn from



each other, and collect memories. For example, a student from Italy (IT-S-39,11-F) who participated in the study described the school by emphasizing the concept of learning and friendship with the words: *"It's a place to learn new things and make new friends. Because I learned a lot of new things at school and met the people I value the most."*

Students explaining the school with the concept of "future" have described it as an important institution to have a profession, diploma, high living standards, success, and university education. For example, a student from Spain (ES-S-93,12-M) who participated in the study have emphasized how important school is for a good future with the words: *"For me, school means an opportunity to have a good future. I think it's because a lot of people can't go and don't have a good future."* A Portuguese student (PT-S-103,14-F) described sustainable future as *"An important factor for my future. Because it gives me a sustainable future, a family, etc. It is the school that can give."* In addition, it was determined as a remarkable finding in the study that students from all countries have concerns about the future and that the most important step towards finding a job is to attend school. In this regard this situation is clearly seen from thoughts of a Polish student (PL-S-5,14-F) explained that *"...we can go to the job we want thanks to school"* and a Turkish student (TR-S-45, 13-M) *"...preparation for business life, most people go to school to get a job"*.

Students explaining the school with the concept of "development" have described it as a place that develops students physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, culturally, and behaviorally. Some of the thoughts of a student from Romania (RO-S-164,14-M) about the school being a place that provides personal development of individuals are *"Personal development, because we develop a lot physically and mentally during these school years."*

Students who describe the school with the concept of "entertainment" have described it as a place where they had fun with their friends and teachers, had fun during breaks and in the classroom, and had funny moments. For example, a student (ES-S-96,13-F) from Spain who participated in the research said, *"...learning, being with friends, having fun. I learn new things that will work for me throughout my life, I am with my friends, I share my feelings, I have fun because I do a lot with my friends"*. It is understood that the perception of education is related to the concepts of learning, friendship, and entertainment.

It was determined that students who explain the school with the concept of "life" have described it as the place they live in half of the day, life before adult life, a part of life. For example, a student (PL-S-64,13-F) from Poland who participated in the research described the school as a chance with the words: *"A chance for a good life. Prepares us for adult life."* A student from Turkey (TR-S-5,13-F) explained the school as life itself with the words *"School means life for me, because I can achieve many of my goals thanks to school."*

In the research, it was understood that some students explained the school with the concept of "responsibility". Students described school as: the main responsibility they have, the responsibility of doing homework, the responsibility of attending school. For example, a student from Poland (PL-S-116,15-F) thinks as *"Responsibility, because I must go*

to it", while a student from Romania (RO-S-7,13-M) says "Responsibility, I have the responsibility to learn how to reach my life."

b) Opinions of Students Defining School with a Feeling

It was determined that 112 of the students who had a positive perception of school also described the concept of school with an emotion. When the students' opinions were examined, it was understood that they used 14 different positive emotions in their definitions of school.

Table 3. Findings Regarding the Views of Students Defining School with an Emotion

Emotion	Country and Number of Students	n
Success	RO (6); TR (13)	19
Happiness	ES (2); IT (8); PL (2); PT (1); RO (3); TR (2)	18
Trust	IT (2); PL (5); PT (5); RO (1); TR (1)	14
Pleasure/Delight	ES (2); PL (3); PT (2); RO (5)	12
Curiosity/Interest	ES (3); IT (3); PL (1); PT (2); RO (2)	11
Love	ES (4); IT (2); PL (1); RO (4); TR (4)	11
Joy	ES (3); RO (4)	7
Respect	ES (4); IT (1); RO (1)	6
Excitement	IT (1); TR (3)	4

As can be seen in Table 3, the students defined the school mostly with the feelings of success and happiness. A student (IT-S-11,12-F) who participated in the study from Italy have described the school as a place that brings happiness with the words: "Being at school is a wonderful thing that I love, it makes me happy... I am happy to go to school.". One of the most frequently used emotions by students when defining the concept of school is trust. A student from Portugal (PT-S-74,14-M) who participated in the study have associated the school with a sense of trust and emphasized that he was protected at school with the words: "It is a safe and educational place. Because I feel protected there and I learn and train".

In the study, students also defined school with other positive emotions such as pleasure, curiosity, love, joy, respect, excitement. For example, an Italian student (IT-S-99,13-M) have described the school as a happy and enjoyable place, stated, "It's a happy place. Because I enjoy being in harmony with my classmates". In addition, it was found that some students described school with other positive emotions such as peace (n=2), self-confidence (n=2), optimism (n=1), normality (n=1).

c) Opinions of Students Defining School with a Value

In the study, it was understood that some students (n=27) described the school with a value expression and described the school as a place of gaining value. In the analyzes carried out, it was seen that the students used 11 different value expressions to explain the concept of school. As seen in Table 4, the students frequently used the values of helpfulness (n=6), respect (n=5), friendship (n=5), responsibility (n=3), empathy (n=2). In

addition, a student from Spain explained it with the values of sacrifice, initiative and kindness, a student from Italy with the values of fairness and friendship, and a student from Portugal with the values of patriotism.

Table 4. Findings Regarding the Views of Students Defining School with a Value

Value	Country and Number of Students	n
Benevolence	ES (2); PT (3); RO (1)	6
Respect	ES (1); PT (2); RO (1); TR (1)	5
Friendship	IT (2); PL (2); PT (1); RO (1)	5
Responsibility	ES (3)	3
Empathy	ES (1); RO (1)	2

d) Opinions of Students Describing School with a Metaphor

In the study, it was determined that 141 of the students described the school using 35 different metaphors. As can be seen from Table 5, the students described the school mostly with metaphors (n=42) shaped around the concepts of house, family, and home. It was understood that at least one student from each country used a metaphor explaining the concept of house. This was followed by the metaphors of opportunity, path, foundation, tool, chance, resource, socio-human, apprenticeship, door, festivity, and challenge. In addition, a student from Poland used the metaphor of ticket, students from Portugal used the metaphors of kindergarten, mechanism, hospitality, journey, key, students from Romania used the metaphors of name, book, legend, heaven, workshop, stage, team, and a student from Turkey used the metaphors of ground, hospital, spike, science center, power.

Table 5. Findings Regarding the Opinions of Students Who Described School with a Positive Metaphor

Metaphor	Country and Number of Students	n
House/ second home/ home/ second home	ES (2); IT (1); PL (1); PT (9); RO (5); TR (14)	32
Opportunity	ES (13); IT (3); PT (1); RO (1)	18
Path	PT (10); RO (1); TR (3)	14
Basic	ES (1); IT (1); PT (11)	13
Vehicle	IT (1); PT (10)	11
Family/second family	IT (6); RO (3); TR (1)	10
Chance	PL (2); RO (8)	10
Source	IT (1); PT (1); TR (2)	4
Socio-human	PL (1); PT (1); RO (1)	3
Apprenticeship	ES (1); PT (1)	2
Gate	ES (1); PT (1)	2
Festival	PT (2)	2
Challenge	PL (1); RO (1)	2

When the metaphors used by the students are examined according to their contexts, it can be said that the metaphors are divided into two main categories. In the first, it is seen that metaphors such as house, family, home, paradise, kindergarten, hospitality, which symbolize basic care, warm and peaceful relations, are used. In the second, it is understood that metaphors such as opportunity, path, foundation, tool, chance, resource, door, apprenticeship, mechanism, key, step, book, workshop, which emphasize that school is a method that helps students reach their goals, are used. For example, a student from Italy (IT-S-1,12-F) used the metaphors of family and home to attend school with the words "*Family, because this is like a second home and you get socialized*", another described by *the family's teaching and being together property* (IT-S-76,12-F) "*A place where you can learn a lot and make new friends. Because school is like a second family where teachers teach us many new subjects.*". Two students from Turkey (TR-S-27,13-F) and Poland (PL-S-23,11-F) used the metaphor of "second home" with very similar sentences since they spend half of the day at school and the other half at home.

## 2. Findings Related to School Perceptions of Students with Negative Perceptions of School

In the study, it was understood that 146 (12.6%) of the students had a negative perception towards the school. When the personal characteristics of these students are examined; it was understood that 76 of them were girls and 70 of them were boys, 78 students were between the ages of 11, 12 and 13, and 68 students were between the ages of 14 and 19. In addition, 14 students are the children of immigrant families in the country of residence. 117 students think that their school success is low or moderate. 22 students do not have a goal of attending university. As a result of the analyzes, it was determined that students with negative perceptions presented their opinions about the school by explaining the reasons for this perception and with some negative meaningful metaphors.

### a) Reasons for Students' Negative Perceptions of School

As seen in Table 6, it was understood in the study that students' negative perceptions of school were caused by individual and organizational factors.

#### Individual Reasons for Students' Negative Perceptions of School

**Finding School Boring:** In the study, it was determined that twenty-nine of the students (TR-7; ES-14; PT-5; IT-1; PL-2) found school boring. For example, a Turkish student (TR-S-56,12-M) described school as "*Time to get bored*". Similarly, a student from Portugal (PT-S-240;13-F) expressed their view as "*It's a boring place...we always have to be in the same place*". In addition, in the study, it was understood that students find school boring due to difficulties in lessons, not being able to receive education in areas of interest, not having fun at school, long course durations and short break periods, and therefore their perceptions of school are negative.

Table 6. Reasons for Students' Negative Perceptions of School

Theme	Code	n
Individual Factors	School boring	29
	Failure, class and exam pressure, stress	20
	Seeing school as a necessity	18
	Negative experiences at school	16
	Finding school meaningless	14
	Not liking school	12
Organizational Factors	Curriculum and teaching approach	24
	Institutional structure / operation of the school	13

**Failure, exam pressure, stress:** In the study, it was determined that twenty students (ES-7; PL-6; RO-4; PT-3) had negative perceptions of school due to failure, feeling pressure about exams and stress. For example, a student from Turkey (TR-S-216,13-M) stated "*School is to get low grades.*" In other words, he explained it with the perception of failure. Similarly, a student from Spain (PT-S-120,16-M) said, "*It is difficult, sometimes I have difficulty keeping up with the pace of some subjects.*" and a student from Romania (RO-S-102,13-F) said, "*Stress, because I am not sure I have some knowledge and I am afraid*". It is understood from the sentence that students experience stress due to academic failure and anxiety, and this situation causes negative perceptions of school.

**Seeing school as a necessity:** In the study, eighteen students (TR-3; ES-7; PT-4; PL-3; IT-1) stated that they did not feel comfortable at school, that they attended school because it was compulsory, and that they thought that the information taught at school was completely unnecessary. A Spanish student commented (ES-S-113;15-M) "*A must, I think that explained clearly what it means, because for me it is a must, I don't like it, but I must do it*"

**Negative experiences at school:** In the study, it was understood that sixteen students (TR-5; PT-4; PL-4; ES-2; IT-1) had a negative perception of school due to some negative experiences they had. Some students stated that students were not cared at school and even exposed to verbal and emotional violence, some stated that they suffered from pain, suffering and torture at school, and the school described the difficult days in their lives. A student from Turkey (TR-S-54,13-F) briefly described the school as "*Hard days*". One Polish student (PL-S-54,12-F) said, "*It's bad... because only bad things happen there*" and another Polish student (PL-S-107,13-F) "*Normally I see that school ruins my life*".

**Finding school meaningless:** In the research, fourteen students (ES-6; TR-5; PT-2, PL-1) presented their views that they found the school meaningless, in other words, that they were alienated from the school. While some students stated that the school meant nothing to them, others stated that the school was praised unnecessarily and was just a waste of time. For example, a student from Turkey (TR-S-1,14-F) expressed their thoughts in the form: "*School means nothing to me.*" A student from Spain ((ES-S-125,14-M) explained their alienation as "*A memory of the day I disconnected...*".

**Disliking school:** In the study, twelve students (TR-6; ES-3; PT-2; PL-1) stated that they do not like school. Some of the students stated that they do not like the school, as

understood from the sentence of a Spanish student (ES-S-41,12-F) "*I don't like going to school*", while others stated that they did not like the school because of teachers, friends, homework and waking up early.

Organizational Reasons for Students' Negative Perceptions of School

**Curriculum and teaching approach:** In the study, it was understood that twenty-four students (TR-2; PT-17; ES-4; PL-1) had a negative perception of school due to traditional teaching methods and education curriculum. A student from Portugal (PT-S-43,14-F) commented, "*An unpleasant place... School does not teach what is necessary for life.*", and a student from Spain (ES-S-86,13-F) said, "*A place where we spend hours with classmates and teachers, often the only purpose is to give more material without seeing that we have actually learned a lot of things because they want us to do a lot of things, there are extracurricular activities and such but they do not realize that we are doing it for memorization, not for learning*". The students described the school as a place where they could not prepare for adult life, where they were only evaluated by memory-testing exams, and where they were subjected to psychological violence.

**Institutional functioning of the school:** In the study, it was determined that thirteen students (ES-2; TR-3; PL-4; PT-4) had a negative perception due to the organizational structure of the school. For example, (TR-S-58,13-M)'s "*School squeezes students between four walls.*" from (PL-S-119.15-F)'s opinion of "*Forced spending time in one building*" and (PL-S-26.12-M)'s view that "*many people...*", it is understood that students develop a negative perception due to the building structure and institutional characteristics of the schools. In addition, it was determined that the early start of education and the high number of school days during the year, in other words, the features related to the school calendar negatively affect the school perceptions of the students.

b) Opinions of Students Describing School with a Metaphor

It was understood that the students who were found to have a negative perception of school used some negative metaphors to explain the concept of school. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that 14 different metaphors were used by 49 students. The metaphors used by more than one student are presented in Table 7. When the metaphors used by the students are examined according to their contexts, it is seen that the metaphors describe physical and mental discomfort (boredom, suffering, fatigue, headache, burnout) and the inhibition of freedom (prison, captivity, watchtower, building, pit, digging a ditch, no, provocation, number).

Table 7. Metaphors Used by Students with Negative Attitudes to School

Metaphor	Country and Number of Students	n
Boredom	ES (10); IT (2); PL (1); PT (3); TR (6)	21
Prison	ES (3); PL (4); TR (2)	9
Suffering	ES (3); PT (1); TR (1)	5
Fatigue	ES (1); IT (1); PT (1)	3
Building	PL (1); TR (1)	2

### Metaphors Expressing Physical and Mental Discomfort

Students most often described the school with the metaphor of "boredom". As it can be seen in the (ES-S-4,16-M)'s expression "*Boredom, because I get bored in class and lectures are boring for me.*", and (TR-S-14,13-F)'s expression, "*It is a boring place, the lessons are too much for us, and the school reminds me of quarantine, it makes me gloomy.*", students described the school with the metaphor of "boredom" because they found the lessons boring and they were bored at school and in the classroom. In addition, the students (RO-S-132,14-F) said, "*Headache, because the homework is too heavy and too much and the schedule is too busy.*" and (RO-S-117,13-M) defined the school with metaphors that describe a physical or emotional discomfort due to homework responsibility, early start of classes, and emotional difficulties by "*Burnout, because I must get up very early, I must write 2-3 more hours when I get home.*".

### Metaphors About Inhibiting Freedom

The most frequently repeated metaphor by students about the inhibition of freedom is "prison". (PL-S-120,15-F) said, "*Prison, I don't like school*". ES -S-80,13-M on the other hand, "*Prison, I don't like a prison full of exams. I'll just let the days pass and summer come, I don't like school*". When the opinions of the students are examined, it is understood that they use the metaphor of prison for these reasons that they think that their freedom is hindered due to intense exam schedules and negative teacher approaches. In addition, it was understood that the students used the metaphors of "captivity", "pit", "no", "provocation" and "digging a ditch", emphasizing that their freedom was hindered at school for reasons such as the school not attracting their attention, and they explained school with the metaphor of "number" because of their assessment and evaluation approaches that do not care about their individual differences and see students as worthless.

## **D. Discussion**

This research was carried out to determine the perceptions of the school of students between the ages of 10 and 19, studying in six different countries. In the first sub-problem of the study, how students who have a positive perception of school perceive the school was examined. Accordingly, it is determined that students describe school with the concepts of learning, friendship, future, development, entertainment, life, and responsibility; positive emotions such as success, happiness, trust, joy, interest, love, joy, and respect; and value expressions such as helpfulness, friendship, empathy. In the second sub-problem of the study, the perceptions of the school of students who have a negative perception towards the school were determined. It was understood that approximately 13% of the students have a negative perception of school. Most of the students with negative perceptions stated that their school success was low or moderate, some of them came from an immigrant family, and some of them did not have the goal of attending university. Students who perceived the school negatively mostly presented their opinions by explaining the reasons for their perceptions. It has been understood that students'

negative perceptions have individual reasons such as seeing school as a necessity, not liking school, finding it boring and meaningless, failing in classes, feeling stress and exam pressure, and having different negative experiences. It was also concluded that the students perceived the school negatively due to organizational reasons stemming from the curriculum, the teaching approach of the teachers, and the institutional functioning of the school.

There are studies in the literature that support the findings of this study. In the research conducted by Saban (2008), it is found that most of the students describe the school with love and solidarity, knowledge and enlightenment, acculturation and shaping, growth and maturation, hope and assurance of the future, a guiding and guiding place. Andersson & Strander (2004), in a longitudinal study of a group of high school students' perceptions of school in Sweden, determined that individuals think that the best thing about school is their friends during and after their student years, and they think that having fun at school is more important than school. The researchers also found that 14% of the participants were not satisfied with being at school and had a negative perception of school, similar to the findings of this study.

The most important stakeholder of the school is the students. For this reason, students are asked to have a positive perception of school, to love their school, and to be happy at school. A student who does not like school cannot be expected to like education (Dos, 2013). The perceptions that students develop towards school are the persistent perception that affects their entire student life and even their evaluations in adult life. Moreover, individuals are likely to transfer this perception to future generations through their own children (Andersson & Strander, 2004). From the research conducted on the subject, it is seen that the perceptions of the students towards the school have begun to evolve negatively over the years (Gulcema, 2019).

Another important finding of the study is that the students described the school with some metaphors. Students with a positive perception explain close relationships such as house, family, home, road, vehicle, and resource; They explained it with metaphors containing positive meanings that enable them to achieve goals such as path, foundation, chance, door, and tool. Students who have a negative perception of school, on the other hand, express physical and emotional discomfort such as boredom, suffering, headache, and burnout; they described it with metaphors emphasizing the impediment of freedom such as prison, captivity, and watchtower.

Metaphors, which are widely used in the literature as analytical and descriptive tools in the field of education (Inbar, 1996), can be described as explaining an unfamiliar educational phenomenon, action, or event with a familiar action and event, in short, creating a new meaning. In this context, metaphors play an important pedagogically important role in education, learning, teaching, policies, educational institutions, and, in short, all processes of education. Although there is no single metaphor that can best explain the whole complexity of the school phenomenon (Botha, 2009), it is seen in other studies that students with positive perceptions describe school with similar metaphors (Aydin-Elmas & Demir, 2018; Saban, 2008; Yuner & Ozdemir, 2017). On the other hand, it



took place in the literature that students with negative perceptions often use the metaphor of "prison" (Arslan, 2020), describe the school as a boring place, and think that they are not valued at school as individuals (Aydin-Elmas & Demir, 2018; Yuner & Ozdemir, 2017). For example, it is determined in the metaphor research conducted by Inbar (1996) with students and teachers in the city of Jerusalem and in which the school is described as a "free education prison" that most of the students described themselves as prisoners, teachers as guards, and explained the school with metaphors such as a fortified castle, forced house, labyrinth, military camp.

Although there have been rapid changes in almost all areas of life in the last hundred years, schools are still designed according to traditional school architecture. For this reason, a suitable development environment cannot be provided for students who must sit at school desks for a significant part of the day (Andersson & Strander, 2004). School is a group solution in providing education. The fact that education is carried out in groups in schools is one of the main problems in the school. However, education is an individualized process (Inbar, 1996). For a school environment consisting of students and employees who are at peace with themselves, it is essential that the physical space and teaching approaches, like all its other characteristics, be designed effectively (Ucak & Dogan, 2020). Designing the physical structures of the schools in accordance with the development and feelings of the students, including the out-of-school learning environments in the curriculum can contribute to more love, a greater sense of belonging, and a happy environment (Dos, 2013). As a matter of fact, according to Gatto (2019, p.9), who criticizes the school in many aspects, *education is not about campuses surrounded by walls*.

Another important finding of the study is that the participating students in all countries experience future anxiety and see school as the most important institution for a good future. From the literature, it is seen that students with a positive perception of school have a high commitment to school (Ozdemir & Kalayci, 2013), while students with high school engagement have a low risk of dropping out (Christle et al., 2007). It is also understood that more educated individuals work in more qualified jobs and face a lower risk of unemployment (Guio, Choi & Escardíbul, 2018). In a large study carried out by the European Commission (2014) in EU countries, it has been determined that early school leavers have a high unemployment rate of 41%. In other words, the fact that students can continue their education life in line with their potential enables them to lead a life in more comfortable conditions and to work in qualified jobs. In this context, as explained before (Gubbels et al., 2019; Demirci & Toptas, 2021), it can be said that one of the most devastating consequences of students' negative perceptions of school is their absence from school and eventually drop-out.

Early leaving is a social failure that arises with the interaction of many factors (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). Because early school leaving causes individuals to decrease their quality of life, work in low-income jobs and experience unemployment (Cerdà-Navarro, Quintana-Murci & Salvà-Mut, 2022). In a study conducted with students with chronic absenteeism in Turkey (Hosgorur & Polat, 2015), it was determined that students

who were absent from school had a negative perception of school, and they resisted and were absent from school even if their families forced them. In another study (Uzun & Kemerli, 2019), it was determined that students do not perceive school as a place that prepares them for life, and therefore, they have been absent. In a study conducted in Spain (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022), it was determined that individual and school-related factors such as the inadequacy of students' learning skills and the low motivation of teachers to teach cause students' absenteeism. According to Andersson and Strander (2004), it is the school's responsibility to prevent these negative consequences, to provide students with the opportunity to spend meaningful time at school, to provide an environment and structure where they can learn useful and valuable information and skills in their lives.

School is much more than meets the eye. Since it is not possible to talk about a perfectly functioning organization, the school as an organization has some problems and deficiencies arising from the nature and structure of the educational process (Inbar, 1996). Although almost all countries try to ensure that all students benefit from basic education and have access to education through compulsory education practices, access to education does not seem sufficient for students to use their right to education at the highest level. For this, first of all, students should have a positive perception of school and their attendance should be ensured (Gulcemal, 2019). In studies conducted with teacher samples from different countries (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022; Gorghiu, Enache, Petrescu & Gorghiu, 2020; Alexa & Baci, 2021), it was found that students' negative perceptions of school and dropouts were related to student-related reasons. Factors such as its structure, climate, and education policies. Interpreting the reasons for students' negative perceptions of the school solely as a result of the student can be considered a wrong step at the beginning and may prevent producing realistic solutions in solving the problem (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). Economic, social, and academic policies that will increase students' attendance at school and measures to be taken in this direction can provide positive results. Thus, it can increase both students' attendance and their success (Bayón-Calvo, Corrales-Herreroc & De Witted, 2020; Eurostat, 2021).

### **E. Conclusion and Suggestion**

As a result of the research, it was understood that most of the students described the school with positive concepts, emotions, values, and metaphors, and some of them had a negative perception of the school, they did not like the school, and they attended school because it was compulsory. Although the results of international studies (OECD, 2019) and reports (Eurostat, 2021) show that the academic success rank and school dropout rates of countries differ, it also shows that students' perceptions of the school organization are very similar, although there are significant differences in the historical, geographical, and cultural characteristics of each country. It has been understood that there are common meanings in their perceptions of school. In other words, no matter what language they speak, the students described the school with similar thoughts and feelings. Despite all the criticisms, the school is still the most important organization for individuals to learn, realize their potential, socialize, and realize themselves by preserving their

existence in the competitive world. For this reason, it is necessary to ensure the continuation of these perceptions of students who have a positive perception of the school and to take radical measures to turn the perceptions of students with negative perceptions into positive ones.

As a result of the research, it can be suggested to organize scientific meetings that will increase the awareness of executives and policymakers that students' perceptions of school affect their behavioral and emotional characteristics such as school attendance, success, subjective well-being, and resilience. It can be suggested that the school buildings should be designed in accordance with the development, feelings, and needs of the students and that interdisciplinary studies should be carried out on this subject. Additionally, it can be suggested that researchers conduct longitudinal studies that examine the causes of students with negative perceptions towards school, which examines the educational level at which these perceptions begin.

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