



The Impact of Friendship Skills Psycho-education on the Friendship Quality of 9-12 Year-Old Students *

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Abstract

The objective of the present study is to examine the effect of friendship skills psycho-education (FSE) on the quality of friendship among 9-12-year-old students. In the study, a 3x2 (experiment, control and placebo group x pre-test-post-test) mixed design was used. For this purpose, in the first term of 2014-2015 academic year, a friendship quality scale was applied to the 5th and 6th grade students in a secondary school in a province center in Eastern Anatolia in order to determine who will participate in the friendship skill psycho-education program. A total of 27 volunteering students (experimental group = 9, control group = 9, placebo group = 9) who met the inclusion criteria for the psycho-education program were randomly assigned to the experiment, control and placebo groups as a result of the conducted pretest. In order to improve the friendship qualities of the participants in the experimental group, a 11-session friendship skills psycho-education program developed by the researcher, and with the placebo group, a five-session group consulting application on efficient studying methods and techniques were conducted. No application was conducted with the control group. Two-factor ANOVA results demonstrated that friendship skills psycho-education program was effective on the quality of friendship. The results of the present study, showed that the friendship skills psycho-education program could be used as an effective approach to improve the friendship qualities of students aged between 9 and 12.

Keywords

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Introduction

Like most living organisms, people live collectively by establishing mutual relationships. In the course of development, the individual builds and develops personal relationships with the people around them. The types and significance of the relationships that individuals establish are different such as family, friendship, and romantic relationships, platonic or virtual relationships. It is known that individuals establish their first relationships in life with their family members and relatives. But one of the most important forms of interpersonal relationships outside the family is friendship. Friendship

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emerges as an important social need in every period of an individual's life. In the life of a growing child, peer relationships (Yun Lee, 2008) and having a friend are very important in terms of social development (Mitchell, 2005). Argued that it is expected of children to fulfill certain developmental tasks, and one of these tasks is to establish and maintain friendship relations. Studies conducted on friendship demonstrated the significance of peers for children. Because children need friends, and without friendship, children face several risks (Baker, 2009; Thompson, Grace, & Cohen, 2002). Asher and Coie (1990) noted that being included in the world of their peers is significant beyond the importance of the family for children. Ellis, Rogoff, and Cromer (1981) also pointed out that when children grow up, this issue becomes even more significant for them. According to Bukowski and Hoza (1989), friendship generally includes reciprocity and volunteering. According to Granich (2009), friendship involves an emotional connection with a few peers or an individual. In other words, friendship is more about variability than stability and individuals become friends with a relationship based on love. Contact with peers, and especially friendship, serves very important functions related to a children's life and needs (Asher & Coie, 1990). Therefore, children provide different benefit from friendship at different ages. During the first years of childhood, friendship is mostly based on general activities. The function of friendship in the early childhood is to be able to initiate mutual interactions. In childhood, friendships have functions such as conflict management, talking about activities, and providing fun and excitement (Cohen, 2008). In mid-childhood, friendship relationship is a source for children to express themselves privately (Agnor, 2009; Cohen, 2008; Holleb, 2011). Thus, friendship could encourage feelings of having a friend that can be trusted friend, acceptance and understanding (Erdley, Nagle, Newman, & Carpenter, 2001). According to Buhrmester (1996), friendship relationships among adolescents include intensive efforts to resolve conflicts, deep and subtle conversations and self-disclosure (as cited in Cohen, 2008). Friendship provides development of special relationships in young people (Cohen, 2008). According to McGuire and Weisz (1982) friendship helps to improve interpersonal problem-solving skills and different perspectives. In addition to this, according to Bagwell, Newcomb, and Bukowski (1998) friendship contributes to the development of positive self-perception. According to Asher and Parker (1988), friendship serves important developmental and social functions that are preceded by marriage and romantic relationships, promoting the ego. Experimental studies conducted over a period of more than 10 years revealed that there is a strong correlation between experiences of close friendship and happiness of the individual and that close friendship relationships could predict an individual's happiness (Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, & Tyrell, 2011). In another study supporting this research finding, Froding and Peterson (2012) also stated that there is a relationship between friendship and happiness. It is also very important to investigate the role of friendship, which could have both positive and negative dynamic effects on the development of individuals (Chow, 2008; Cohen, 2008; Marion, 2008). Peer relations in general are thought to have a positive effect on the individual, since positive friendship relationships that children establish develop their adjustment in all social areas, and serve as a buffer against adverse situations (Marion, 2008). However, tension, problems or similar negative experiences in peer relations could negatively affect the life of an individual (Wiltz, 2005). According to Sullivan, friendships in the pre-adolescence age (9-12 years) begin to become more explicit relationships. In this period of life, the need for intimacy in interpersonal relationships begin to emerge, and the need for of intimacy in this age becomes even more important than the need for acceptance, which is achieved through participation in group interactions with peers (Chow, 2008, Erdley et al., 2001; Geçtan, 2003). Sullivan also stated that friendship is important for emotional and social development in pre-adolescence period and that friendship has a significant role in the development of self-esteem in the pre-adolescent period (Chow, 2008).

It is considered that in addition to the importance of friendship relations, the level of quality that individuals feel in these relationships is also significant. It was observed that studies were concentrated on the importance of friendship in social development and adjustment of children during recent years (Agnor, 2009; Baker, 2009). It is therefore important to investigate the quality of friendship

since it would provide a better understanding of the psychological benefits of the quality of friendship for a child and the negative and positive dynamics of having a special friendship (Agnor, 2009). Several researchers of friendship assumed that a qualified friendship has positive effects on children such as increasing children's self-esteem, improving social adjustment, and increasing their ability to cope with stressful factors (Berndt, 2002; Bowker & Rubin, 2009). Study findings demonstrated that the quality of friendship is related to the general well-being of the children (Asher & Parker, 1993; Bowker & Rubin, 2009; Foster, 2005; Ladd, 1999; Mitchell, 2005; Zhou, Li, Zhang, & Zeng, 2012). Akin and Akin (2015) demonstrated that quality of friendship positively predicted subjective happiness and subjective well-being. In other studies, Berndt and Keefe (1995) stated that high level friendship relationship had a positive effect on low level of loneliness and increased self-efficacy. Asher and Parker (1988) emphasized that participation in friendship and quality of friendship are predictors of emotional well-being of children. Berndt, Hawkins, and Jiao (1999) pointed out that the leadership qualities and sociability of children with high quality friendship increased when they started the high school in their study conducted with 8th grade students. In a study, Hartup and Stevens (1999, p. 78) found that the high quality of friendship positively affected children's ability to cope with stress, improved their self-esteem levels and social achievements.

Wiltz (2005) argued that friendship has a potential influence on mental health and the quality of life. Social trends, developmental information, and prominent theoretical and empirical studies indicated that friendship's permanent contribution to mental health and its importance become even more significant in adolescence (Chow, 2008). Such studies showed that peer relationships and friendship were beneficial for mental health (Agnor, 2009; Cohen, 2008). Rutter (1987) noted that friendship is important for healthy mental development, and those who do not have close relationships are at risk of experiencing mental health problems. In another study, Lansford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, and Bates (2003) demonstrated that young adults with better quality of friendship and peer groups tend to exhibit less problem behavior. The results of the studies conducted by Hintikka, Koskela, Kontula, Koskela, and Viinamaeki (2000), and Knickmeyer, Sexton, and Nishimura (2002) showed that friendship relations improved the well-being of individuals. According to Baril, Julien, Chartrand, and Dube (2009), friendship facilitates adaption to chronic stress and challenging life events via the assistance it provides. In another study, Bagwell et al. (1998) found that friendship has a protective effect against depression and peer rejection and children who were rejected by their peers were more prone to problem behavior such as adult and young adult crimes and absenteeism at school due to their liberal attitudes during primary education when compared to non-rejected children. Researchers such as LaGreca and Harrison (2005), Nolan, Flynn, and Garber (2003) and Ueno (2005) noted the likelihood of higher rates of depression and anxiety among young adult being rejected by their peers in their respective studies.

As could be understood from the abovementioned issues, friendship relations in childhood and the quality of these relationships are very important. Study results demonstrated that if a child has certain skills to establish good friendships, this could increase the possibilities of the child's likability and acceptance in the peer group (McFarland, 2008). According to Asher and Parker (1988) and Wanless and Prinz (1982) studies also revealed that childhood experiences could affect the experiences of an individual as an adult. The individual who is a dynamic entity in a social structure is constantly in development. In order for the individual to continue her / his development in a healthy manner, the individual needs to acquire certain skills and reflect these into her / his life. One of the skills that an individual must possess is friendship skills. In the center of friendship skills, there are social tasks such as the ability to initiate coexistence, social skills, forgiveness, conflict management, cooperation and assistance (Asher & Asher, 2004). According to McGinnis and Goldstein, friendship skill is "the ability to introduce oneself, start a conversation, end a conversation, participate in a game, ask for a favor, offer

help to a peer, compliment one, accept a compliment, and offering apologies" (as cited in Öztürk, 2009). Friendship skills are also a significant component of social skills.

According to Segrin (2001) social skills include the ability to use appropriate and effective relationships with other people. Caldarella and Merrell (1997) collected the social skills in five groups. These; peer relationship skills, self-management skills, academic skills, adaptation skills and push fullness skills. Friendship skill is one of the important components of social skill. Therefore social skills are needed to establish a friendship relationship. But alone is not enough. Schofield and Kafer (1985) point out that social skills are effective in achieving harmony in interpersonal relationships that will be set up to initiate and maintain a friendship relationship. According to Thompson et al. (2002), having social skills facilitates to make friendship. The weakness of social skills makes it impossible to establish friendship. Therefore it can be said that having social skills is a very important but an insufficient condition to make friends. Because friendship is defined as children choosing each other, trusting each other, and loving each other.

Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) found that it is more probable for children with friendship skills to be better at communicating, socializing, cooperating, resolving conflicts, having positive influence, equality, mutual influence, closeness and loyalty when compared to children without friendship skills (as cited in Barry & Wigfield, 2002). Children who do not possess friendship skills and struggle with social interaction are at great risk for exhibiting problem behavior. Adolescents who do not have friends face a higher risk for problem behavior such as consuming more alcohol, smoking, using drugs (Barry & Wigfield, 2002), having attention problems, lower achievements, being less ambitious and more anxious (Granich, 2009).

During social development and adjustment process, while certain children could easily initiate friendship relationships, certain others could not. In other words, it is not easy for several children to make friends or to start and maintain a relationship (Webster-Stratton, n.d., p. 2). In this period, children could experience difficulties in initiating and maintaining friendship relationship, and at times experience great sorrow due to problems they experience with their friends, and problems experienced with friends could affect their lives profoundly. As discussed above, friendship relationships and the quality of these relationships have an important place in life of the individual at every age. However, it is considered that children need assistance in this process, since every child cannot possess the same level of skills in initiating and maintaining friendship relationships. However, related studies conducted in Turkey are extremely limited. Bilgiç (2000) investigated the effects of friendship skills education instructed to primary school second level students on the loneliness levels of students, Uşaklı (2006) investigated the effects of drama based group counseling on friendship relations, assertiveness, and self-esteem of primary school 5th grade students, Demir (2006) investigated the effects of friendship skills education on the sociometric status of students that attended primary school secondary level, Öztürk (2009) examined the effects of game-based friendship education on friendship skills of primary school 4th grade students and Özaydın (2006) researched the effects of the friendship skills development program on the social interaction of preschool children with and without special needs. Uysaler (2015) investigated the effect of the program designed to develop friendship relations of gifted students attending 4th grade in the elementary school on friendship relations.

Particularly childhood experiences affect the future lives of individuals. One of the most important tasks a person has to accomplish is social development. Bearing in mind that the stages of development are interrelated, fulfilling social development tasks in childhood would ensure that the individual will be well-adjusted in the future and in his or her relationships. Thus, it is considered that both the lack of skills experienced in making friends in childhood and the inadequacies in solving problems experienced in making friends might affect the future social and emotional development of the child negatively. Therefore, when the significance of friendship relations in childhood are

considered, the present study was considered to contribute to the students in a positive way, since providing friendship skills psycho-education in order to improve the quality of friendship between 9-12 year olds who do not have sufficient skills in this area would be a preventive approach for children to avoid these problems in the future and they could achieve life-long skills as a result of this education. Some of these contributions include the ability of children to change their social status in school, to increase their quality of friendship, their acceptance at school, and their self-expression skills in a novel environment, or to have positive effects on their adjustment at a new school, decrease the levels of loneliness, and increase their academic achievements. Especially in the pre-adolescence period, friendship skills education is considered to contribute to children's peer acceptance levels and social relations. Through this program, children could establish new friendship relationships and learn to solve problems that they have in their existing friendship relationships, which in turn could enhance the quality of current friendship relationships.

It is worth noting that this kind of assistance for the children on friendship education is considered to support both current and future lives of children in establishing healthier relationships, and that there are limited number of studies on the subject in Turkey. Therefore, it is considered that the present study conducted to improve children's friendship skills would make a significant contribution to the literature.

Method

Participants

In the present study, a mixed design with pre-test-post-test experiment, control and placebo groups was used. To prevent potential problems in conducting the empirical study, a total of 313 5th grade (151 students) and the 6th grade (162 students) students attending Türkiyem Secondary School were determined by convenience sampling method among the students attending Malatya Provincial Directorate of National Education secondary schools, and included in the study sample. Convenience sampling reflects that the sample is selected with the criteria of ease of access and feasibility due to limitations in time, funding and workforce (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). To identify the students to be selected for, experiment, control, and placebo groups, the Friendship Quality Questionnaire was administered to all 313 students. Since the aim was to include students with low quality of friendship scale scores in the study, students who received below the average quality of friendship scores were identified after the application. In addition to general information on the study (session duration and frequency, etc.), information on the voluntary basis of the study were provided to 50 students that meet study criteria during the preliminary interviews. Voluntary students were also informed that they should acquire the approval of their parents to participate in the study and parent permission forms were provided to the volunteering students. Forty-two students who volunteered to participate in this study and provided parent consent were randomly assigned to the experiment (6 females, 6 males), control (6 females, 6 males) and placebo (6 females, 6 males) groups considering the number of male and female participants. However, since each member in the group needed other members exhibiting positive behavior (Morganett, 2005), two more members, who exhibited positive behavior in friendship relations, were included so that each group finally included 14 members.

Some of the students assigned to the experiment group did not attend sessions for a variety of reasons, although they reported that they would voluntarily participate in group sessions while the experimental process was in progress. In the experiment group, one female and four male students left the study.

In order to test the effectiveness of the program implemented in the study, and to determine whether the groups identified in the beginning of the empirical process were actually comparable, it was proposed to analyze pre-test results (Büyüköztürk, Çokluk, & Köklü, 2010). For this purpose,, pre-test mean scores and standard deviations were calculated based on the results obtain with the data

collection tool applied to the experiment, control and placebo groups before the psycho-education and the pre-test mean scores and standard deviations obtained on the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (FQQ) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations Obtained in the FQQ Before Psycho-Education

Groups	N	\bar{x}	Ss
Experiment	14	66.00	22.73
Control	14	67.07	22.30
Placebo	14	66.92	22.64

As presented in Table 1, the FQQ mean pre-test scores of the experiment, control and placebo group students were similar before the application. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there was a difference between the FQQ mean pre-test scores of the students in the experiment, control, and placebo groups. As a result of the statistical calculations, it was observed that the distribution was normal and the variances were homogeneous. One-way analysis of variance results for the FQQ scores of the experiment, control and placebo groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. One-way analysis of variance results for the FQQ scores of the experiment, control and placebo groups

	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean of Squares	F	p
FQQ Pre-Test	Between-groups	9.476	2	4.738	
	In-groups	19873.857	39	509.586	.009
	Total	19883.333	41		.991

As could be observed in Table 2, there was no significant difference between the mean pre-test scores of the experiment, control and placebo groups [$F_{(2,39)} = .009, p > .05$]. This finding demonstrates that prior to psycho-education, the experiment, control, and placebo groups included members with similar levels of quality of friendship.

Data Collection Tools

In the present study, the Friendship Quality Questionnaire was applied to the students in experiment, control, and placebo groups to examine the effect of friendship skills psycho-education on the quality of friendship of 9-12 year-old students.

The Friendship Quality Questionnaire (FQQ): The Friendship Quality Questionnaire developed by Asher and Parker (1993) was utilized to determine the quality of friendship of the students between the ages of 9 and 12. The adaptation of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire to Turkish language was conducted by Öztürk (2016).

The original the Friendship Quality Questionnaire form includes a total of 40 items and 6 sub-dimensions. These dimensions are Friendship and Companionship, Approval and Support, Assistance and Guidance, Sharing Secrets / Self-Disclosure, Conflict Resolution, Conflict and Betrayal. The item factor loads of the FQQ sub-dimensions are as follows: Item factor loads of the Approval and Support sub-dimension ranged between .78 and .54, item factor loads of the Conflict Resolution sub-dimension ranged between .88 and .57, item factor loads of the Conflict and Betrayal sub-dimension ranged between .84 and .63, item factor loads of the Assistance and Guidance sub-dimension ranged between .82 and .56, item factor loads of Friendship and Companionship sub-dimension ranged between .80 and .57, and item factor loads of Sharing Secrets / Self-Disclosure sub-dimension ranged between .75 and .65. The Cronbach internal consistency coefficients for the sub-dimensions of the items in the scale are as follows: Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient was $\alpha = .75$ for the Friendship and

Companionship sub-dimension, Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient was $\alpha = .90$ for the Approval and Support sub-dimension, Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient was $\alpha = .90$ for the Assistance and Guidance sub-dimension, Sharing Secrets / Self-Disclosure sub-dimension Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient was $\alpha = .86$, Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient for Conflict Resolution sub-dimension was $\alpha = .73$, Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient for Conflict and Betrayal sub-dimension was $\alpha = .84$ (Asher & Parker, 1993).

During the adaptation of the scale, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were conducted to investigate structural validity. As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, a 6-factor structure was obtained which explained 50.84% of the total variance. Most of the items listed under the factors demonstrated an adequate distribution with respect to the factors in the original form, but certain items were observed under different factors. The 7 out of these 40 items under these 6 factors with a factor load of under .40 were excluded from the scale. Based on the results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis, the factor loads of the items in the conflict and betrayal sub-dimension ranged between .87 and .79 and this sub-dimension explained 12.750% of the total variance. The factor loads of the items under sharing secrets / self-disclosure sub-dimension ranged from .66 to .45, and this sub-dimension explained 9.233% of the total variance. The factor loads of the items under the approval and support sub-dimension ranged from .67 to .45 and this sub-dimension explained 9.132% of the total variance. The factor loads of the items under the friendship and companionship sub-dimension ranged from .70 to .51, which explained 8.3659% of the total variance. The factor loads of the items under the Assistance and Guidance sub-dimension ranged from .69 to .42, which explained 6.138% of the total variance. The factor loads of the items under the confidence sub-dimension ranged from .64 to .47, and this sub-dimension explained 5.227% of the total variance. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test whether the six factor model obtained with the exploratory factor analysis was fit for the data. Fit indices of the obtained model were examined in the CFA and it was found that Chi-square value was significant ($\chi^2 = 1067.89$, $N = 703$, $p = 0.00$). The fit index values were found as RMSEA = .042, GFI = .92, AGFI = .90, CFI = .92, NNFI = .91, SRMR = .04, RMR = .069, PGFI = .78 and PNFI = .78.

In order to demonstrate the criterion-dependent validity of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire, the correlation between the FQQ and the Loneliness Scale for Children was calculated as -.48. Thus, this value obtained for criterion-dependent validity of the scale was considered as the proof of differential validity of the scale.

Internal consistency coefficient and test-retest methods were used to determine the reliability of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire. In the present study, internal consistency coefficient was .89 for the total scale, while it was .92 for the test-retest reliability for the whole scale. Internal consistency coefficients for the sub-dimension were found as .83 for confidence sub-dimension, .87 for conflict and betrayal sub-dimension, .79 for sharing secrets / self-disclosure sub-dimension, .70 for approval and support sub-dimension, .60 for friendship and companionship sub-dimension and .52 for assistance and guidance sub-dimension. Test-retest reliability was found as .89 for confidence sub-dimension, .72 for conflict and betrayal sub-dimension, .78 for sharing secrets /self-disclosure sub-dimension, .74 for approval and support sub-dimension, .72 for friendship and companionship sub-dimension, and .82 for the assistance and guidance sub-dimension. As a result of the conducted analyses, it was determined that the scale had both internal consistency and test-retest reliability in terms of sub-dimensions and total score.

Based the findings obtained from the validity and reliability studies for the Turkish form of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire, it could be argued that the Friendship Quality Questionnaire was a valid and reliable measurement tool that could be utilized to assess the friendship quality of the children at 3rd-6thgrade levels.

In the scale, the children mark their responses for each item on a 5-point scale. These points are (0) is "not accurate", (1) "somehow accurate", (2) "accurate", (3) "fairly accurate", (4) "completely accurate." In the scale, items 7, 15, 22, and 29 items are reverse-scored. The highest score that could be

obtained in the scale is 132, and the lowest score possible is 33. A high score in the Friendship Quality Questionnaire indicates a high level of friendship quality.

Procedure Path and Friendship Skills Education (FSE) Content

The objective of the present study is to evaluate the effectiveness of FSE on the quality of friendship of 9-12 years old children. FSE was designed, implemented and tested in the context of the present study.

The psycho-education program for improving friendship skills was structured to understand the significance of friendship relationships and the quality of those relationships and to ensure the utilization of the skills necessary to initiate and maintain friendship relationships. During the development of the psycho-education program to improve the friendship skills, it was presented for an expert opinion (A faculty member at İnönü University, Education Sciences Faculty, Education Programs and Teaching Department).

The psycho-education group process, designed to develop friendship skills, is a procedure that is structured with a focus on friendship, introducing oneself, starting a conversation, ending a conversation, asking for a favor, offering assistance, asking for help when you need it, complimenting others and accepting compliments, apologizing when necessary, collaboration and conflict management. Especially modeling and cognitive behavioral therapy were utilized since the objective of the developed program was the achievement of certain skills in the beginning and countenance of the friendship relations.

Following the development of the program, the friendship skills psycho-education program was instructed to the experiment group once a week for about 11 weeks and about 50 minutes, and no specific action was taken with the control group. In this study, a placebo group was used to check whether the expected difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the experiment group was due to friendship skills psycho-education program, or due to participation or interaction within a group, and meetings for five weeks were held with students in the placebo group and an informative study on efficient study methods and techniques was conducted. The FQQ was applied as pre-test and post-test to experiment, control and placebo groups. SPSS-17 (Statistical Package Program for Social Sciences) software program was used for data analysis. Two-Factor Mixed (Split-Plot) design, which is suitable for multi-factorial designs, was used as an experimental design since the study was an empirical study with experiment, control, and placebo groups and pre-test and post-test. Two-factor Split-Plot ANOVA method was used to test the effectiveness of the program and to determine the differences between the groups.

The definition of friendship in the psycho-educational program for improving friendship skills was based on through sharing the information obtained from several resources on various concepts that are the basis of friendship skills such as communication, cooperation, and expressing positive emotions, which are the main factors that initiate friendship skills, as well as the technique of exemplifying a behavior or skill of an individual or more than one individual to demonstrate this behavior or skill symbolically, the technique of implementation of an example behavior with role playing in the group before it is implemented in real life, the technique of providing feedback about the target behavior after it is animated, and homework assignments to reinforce newly learned skills and facilitate their transfer to the real life. Accordingly the sessions were structured based on warming, providing information, role playing, assessment and assignment stages. FSE sessions included the following tasks: 1) Meeting, setting group rules, expressing expectations about the study, defining friendship; 2) Understanding the importance of communication skills in the development and maintenance of friendship; 3) Establishing communications; 4) Body language and effective use of body language; 5) Identify and practice active listening skills; 6) Expressing positive emotions; 7) Ability to apologize; 8) Providing and getting assistance; 9) Cooperation; 10) Understanding the conflict and its reasons and reaching a consensus and its importance; 11) Assessment and termination of the program.

Results

The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of the FSE on the quality of friendship of 9-12 year olds students. For this purpose, the FQQ was applied as a post-test to students in the experiment, control and placebo groups at the end of the empirical study. Since only 9 members in the experiment group were present in the process on a regular basis, the scores of 5 remaining experiment group members were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the scores of 5 members in other (placebo, control groups) groups with scores similar to the scores obtained by the 5 excluded members of the experiment group in the FQQ were also excluded from the analysis. Therefore, a sample of 27 participants, 9 in the experiment, control and placebo groups each, were included in the study. The experiment group included 3 males and 6 females, 4 males and 5 females were in the control group, while 4 males and 5 females were the members of the placebo group. The means and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores obtained in the FQQ by experiment, control and placebo groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. FQQ Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Experiment, Control and Placebo Groups

Scale	Groups	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			\bar{x}	Ss	\bar{x}	Ss
FQQ	Experiment	9	64.22	20.48	93.44	21.61
	Control	9	65.22	19.74	60.66	27.46
	Placebo	9	64.88	21.73	66.11	13.12

Statistical analysis results presented in Table 3 indicate that there was a difference between the mean pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the experiment, control and placebo groups obtained in the FQQ. Students who were in the experiment group where the friendship skills psycho-education program was instructed had higher post-test scores when compared to the pre-test scores. While the students in the control group exhibited a decrease in mean post-test scores, there was a slight increase in the mean post-test scores of the students in the placebo group when compared to mean pretest scores.

The main purpose of the research is to test the effectiveness of the applied psycho-education program on increasing the quality of friendship the students'. In order to determine the degree of realization of this goal, a two factor mixed (split plot) design which is convenient for multi-factorial designs as an experimental design was used because it is an experimental study of experiment, control and placebo group and pre-test post-test model. Two factor split-plot ANOVA method was used to test the effectiveness of the applied program and to determine the differences between the groups.

In the direction of the reserach's aim, whether the values detained from the scales by the experiment, placebo and control groups met the basic assumptions of the parametric tests was questioned in order to decide on the analyzes to be used in the investigation. Because of this the homogeneity test of variance was applied to the pre-measurement scores of the friendship quality of the students in the experiment, control and placebo groups and it was found that the variances were homogenous.

Before the operation, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there was a difference between the FQQ pre-test point averages of the experiment, control and placebo group students. The result of the one way analysis of variance for the the FQQ scores of the experiment, control and placebo groups was presented in the Table 4.

Table 4. One-way analysis of variance results for the FQQ scores of the experiment, control and placebo groups

	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean of Squares	F	p	
FQQ Pre-Test	Between-groups	9.476	2	2.333	.005	
	In-groups	19873.857	24	427.250		.995
	Total	19883.333	26			

As could be in Table 4, ANOVA results which is committed in order to show the measurements of the experiment, control and placebo groups were identical, show that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test scores of the experiment, control and placebo groups [$F_{(2,24)} = .005$, $p > .05$]. In other words, experiment, control and placebo groups included members who are equivalent to each other in terms of the levels of friendship quality.

According to this, it was determined that the variances in every group were homogenous and showed normal distribution according to the skewness-kurtosis values. As the assumptions were fulfilled, it was decided that parametric tests will be able to use with regard to obtained findings. In this context as stated above it was examined that there was no significant difference between pre-test scores of experiment, control and placebo groups by using one way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The two-factor ANOVA method was used for mixed measures to determine whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the FQQ pre-test and post-test scores of students in experiment, control, and placebo groups. The ANOVA results of pre-test and post-test the FQQ scores of experiment, control and placebo groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Two-Factor ANOVA Results for Repeated Measurements of Pre-test and Post-Test Scores

Source of Variance	KT	Sd	KO	F	p
Between-groups	20530.037	26			
Group (Indiv./Group)	2620.593	2	1310.296	1.756	.194
Error	17909.444	24	746.227		
In-group	7438.5	27			
Measurement (pretest-posttest)	1005.352	1	1005.352	6.902	.015*
Group* measurement	2937.481	2	1468.741	10.084	.001**
Error	3495.667	24	145.653		

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$

As could be observed in Table 5, there was no difference between the mean scores obtained in the quality of friendship scale when only the groups were considered regardless of the measurements [$F_{(2,24)} = 1.756$, $p > .05$; $\eta^2 = .45$]. In other words, it seems that the basic effect of the group was not significant. Independent of the group variable, it was determined that only the mean pre-test and post-test scores varied based on the change in the measurements, when only the measurement order was considered. In other words, it was observed that the basic effect of measurement was significant [$F_{(2,24)} = 6.902$, $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .22$]. This finding suggested that the difference between the mean scores of the subjects on pre-test and post-test measurements was significant without group discrimination. The group * measurement common interaction, which is called interaction and where the effectiveness of the empirical process could be observed, demonstrated that mean quality of friendship scores differed across experiment, control and placebo groups as the measurements changed [$F_{(2,24)} = 10.084$, $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .45$]. In other words, it was observed that the group * measurement common effect that investigated whether there was a variation between experiment, control, and placebo groups' mean pre-test and post-test quality of friendship scores was also significant. Among the groups, 45% of the change in friendship quality scale scores during the measurements was explained by the experimental process ($\eta^2 = 0.45$). When Eta square values are examined, it was observed that being in a different application group explained 45% of the variance in quality of friendship scale post-test scores. Furthermore, whether the effect of the process applied in mixed design was significant on the dependent variable is determined by considering the common effect of the group * measurement (Büyüköztürk, 2007). The significance of the common effect in the present study also suggested that the applied friendship skills psycho-education program had an effect on the level of quality of friendship of the students in the 9-12 age group. Activities conducted during the sessions affected the friendship relations of the students positively.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

It can be said that a child has the most significant relationships with their friends outside the family. The objective of this study is to stress the friendship relationships between children and investigate the effect of friendship skills psycho-education program designed for students with problems in establishing and maintaining friendship on quality of friendship of children between the ages of 9 and 12. Study findings demonstrated that quality of friendship scores of students that participated in friendship skills psycho-education showed a significance increase when compared to students who did not participate in that application.

Literature review showed that mostly psycho-education or group counseling studies are conducted to instruct and develop social skills of individuals to develop friendship relations (Bilgiç, 2000; Demir, 2006; Özyayın, 2006; Öztürk, 2009; Uşaklı, 2006), although the number of studies conducted on the topic in different age group in Turkey were quite limited (Çoban, 2007; Kabasakal & Çelik, 2010; Tagay, Baydan, & Acar, 2010; Uz Baş, 2010).

The result of the psycho-education program to increase the quality of friendship were consistent with the results of previous studies on friendship skills education. In one of the previous national studies, Bilgiç (2000) concluded that the friendship skills psycho-education program positively affected the social acceptance levels of the students that attended the second stage of primary education. Again, Demir (2006) found that friendship skills psycho-education program positively affected social acceptance and sociometric status of the students who attend the secondary education. In another study, Özyayın (2006) examined the effectiveness of the "Program for the Improvement of Friendship Skills" that was instructed to children with normal development in preschool educational institutions on improvement of their interaction with their peers with special needs who had limited social interaction skills. As a result, it was observed that there was a significant increase in social interaction behavior in both groups of children (child with special needs child-educating peer). It was determined that social interaction behavior among peers were retained on 3rd and 4th weeks after the last follow-up data were obtained at a higher level than the beginning level. Uşaklı (2006) examined the influence of drama-based group counseling on the friendship relationships of 5th grade students in their study. At the end of the study, it was found that the group counseling positively affected the children's friendship relations. In another study by Öztürk (2009), effect of game-based friendship skills education on friendship skills of primary education 4th grade students was investigated and it was determined that there was no significant difference between Friendship Skills Assessment Scale pre-test and post-test scores of experiment and control group students, however the total scores of experiment group students significantly increased after the training.

In the international arena, Ralph et al. (1998) developed a psycho-education program for adolescents aged 11 to 16 who had problems in friendship relations, and it was determined that the program had positive effects on the friendship relations of the adolescents, and improved their problem solving skills and self-respect. The literature review demonstrated that, similar to national studies, psycho-education studies were conducted in other countries to teach and develop social skills to improve friendship relations. In one of the initial studies, Oden and Asher (1977) developed and implemented a program to teach social skills to third and fourth grade children who were left alone. As a result, it was observed that there was an increase in the social skills of the students in the study group as demonstrated by sociometric measurements. In another study, La Greca (1983) developed a social skills training program to teach interpersonal relations skills to children and adolescents that experienced problems with their peers. The main objective of that study was to encourage the establishment of positive peer relations. At the end of the study, it was observed that the interpersonal skills of children and adolescents had developed. Bierman (1986) investigated whether social skills education improved children's relationships and found that verbal skills and peer support of children who received social skills education had increased. Grizenko et al. (2000) conducted a social skills education study with children aged between 8 and 11 years and the results demonstrated that the social skills education program that included implementing the perspective of the self and others was effective

on learning the behavior required at school and the achievements were retained by the students for nine months after the training. In another study, Fox and Boulton (2006) investigated the effects of social skills education they developed on victims of physical violence at ages 9 and 11. After this education, it was determined that there was a significant increase in the self-esteem levels of the students in the study group. Spence (2003), in his 1995 study, developed a social skills training program for young adults between the ages of 7 and 18 and found that the program was effective on young individuals. In another study, DeRosier (2004), in a study that investigated the effectiveness of the Social Skills Group Intervention, which included peer experiences such as social anxiety, bullying, and rejection, on 3rd grade students, concluded that students in the study group achieved a higher level of peer approval, resulting in higher levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, Dee and Ron (2009), in a study where they investigated the effectiveness of the intervention program they designed based on the principle that social skills do not only improve social relations, but also are related to psychological health and academic achievements of the children, found that loneliness and social anxiety levels of the participating students decreased and academic achievements of the children increased.

The findings of studies found in the literature on the effects of friendship skills and social skills programs implemented at schools demonstrated that the findings were positive. It was observed that instruction of friendship skills increases the social acceptance levels of students (Demir, 2006) and affects friendship relations positively (Özaydın, 2006; Öztürk, 2009; Uşaklı, 2006). Similarly, it was observed that social skills programs positively affected social skills (Bilbay Alpa & Köseoğlu, 1999, Çoban, 2007; Kabasakal & Çelik, 2010; Tagay et al., 2010; Uz Baş, 2010; Ünlü, 2010; Yüksel, 1997), social acceptance (Sümer Hatipoğlu, 1999) and interpersonal relations (Uzamaz, 2000) of individuals. Thus, national and international study findings demonstrated that students who participated in the programs designed to improve friendship skills and social skills improved their relations with their peers.

Both quality of friendship and peer acceptance are important components of peer relations (Demir & Urberg, 2004). Several studies revealed the positive effects of high quality friendship. Studies showed that the quality of friendship is related to the general well-being of children (Asher & Parker, 1993; Bowker & Rubin, 2009; Foster, 2005; Ladd, 1999; Mitchell, 2005). Several scholars who conducted research on friendship assumed that a quality friendship has positive effects on children such as increasing their self-esteem, improving their adjustment to society and their ability to cope with stress factors (Berndt, 2002; Bowker & Rubin, 2009).

Lansford et al. (2003) noted that young individuals with better friendship quality and peer groups tend to exhibit less problems behavior. Asher and Parker (1988) stated that failure in peer relations during the early period might be an indicator for adjustment of the individual to future adulthood problems.

Thus, it was considered that friendship relations in childhood and the level of quality that these individuals feel in this relationships are quite important. Findings of this psycho-education study, which was based on the premise that as a result of teaching children the skills to initiate and maintain friendship relations, their friendship relations would be stronger, and thus would have a positive impact on their happiness and psychological health, demonstrated that quality of friendship levels of the children increased.

Deliberation of the limitations is also considered important in evaluating the results obtained from a study. In the present study, an experimental design was attempted to be achieved using pre-test, post-test, experiment, control and placebo groups. However, no follow-up test was performed. This could be considered as a limitation of this study. Furthermore, the present study was limited to students in the 9-12 age group. So this is another limitation of research.

In addition to that, because of the study is being done at noon and the class starts immediately after study, some group members don't continue to study because they cannot meet their nutrition and rest needs. So this situation is another limitation of the research. Also the fact that experiment, control

and placebo groups are selected from the same school students is another limitation of the study because students interact with each other in the school environment except from the study.

Based on study findings, the following recommendations could be made. In the future, studies could work with students at 7th and 8th grade levels in the secondary school to demonstrate the effectiveness of friendship skills psycho-education. Thus, it would be possible to observe how well this experimental process would improve the quality of friendship in other age groups. It is also recommended to conduct a follow-up study to test the permanence of the applied psycho-education work in the future.

Also the field indicates that the friendship skills of the children and the parents and the parent-child communication are related to each other. In future researches, a program which is developed for the parents and the friendship skills pscho-education which is developed for the students can be carried on simultaneously.

When the field is examined,, it has been seen that in abroad the studies which were done for friendship skills and social skills training, generally started from the lowest level. . Therefore in the future studies, the studies to develop friendship skills can be planned as starting from the pre-school period.

In the future studies making a social validity study is suggested to evaluate the effectiveness of the friendship skills psycho-education program. Whether the pscho-education program is effective can be evaluated by asking various questions to the associations participating in the pscho-education program, to the teachers in these associations and to the parents.

The applied friendship skills psycho-education program also supports preventive guidance work and its goals. Therefore friendship skills psycho-education groups can be constituted in schools and as many students as possible can be benefited from this service.

This study could be considered as a study in which the effect of friendship skill psycho-education program on the quality of friendship of the students aged 9-12 was investigated. As a result of the study, it is possible to argue that the friendship skill psycho-education program was supported, but further studies have to be conducted to ensure the long-term effects of the program.

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