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Are model PISA pupils happy at school? Quality of school life of adolescents in Finland and Korea

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the quality of school life (QSL) of two 'model pupils' in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, Finland and Korea, and investigates students' views on the central aspects of QSL (*general satisfaction, peer relations and teacher-student relations*) using PISA 2012 data. It also seeks to interpret how specific institutional and sociocultural aspects are linked to QSL. The analyses show that Finnish and Korean adolescents' views on QSL are less positive compared with the OECD average; Finnish adolescents' views on QSL are more positive than those of Korean adolescents regarding *general satisfaction* and *peer relations* but are not clearly related to *teacher-student relations*. Since Finnish and Korean adolescents' views on QSL partly differ from those of their Nordic and East Asian counterparts, the distinct Nordic or East Asian image of QSL could not be revealed in the study. This article proposes that QSL demands more attention in the era of 'rankings and benchmarked educational models', with consideration to the universality and uniqueness of institutional, sociocultural and historical factors of one's own and others' schooling.

KEYWORDS

Quality of school life; PISA; comparative education; educational system; Finland; Korea

Introduction

Since the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was implemented in the 2000s, Finland and Korea have become well known for their superior academic achievements and competitive educational systems. Finland has become a sacred place for international educators seeking to apply Finnish innovations to their educational and schooling systems (Simola 2015). Korea has also been referred to as a model country in terms of student academic achievement by external education commentators and governments, particularly in the USA (Jeynes 2008). Due to the effect of international comparative assessment, the trend in educational borrowing and transfer has been strengthened. The education systems of East Asian and Nordic countries, which are considered to stem from very different political and sociocultural backgrounds, have been cited as superior models (OECD 2011, 2013a; Rajamäki 2014; Schleicher 2013).

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Given its continuous success in PISA tests, Finnish education has received endorsement and affirmative responses worldwide, and the Finnish educational and schooling systems are viewed as a desirable model for educational reform. This positive view has emerged not only in other European and Anglo-Saxon countries but also in East Asian countries, which have also achieved comparably superior results in large-scale international assessments including Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and PISA. Global and local media have reported on Finnish education, depicting it with images of an educational utopia and catching both excellence and equality of education (Takayama, Waldow, and Sung 2013; Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014). Moreover, worldwide attention has extended beyond Finland's superior PISA results to the Nordic educational and comprehensive school system as an example of universal welfare (Kim 2011; Lee 2011).

On the other hand, South Korean education has been regarded as a part of 'East Asian education', and it has been negatively stereotyped as featuring excessive study hours and competition between students. Prior to PISA 2009 results, East Asian education was not viewed positively internationally, even though many East Asian countries appeared at the top of the PISA rankings. In fact, East Asian education has been described as 'examination hell' and characterised by high-achieving but unhappy pupils. Particularly following the Finnish success in PISA tests since 2000, Finnish and East Asian education have been compared from opposing dichotomous perspectives, not only in Western countries but also in East Asian countries (Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014). However, this trend began slowly to change following the publication of the PISA 2009 results as Shanghai-China and other East Asian countries came to dominate the top rankings in the tests. The reports in the mass media became more favourable; moreover, East Asian nations have emerged as alternative counter-reference societies for educational reform (Sellar and Lingard 2013a; Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014). For instance, the OECD published news regarding the competitiveness of Asian students in the PISA tests, focusing, for example, on the problem-solving skills of Shanghai students (OECD 2013a; Schleicher 2013). Further, Korean education has been referenced positively several times by the American President, Barack Obama (Hong 2011; Jung and Koh 2011).

There is little doubt among researchers in comparative education researchers that international student assessments, in particular OECD-PISA, have created the current trend of external policy referencing on educational reform models (Sellar and Lingard 2013b; Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014). First, the OECD has played a key role in formulating the comparative trend by publishing analyses of PISA results and offering its own news reports on them. Second, global and local mass media have immensely influenced the attention given to 'outstanding educational models', as measured by the PISA results. In sum, it can be said that top scores in PISA tests and media reports have led to discourse on the representative educational models throughout the world. Examples of those models are the Finnish and the East Asian educational models (Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014; see Bulle 2011 for theoretical definition of educational models).

The PISA evaluates key knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds who are at the end of compulsory education. The triennial tests have assessed competencies in reading, mathematics and science and have also gathered contextual information on students' backgrounds and schools since 2000. In PISA 2012, 510,000 students from 65 countries (34 OECD member countries and 31 other countries/economies) participated in testing (OECD, n.d., 'About PISA'). Even though the rankings of both Finland and Korea have gone

down in recent years, they are still among the top-performing OECD countries, as shown in Table 1.

In spite of the high rankings of both nations, the contrasting images of ‘educational utopia’ and ‘competition hell’ of Finnish and Korean education, respectively, are deeply ingrained in Korea’s self-perception of its educational system as well as in Western countries’ perspectives on East Asian education (Takayama, Waldow, and Sung 2013; Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014).

The present study views Finnish and Korean education as an interesting set of comparisons in terms of education and society; however, it seeks to broaden and deepen the comparative perspectives according to the following arguments. First, comparative education research between nations, regions or sociocultural entities should be conducted based on an understanding of each party’s unique social, cultural and historical contexts. This understanding should be emphasised, especially when the study is related to qualitative concepts such as cognitive or affective outcomes of schooling, or when the comparison occurs between Western and non-Western counterparts, where orientalism and reverse-orientalism have emerged in comparative education research (Dale 2005; Takayama 2008a). Second, this study sheds light on the quality of school life (QSL), which has received less attention compared with cognitive outcomes of schooling such as student performance. As worldwide student assessments such as PISA or TIMSS have influenced the direction of national educational policies and discourses,¹ measurable student performance or competencies, which are the main domains of the tests, have become the focal point of discussions regarding the results and league tables of each country. Other purposes of school education, such as the affective, social and physical development of young people, have not been discussed actively in a relative sense. OECD-PISA has also published extensive background information and analyses related to students’ affective domains, such as a sense of belonging and student–teacher relations; however, it appears that these affective domains have been researched mainly as supplementary data that may influence the outcomes of main PISA domains (see OECD 2013c, 9–10).

Schooling amounts to far more than academic outcomes. Throughout school life, adolescents develop their sense of belonging to peer cultures and learn to cope with academic pressure and competition, bullying and many other aspects of school life. School is an essential meeting place where youthful life and values are carried out. Therefore, schooling needs to be understood as part of young people’s life, which is organically connected and harmonised with other areas of daily life such as family, friends and love relationships (Parreira do Amaral et al. 2010). Opening the ‘black box’ of schooling has

Table 1. The ranking of Finland and Korea in PISA studies from 2000 to 2012.

	Reading		Mathematics		Science	
	Finland	Korea	Finland	Korea	Finland	Korea
2000	1	6	4	2	3	1
2003	1	2	2	3	1	4
2006	2	1	2	3	1	10
2009	3	2	6	4	2	6
2012	6	5	12	5	5	7

Source: OECD.

been the task of many qualitative and ethnographic studies for decades (Jackson 1968; McLaren 1993; Willis 1977). Related to this, a Finnish school ethnographer, Lahelma (2002), differentiated the 'official', 'informal' and 'physical' layers of everyday school life. The official layer includes teaching and learning, curriculum, pedagogy and formal hierarchies. The informal layer refers to interactions among teachers and students and between teachers, students and other staff members, including informal hierarchies. The physical layer denotes spatiality and embodiment, including space, time, movement, sound and voice (Lahelma 2002, 368). From students' perspectives, school can be even more important as a social (informal layer) and a physical environment than as the official learning environment (Paju 2011). In Korea, school has been emphasised as an institution that serves a cognitive (academic) function, separate from other parts of youth life, even though well-balanced development among academic, virtuous and physical education is one of the stated purposes of school education in the Korean national core curriculum (Korean Ministry of Education and Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation 2013). Public schooling in Korea has been criticised for its failure properly to meet its intrinsic goals owing to the influence of academic competition, which culminates in the university entrance examination. Meanwhile, schools in Nordic countries such as Finland have been considered as a major setting for adolescents' daily life. Thus, it is assumed that school and school life in Finland have been perceived more as a holistic concept by citizens, as manifested in the Finnish national core curriculum for basic education, which encompasses school as a learning, emotional and social environment in which students live (Finnish National Board of Education 2014).

Quality of school life

Defining QSL can be ambiguous and difficult since quality is subjective depending on the individual. Moreover, establishing a setting for research on quality may be problematic as QSL varies between different societies and cultures owing to their non-identical definitions of quality and qualitative uniqueness (Lee 2001). In spite of these difficulties, several researchers have attempted to conceptualise this qualitative concept. A number of previous studies conceptualised QSL and school satisfaction as affective outcomes of schooling, which along with cognitive outcomes such as academic achievement are major goals of schooling (Huebner 1994; Linnakylä 1996; Williams and Roey 1996). In addition, some researchers perceived QSL as a crucial subordinate concept of quality of life, consisting of both positive and negative experiences (Huebner 1994; Linnakylä 1996; Verkuyten and Thijs 2002). Williams and Batten (1981, as quoted in Thien and Razak 2013, 685) defined QSL as an overall sense of happiness, well-being or satisfaction in regard to students' present circumstances. Williams and Roey (1996) measured QSL based on six dimensions: general affect, negative affect, opportunity, teachers, identity and status. Similarly, Linnakylä (1996, 70) defined QSL as students' general well-being and satisfaction from the point of view of their positive and negative experiences, particularly in typical school activities. In her study, QSL was categorised by six domains: general satisfaction, teacher–student relations, status in class, identity in class, achievement and opportunity and negative affect (Linnakylä 1996). In this respect, QSL has been studied mainly from the perspectives of educational psychology (see also Thien and Razak 2013; Tian and Gilman 2009).

School well-being is another concept that has been utilised to identify students' satisfaction and happiness with school life. Some studies, such as those by Hofman, Hofman, and Guldemond (1999), Pyhältö, Soini, and Pietarinen (2010) and Pietarinen, Soini, and Pyhältö (2014), were conducted from the perspectives of education and educational psychology. School well-being has also been researched in the field of social health. For instance, Konu and Rimpelä (2002) and Konu and Lintonen (2006), leaning on the tradition of Scandinavian welfare research (see Allardt 1981), conducted research on school well-being on the basis of Finnish national and WHO data. The concept of school well-being was categorised into school conditions, social relationships, means for self-fulfilment and health status. Similarly, Kim (2015), adapting to the recent trend in the field of social health and welfare, introduced the term subjective well-being, highlighting the importance of investigating well-being from the viewpoint of children and young people.

In addition, comparative studies on QSL and well-being have been conducted from the point of view that well-being or happiness in one society needs be interpreted diversely by comparing with results from another society (Park et al. 2010). The trend of comparison of QSL and other affective domains of school life is grounded in student assessments and research reports by international organisations. Several domestic and international comparative studies on QSL have used survey data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)–International Reading Literacy Study 1991 (Linnakylä 1996; Malin and Linnakylä 2001; Williams and Roey 1996) and PISA 2003 (Linnakylä and Malin 2008). Park et al. (2010) and Kim (2015) also analysed Korean children and adolescents' well-being in and out of school using international comparisons based on UNICEF reports.

In spite of the diverse definitions of QSL, there are common factors in defining and categorising the dimensions of QSL. First, QSL refers to students' positive and negative perceptions or evaluations of their school well-being, satisfaction and happiness. Second, aspects of QSL include social factors such as students' identities, statuses in class and relations with peers and teachers in addition to academic dimensions such as academic achievement and future opportunity; these factors are all closely related to the roles of schooling. Furthermore, many past studies have identified teacher–student relations and peer relations as key factors in QSL and school well-being. It has been widely demonstrated that these social relations are important to students' social integration and experiences of school life. In other words, QSL has been shown to be enhanced by high-quality interactions with teachers and peers, trust and fair treatment from teachers and being accepted and liked by peers (Pietarinen, Soini, and Pyhältö 2014; Pyhältö, Soini, and Pietarinen 2010; Van Maele and Van Houtte 2011).

Based on the above-mentioned definitions and discussions, QSL in this article is defined as students' general perception of their school well-being and satisfaction with their positive and negative experiences of ordinary school life. The aspects of QSL in this study are as follows: (1) general satisfaction, (2) peer relations and (3) teacher–student relations (Figure 1).

School is a social place, where students experience their current lives as a whole, not a place where they simply prepare for future success. School also has an enormous effect on the process of self-development (Dewey [1897] 1987a, [1899] 2013). In modern society, school is a place where most children and adolescents spend many hours a day; thus, it has a significant influence on their socialisation process (Lahelma 2002; Verkuyten and

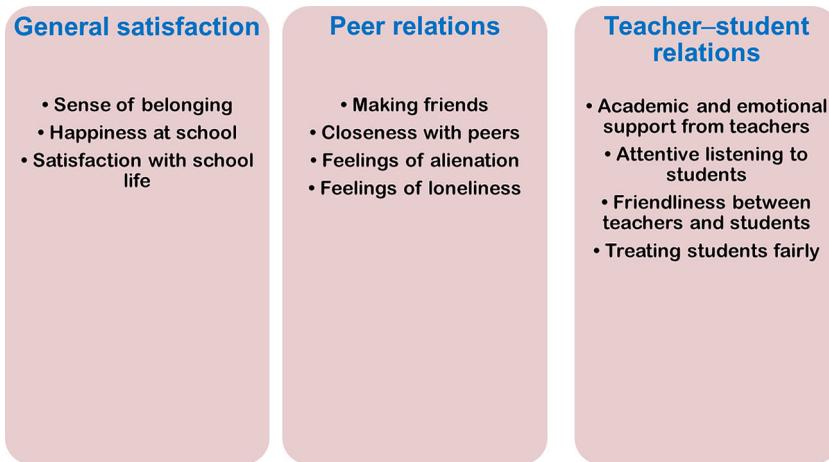


Figure 1. Aspects of QSL.

Thijs 2002). Therefore, the outcomes of schooling should be studied in a comprehensive way that encompasses not only cognitive dimensions but also social and physical development. However, previous academic studies on the outcomes of school education have largely concentrated on academic achievement and on the contents of teaching and learning (Baker 1999; Huebner and McCullough 2000; Lahelma 2002; Verkuyten and Thijs 2002).

Several previous studies (e.g. Huebner and McCullough 2000; Karatzias et al. 2001) have investigated the emotional aspects of students' school life using quantitative data. In addition, OECD-PISA and IEA-TIMSS have conducted student questionnaire surveys, which provide contextual information regarding affective aspects such as students' attitudes towards school and learning, classroom climate and teacher–student relations (e.g. IEA, n.d.; OECD 2014a). However, in most previous studies, the sociocultural and historical background that is assumed to underlie student QSL has not been actively studied.

Research aims and methods

This article investigates Finnish and Korean students' views on their QSL, with data taken from the relevant survey items from the PISA 2012 studies. The students' responses on the items are analysed in relation to other Nordic and East Asian countries and to OECD averages. Further, comparisons between the two countries concerning the three aspects of QSL (general satisfaction, peer relations and teacher–student relations) are investigated. We also seek to interpret how specific institutional, sociocultural and historical aspects are linked to QSL. Education and schooling are not confined to teaching and learning methods, didactics and curricula based on each subject; rather, they are deeply rooted in the institutional, sociocultural and historical factors of the society (Simola 2005). Thus, without underestimating the importance of investigating QSL at the school level, the validity of this study would be enhanced by examining the relevant institutional, sociocultural and historical aspects of Finland and Korea. This is important as an understanding of QSL might not be fully captured by quantitative data from the PISA survey

items alone. This article also seeks to elaborate on QSL, extending beyond a simplistic comparison and justification derived from several comparative education studies and media reports on Finnish and Korean education (Lee 2001; Takayama 2008a; Takayama, Waldow, and Sung 2013). In addition, possible assumptions regarding QSL among Finnish and Korean students as well as the implications of QSL for basic education (primary and middle school education) innovation and for educational model discourses (Finnish and East Asian models) will be discussed.

The study data were derived from student questionnaire items in PISA 2012. OECD-PISA conducts contextual surveys to collect extensive background information on students' backgrounds and school factors that could influence student performance. In particular, for the first time, in PISA 2012, student participants were asked to evaluate their happiness at school as well as their satisfaction with school and to reflect on whether their school environment approached their ideal situation, as students' subjective evaluations of their school life can provide a good indication of whether educational systems are promoting or hindering overall student well-being (OECD 2013c, 51). The student participants consisted of 15-year-old Finnish ($N = 8829$) and Korean ($N = 5033$) students who participated in PISA 2012. They were mostly ninth graders in Finland, and 6.1% of ninth graders and 93.9% of newly entered tenth graders in Korea (Cho et al. 2012).

We selected all questionnaire items that were relevant to QSL. As a result, 14 student questionnaire items were collected via the PISA 2012 international database (OECD, n.d., 'The PISA International Database'). The items shown in Table 2 are rated according to a four-point scale (strongly agree – agree – disagree – strongly disagree). The 14 items were categorised into Sense of Belonging and Student–Teacher relations according to the PISA Scale, and they belong to General Satisfaction, Peer Relations and Teacher–Student relations according to the aspects of QSL considered in this study (see also Figure 1).

First, we formulated the rate of positive answers (strongly agree, agree) for Finland, Korea, two Nordic countries (Denmark and Sweden), one East Asian country (Japan) and the OECD average. The aim was to determine the similarities and differences between

Table 2. The list of PISA 2012 questionnaire items used in the study.

PISA Scale	Aspects of QSL in this study	The list of selected questionnaire items
Sense of belonging	General satisfaction (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel happy at school • I am satisfied with my school • I feel like I belong at school • Things are ideal in my school
	Peer relations (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I make friends easily at school • Other students seem to like me • I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school • I feel awkward and out of place in my school • I feel lonely at school
Student–teacher relations	Teacher–student relations (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students get along well with most teachers • Most teachers are interested in students' well-being • Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say • Most of my teachers treat me fairly • If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers

individual countries and country clusters (Nordic vs. East Asian). A cross tabulation and a Pearson's chi-square test were performed. Next, for each pair of countries, z-tests with Bonferroni correction were used to determine whether the differences in the percentages were statistically significant. After the descriptive analysis, a principal component analysis (PCA) was done on the single items related to QSL (see [Table A1](#) in the appendix). Based on the results of the PCA, three component-based sum-scores (General Satisfaction, Peer Relations, Teacher–Student Relations) were constructed to compare Finnish and Korean adolescents' views on the most relevant aspects of QSL. The statistical significance in the difference of the means was examined with a *t*-test, and the practical significance and magnitude of the reported effect was measured by calculating effect sizes (Cohen's *d*). The OECD average value was used as background information for placing the findings concerning Finland and Korea into a broader context.

Results

Comparison of Nordic and East Asian countries

The rates of positive answers for Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Japan and Korea as well as the OECD average were formulated and compared, targeting the six key items that represent the three aspects of QSL (General Satisfaction [GS], Peer Relations [PR], Teacher–Student Relations [TS]), as shown in [Table 3](#). The positive rates indicate the sum of the percentage of responses that are devoted to strongly agree and agree. Each letter (a, b, c and d), preceded by a value, denotes a subset of countries whose cell proportions in each row do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level (z-test with Bonferroni correction).

It can be seen from [Table 3](#) that Nordic countries showed higher affirmative rates of responses in almost all the items on QSL compared with East Asian countries (items 2–6). The differences between the country clusters (Nordic vs. East Asian) were statistically significant (z-test) in the items concerning peer relations (items 3, 4). However, when comparing the differences within country clusters, it was noticed that Finnish adolescents' responses showed diverse tendencies. In terms of the two items on peer relations (items 3, 4), Finland showed similar positive trends to those in Denmark and Sweden. However, in the items concerning happiness and teachers' concerns about students' well-being (items 1, 5), there were statistically significant differences between Finland

Table 3. The rate of positive responses in five countries on the key items of QSL (%).

Items	Denmark	Finland	Sweden	Japan	Korea	OECD average
1. I feel happy at school (GS)***	85.8a	70.8b	85.2a	85.5a	60.3c	82.4
2. I am satisfied with my school (GS)***	80.9a	76.3b	76.8b	67.8c	64.7d	79.2
3. I make friends easily at school (PR)***	84.5a	86.0a,b	86.9b	79.0c	78.9c	87.8
4. Other students seem to like me (PR)***	87.9a	87.6a	89.1a	77.5b	77.7b	87.6
5. Most teachers are interested in students' well-being (TS)***	83.8a	74.5b	81.6a	58.9c	72.4b	80.5
6. Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say (TS)***	79.4a	75.3c	76.5b	73.0c	68.8d	76.1

Source: PISA 2012 – The PISA International Database.

Note: Each letter (a, b, c and d), preceded by a value, denotes a subset of countries whose cell proportions in each row do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level (z-test).

***Differences significant at the level .001 (Pearson's chi-square test).

and the other Nordic countries. Furthermore, regarding school satisfaction (item 2), the Finnish response was similar to that of Sweden and differed from the responses of Denmark, Japan and Korea. The responses of Korean and Japanese adolescents, in turn, differed from each other for all the other items with the exception of those related to peer relations (items 3, 4). Finally, the differences in the responses of Finnish and Korean students were statistically significant for five out of six items, with the only exception being the item 'Most teachers are interested in students' well-being' (Table 3).

When comparing the responses of Finnish and Korean adolescents with the OECD average, the share of positive responses on all items was lower among Korean students compared with the OECD average. Among Finnish students, this was the case for five out of six items, with the only exception being the item 'Other students seem to like me', where the share of positive responses was equal to that of OECD average.

The six items presented in Table 3 were selected to obtain a brief overview of QSL among Finnish and Korean adolescents and to compare it with results from other Nordic and East Asian peers as well as the OECD averages. In sum, a noticeable trend of responses appeared among the five countries. Denmark and Sweden showed higher affirmative rates of responses for most of the six items compared with the OECD average. On the contrary, Korea, Japan and Finland showed a low proportion of positive answers compared with the OECD mean and the other countries. Interestingly, while Finland showed nearly identical positive response rates as the other Nordic countries in terms of peer relations, fewer Finnish students answered positively in the items asking about happiness at school and teachers' concern about their school well-being. Since both Finnish and Korean adolescents' views on QSL differed from those of their Nordic and East Asian counterparts in certain respects, a clearly distinguishable Nordic or East Asian image of QSL could not be revealed in this study. The differences between country clusters were statistically significant only for two items regarding peer relations.

Comparison between Finland and Korea: are model PISA pupils happy?

Next, a PCA was done on the 14 PISA items related to QSL.² Three components were identified for the 14 items, explaining 60.34% of the total variance (see Table A1 in the appendix). After the PCA, component-based sum-scores were generated by summing the items loading strongly on the respective component. The scores were returned to the scale of the original items, and so the component-based scores varied between one and four, with higher values indicating a stronger agreement on the component in question. The three sum-score variables used in the study (GS, PR, TS) as well as the single items included within them are listed in Table 4.

After constructing sum-score variables and checking their reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, see Table A1 in the appendix), a comparison of means concerning the three aspects of QSL was done. The statistical significance in the differences of the views of Finnish and Korean adolescents was examined with a *t*-test, and the practical significance and magnitude of the reported effect was determined by calculating effect sizes (Cohen's *d*). The OECD average value was used as background information for placing the findings concerning Finland and Korea into a broader context. The main finding was that, regarding each dimension of QSL, both Finnish and Korean adolescents' views were less positive compared with those of adolescents from the OECD countries, on average. The differences

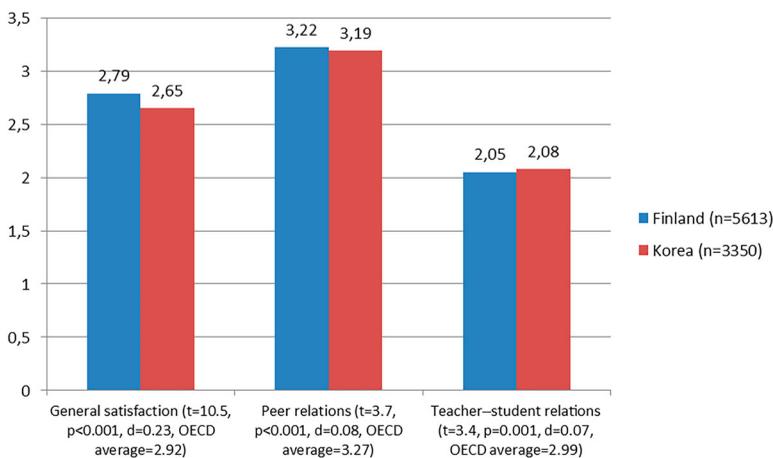
Table 4. Sum-score variables used in the study.

General satisfaction	Peer relations	Teacher–student relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like I belong at school • I feel happy at school • Things are ideal at my school • I am satisfied with my school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I make friends easily at school • Other students seem to like me • I don't feel like an outsider at school • I don't feel awkward and out of place at my school • I don't feel lonely at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students get along well with most teachers • Most teachers are interested in students' well-being • Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say • If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers • Most of my teachers treat me fairly

were greatest in teacher–student relations. A comparison between Finnish and Korean adolescents, in turn, revealed that while Finnish adolescents were more satisfied both with their school life in general and their peer relations, Korean adolescents were more satisfied with teacher–student relations. The differences notwithstanding being statistically significant at the level $p < .001$ had no practical significance, except in regard to general satisfaction, where the Cohen's effect size ($d = 0.23$) suggested a small to medium practical significance (Figure 2).

Uniqueness and similarity of QSL across cultures and societal systems

In this section, we attempt to understand and interpret the results drawn from the analyses of the PISA survey items in relation to the institutional, cultural and historical contexts of the Finnish and Korean societies. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), settings from microscopic to macroscopic environments interrelate with respect to the development of a growing person.³ In particular, macro-level settings play significant roles in the development of adolescents as they get older. In this respect, the results regarding general satisfaction, peer relations and teacher–student relations (microsystem) are discussed in connection with the educational systems (exosystem) and cultural and historical backgrounds (macrosystem) that encompass the school life of Finnish and Korean 15-year-olds.

**Figure 2.** QSL of Finnish and Korean adolescents (means of sum-scores, scale: 1–4, t -test).

Both Finnish and Korean adolescents' perceptions of their *general satisfaction* appeared to be less positive compared with the OECD average; nevertheless, partial differences were found between the two countries. More Finnish 15-year-olds viewed their general school satisfaction affirmatively, whereas fewer Korean students perceived themselves to be happy and satisfied at school. PISA 2012 reports also showed that Korean students' views of their school happiness and satisfaction were at the bottom level of the scale compared to other OECD countries (OECD 2013b, 20–21). This result could be at least partially explained by the educational systems and social conditions surrounding schooling in Korea, which have an effect on the general school satisfaction of students. According to 'Education at a Glance 2014' (OECD 2014b), Finnish and Korean lower secondary school students have a somewhat similar number of annual instruction hours at school (Finland: 901 instruction hours [187 days], Korea: 842 hours [190 days], OECD average: 905 hours [183 days]); however, the majority of Korean students also receive extra private lessons after normal school hours to supplement their learning or to help them excel in the major subjects of their school curriculum.⁴ The excessive amount of study hours and academic competition that Korean adolescents face are assumed to increase the level of the academic stress that they feel in and out of school. In spite of the relatively more positive views Finnish students have of their general satisfaction compared to their Korean counterparts, school satisfaction among Finnish students is low relative to that of their Nordic country peers. A similar result has also been found in several international and domestic studies (Kim 2015; Linnakylä and Malin 2008; Park et al. 2010; Pietarinen, Soini, and Pyhältö 2014). Although the common sociocultural traits of Scandinavian people such as unassertiveness and emotional reserve might have influenced their more cautious and critical assessment of school satisfaction items (Ollila 1998), the views of Finnish youths were less positive than those of their Scandinavian neighbours. These findings imply that general school satisfaction among Korean and Finnish students, who achieved superior results in international assessment, needs to be given more attention and studied using in-depth qualitative methods.

The educational welfare system is one factor that might be linked to QSL. The Finnish educational system is perceived and operated as part of a social welfare system for all citizens, especially in its nine-year comprehensive schooling. The Finnish system pays considerable attention to assisting students who have difficulties or special needs, thereby enhancing social integration regardless of pupils' socio-economic status. Tax funding takes care of not only tuition fees but also other secondary costs, such as school meals and transportation fees. Moreover, Finnish students can receive multiple forms of support to prevent an accumulation of learning difficulties and other problems in their school lives. The multiple forms of support consist of interventions in four stages, through general teachers, assistant teachers, special education teachers and a student support team composed of the school principal, school nurse, social worker and psychologist (Antikainen 2006; Jahnukainen 2011; Kang 2007; Kim 2011). In contrast, in spite of the fact that the Korean educational system also provides nine-year compulsory education that aims at equal and high-quality education for all pupils regardless of socio-economic status, Korean students from families of low socio-economic status are more likely to experience increasing degrees of inequality in terms of academic achievement and school life as they get older and enter the upper level of educational institutions (cf. Kim 2005). To put it simply, the Finnish and Korean educational welfare systems are

based on different political and socio-economic contexts: Korean majoritarianism and market-based selective welfare and Finnish proportional representation and democratic universal welfare⁵ (Jang and Jeong 2011, 34–38).

The different perceptions of school satisfaction can also be linked to the general cultural traits of the Finnish and Korean societies; nevertheless, enormous differences among individuals exist (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). It is noteworthy that Korean culture is relatively masculine, long-term oriented and restrained,⁶ meaning that members of society are encouraged to be persistent in work and to refrain from leisure to pursue future success. Finnish culture, on the other hand, places more emphasis on the balance between work and relaxation and individual needs and desires. Indeed, it seems that the cultural tendency towards indulgence or restraint is highly related to happiness and subjective well-being. Thus, it can be interpreted that adolescents from more indulgent societies such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland would be more likely to experience positive emotions than young people from more restrained societies such as Korea and Japan (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Table 5).

Furthermore, the differences between the general views of Finnish and Korean students concerning single items on *peer relations* were statistically significant. It is notable that Finnish and Nordic students were more likely to perceive their relations with their peers positively, whereas Korean and Japanese students had lower rates of positive perception. In the OECD's report on the results of PISA 2012, Korean students showed the lowest rate of positive perceptions in regard to making friends at school (OECD 2013b, 20). This could be related to differences in friendship formation between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In societies where individualism is prevalent, such as Finland, students tend to view their peers as individuals rather than group members. On the other hand, in societies such as Korea where collectivism is more dominant, students might perceive their peers as members of peer groups, which can be distinguished as either in-groups or out-groups. The comparatively clearer division of in-groups and out-groups in collectivistic cultures, where people are less tolerant to out-group members, may function as a barrier to students in terms of making friends or feeling that they are liked by their peers (Diener and Diener 2009; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Triandis 2001). Another issue could be the different perceptions of self and others in individualist and collectivist cultures. In individualistic cultures, young people tend to grow up to be idiocentric, prioritising independence and individuality, whereas in collectivist cultures, adolescents tend to become allocentric, that is, interdependent within their in-groups and socialised to do their duty as defined by the community (Diener and Diener 2009; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Triandis 2001). These cultural traits could be linked with the perceptions of difficulty in peer relations displayed by Korean adolescents. Especially in a collectivist society such as Korea, where academic ability is highly valued, the performance of a student's duty – in other words, good school achievement – may be a crucial and distinctive factor in receiving positive feedback and respect not only from adults (parents and teachers) but also from peers (Park and Huebner 2005, 452). However, severe academic competition culminating with university entrance may seriously hinder peer relations among Korean students. It means that Korean teenagers' lack of leisure time caused by an academic ability-oriented social atmosphere and long hours spent in private education hampers the density of their peer relations (Kim, Kim, and Min 2007).

Table 5. Institutional, sociocultural and historical factors assumed to be linked to the QSL of Finnish and Korean adolescents.

Dimensions of QSL	Factors assumed to be linked	Finland	Korea
General satisfaction	Amount of study hours of ninth graders (OECD 2014b; Statistics Korea 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 901 hours per year (187 days) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 842 hours (190 days) • A majority of students receive extra private lessons
	Educational welfare system (Iversen and Stephens 2008; Jang and Jeong 2011; Kim 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal welfare for all based on democracy • High degree of de-commodification • Tax-funded tuition and other secondary costs for all, child subsidies, remedial teaching and extensive special education, student support team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly implementing selective welfare based on market economy • Medium degree of de-commodification • Tax-funded tuition for entire nine-year compulsory period • Selective welfare on secondary costs targeting low-income groups
	General culture traits (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively feminine, short-term oriented and indulgent society • The balance between work and relaxation, individual needs and desire is valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively masculine, long-term oriented and restrained society • Members of society are encouraged to be persistent in work and refrain from leisure time in pursuit of future success
Peer relations	Friendship formation, perception on self and others (Diener and Diener 2009; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Park and Huebner 2005; Triandis 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may view other peers as individuals • Persons are grown up to be independent and their individuality is respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may view other peers as members who belong to peer groups, either in their in-groups or out-groups • Persons tend to be interdependent within their in-groups and socialised to perform their duties • Good school marks matter to be respected from peers
Teacher–student relations	Teacher and student identity given by the society (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010; Kim, Kim, and Min 2007; Simola 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers hold authority: they are highly qualified, society trusts their professionalism • Nurturing culture would be linked with T–S relations in individualist and collectivist societies (Triandis 2001) • Narrower power relations and stronger individualism, with slight differences from other Nordic countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time due to test and competition-oriented social context causes fewer close T–S relations • Wider power relations occur according to age and social position
	Schooling culture (Simola 2005; Sung 2009)	<p>Somewhat submissive role of pupils to teachers and schooling (Kupiainen, Hautamäki, and Karjalainen 2009; OECD 2013c)</p> <p>Collective mentality after civil war, late and rapid industrialisation, and expansion of mass schooling: value education as a cornerstone to develop society</p>	

Finally, the Finnish and Korean adolescents showed both similar and dissimilar responses regarding *teacher–student relations*. While statistical tests (Pearson’s chi-square, *z*-test) revealed statistically significant differences between the countries concerning the item ‘Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say’, this was not a case for the item ‘Most teachers are interested in students’ well-being.’ In addition, both Finnish and Korean sum-scores on teacher–student relations were far below the OECD average, with a gap of almost one point on the four-point scale. These results are in agreement with previous studies indicating that Finnish students have relatively few positive perceptions of friendliness in their relations with teachers (Linnakylä and Malin 2008; see also Carlgren et al. 2006; Simola 2005). It is interesting to note that the rather submissive role of pupils and the authoritative teacher image have been embedded in both countries’ schooling cultures.

Finland has somewhat authoritative teachers and school culture compared with other Nordic countries, which may be attributed to the fact that society members from elites to the general public generally respect and trust teachers. Finnish school teachers are highly qualified (completing a Master’s degree at university), and thus society legitimises and authorises their professional academic status and autonomy. In addition, many Finnish comprehensive school teachers appear to prefer pedagogical discipline, order and maintaining professional distance from their pupils, compared with their Nordic colleagues (Carlgren et al. 2006; Klette 2002; Simola 2005). As for Korea, Kim, Kim, and Min (2007) indicated that Korean students are less satisfied with teacher–student relations compared with American, German, Swedish and Japanese students. Test-driven education and excessive academic competition appear to be the main causes for worsening teacher–student relations in Korea. Since the direction of Korean education, and secondary education in particular, is geared to succeeding in the university entrance test, relations between teachers and students tend to be distant from an ethic that promote holistic human growth; both teachers and students lack the time and energy to feel friendliness owing to the teachers’ excessive administrative work and students’ extra hours of study after school (Kim, Kim, and Min 2007).

Moreover, it could be inferred that teacher–student relations have been shaped to some extent through societal culture, such as the degree of power distance.⁷ Finnish students, who belong to a society with a narrower power distance, are more likely to feel that their teachers and school system treat them as equal human beings than are Korean students, who are under social control in a system where a wider power distance exists based on age, social position, gender, etc. In addition, a nurturing culture would be linked with teacher–student relations. In fact, the meaning of nurturing is contained in the derivation of education in Finnish (*kasvatus*) and in Korean (*Gyo-yuk*, 교육). In individualist cultures, child-rearing emphasises independence, exploration, creativity and self-reliance. Contrastingly, in collectivist cultures, child-rearing focuses on conformity, obedience, security and reliability (Triandis 2001, 912). However, in spite of the clear cultural differences between the Finnish and Korean societies in terms of power distance and individualism–collectivism, Finland is marked by slightly wider power relations and stronger collectivism than other Scandinavian countries (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). This culture trait could be related to the somewhat different results of Finland in teacher–student relations compared to other Nordic countries.

In Finland and Korea, despite the difference of degree, it could be said that students' position has been supported by the idea of conformity to teachers and schooling. This culture seems to be borne out by the fact that Finland's rate of nonresponse for PISA items was low (Kupiainen, Hautamäki, and Karjalainen 2009), and Korea had a comparatively very low rate of students who reported that they arrived late for class or skipped classes or days at school (OECD 2013c, 188).

The above-mentioned role of teachers and students in the schooling culture and the emphasis on education of both societies is assumed to underlie the superior results of the model PISA pupils. It is assumed that a collective mentality might have influenced Korean and Finnish citizens to value education and academic ability as a cornerstone for restoring and developing their society in industrial and post-industrial directions. Historically, Korean people have maintained a collective and nationalistic mentality for coping with invasion and colonisation by neighbouring countries. Korea has also been a geopolitically strategic point straddled by the hegemony of China, Russia, Japan and the USA. Similarly, Finland is a border country between East and West that was ruled and influenced by the Russian empire until 1917, which had an eastern authoritarian flavour to it (Simola 2005). In addition, both countries have experienced collective traumas in modern history caused by tragic fratricidal wars involving ideological conflicts. This history may have given rise to several factors contributing to a collective mentality of common destiny (Simola 2005; Sung 2009). Furthermore, in both countries, industrialisation and urbanisation occurred relatively late though rapidly after the Second World War. Together with the rapid transition from an agricultural to an industrialised society, mass schooling also dramatically expanded. Thus, the entrance rate to primary, secondary and higher education has increased over the last five decades (Korean Ministry of Education 2011; Simola 2005). However, at the same time, these sociocultural and historical traits, which lead to appreciation of education as a cornerstone for social growth, are considered to hold both pros and cons in regard to QSL. The holistic development of adolescents could be optimised in circumstances in which young people experience a shift in the balance of power in teacher–student relations in their favour, and where they are able to be more autonomous in their learning and social and physical environments at school (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Conclusion

We set out to investigate Finnish and Korean students' views on QSL using data from relevant survey items from PISA 2012. According to both the descriptive analysis of single items and comparisons of means of sum-scores, Finnish and Korean adolescents' views on QSL were less positive compared to the views of adolescents in OECD countries, on average. However, a similar trend did not occur when the responses of adolescents from other Nordic and East Asian countries were examined. Since both Finnish and Korean adolescents' views on QSL differed from those of their Nordic and East Asian counterparts, distinct Nordic or East Asian profiles related to QSL could not be found in our study. Further, based on the descriptive analysis of single PISA items related to QSL, Finnish adolescents' views on QSL were more positive than the views of Korean adolescents in regard to all aspects of QSL. In five out of six items, the differences were statistically significant. A comparison of sum-score means confirmed this finding on GS and PR. In

the case of GS, this finding was not only statistically significant ($t = 10.5, p < .001$) but also had small to medium practical significance ($d = 0.23$). Concerning TS, the views of Korean adolescents were more positive, although the strength of the effect size of this difference was small ($d = 0.07$). Hence, Finnish adolescents' views on their QSL were more positive than those of Korean adolescents for GS and PR but not clearly related to TS.

Moreover, we sought to identify an implicit link between our findings and outside-school factors to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of QSL. First, it was assumed that each dimension of QSL was linked with diverse institutional, sociocultural and historical factors. Second, dissimilar but also similar backgrounds were assumed to underlie the QSL of Finnish and Korean adolescents in the comparisons. Finally, it was interpreted that both countries' schooling cultures had been influenced by a societal emphasis on education, which may be one reason for the superior PISA results – and though it is beneficial, it might also hinder factors for QSL.

This study has some limitations. Quantitative data were gained from standardised survey items across different cultures that likely do not fully elaborate on all aspects of QSL. Thus, Finnish and Korean adolescents' views and experiences of QSL are not likely to be fully reflected in this article. In particular, due to the age-based (15-year-olds) sampling methods of the PISA studies and the different academic year system between the two countries, we could not compare the perceptions of school life for participants in the same grade. We accept the possibility that the Korean adolescents' views on their QSL might have been less positive because the majority of Korean participants were exposed to a new school environment, having just entered high school at the time of the data collection of PISA 2012. Furthermore, peer relations and teacher–student relations, as crucial dimensions of QSL, were examined from inter-individual and psychological perspectives by utilising survey items asking about relations between individual students and teachers or between individual students and their peers. However, when considering the function of school as a social environment where social members convey and share various experiences and interests through a communal lifestyle (Dewey [1897] 1987b, 149–156), democratic relations that encompass the school ethos, students' autonomous and democratic participation in their learning and other aspects of school life should be investigated as a significant aspect of QSL (Lahelma 2002; Mager and Nowak 2012). Therefore, future studies could analyse qualitative data collected from comprehensive schools in the two countries.

It is expected that the prestige of the 'educational model to be benchmarked' will be determined by the superiority of educational paradigms between competitiveness and equality of education. One interesting point will be whether Finland will reclaim the top rankings in international assessments and how students' satisfaction with school will develop. The focus of attention should also be on whether East Asian countries maintain the position of 'tiger' as a counter-reference society, not only in the test league tables but also in terms of economic power, and how Western countries react to the superiority and the negative stereotypes of East Asian education (cf. OECD 2013a; Waldow, Takayama, and Sung 2014).

In modern education in many nations, including the USA, progressive and conservative educational reforms have resulted from discourses on internal crises and external policy borrowing (Lee 2001; Takayama 2008a). Consequently, QSL in each nation

would have been influenced by the direction of national educational reforms up to the present time. Notably, Finland will implement curricular reforms beginning in the academic year 2016, such as ‘collaborative learning atmospheres’, ‘promoting student autonomy in studying and in school life’ and ‘close-to-pupils’ real life, by implementing multidisciplinary, phenomenon- and project-based studies. This echoes the thoughts of John Dewey and other progressive educational theorists and reformers (see the direction of Finnish curricular reform from Halinen 2015; see also Dewey [1897] 1987a, [1897] 1987b, [1899] 2013). The direction of Finnish curricular reform is meaningful in the context of the decline in Finnish PISA results since 2006, which is in contrast with, for instance, Japanese curricular reform from student-oriented frameworks to a ‘back-to-basics’ framework after the PISA shock in 2003 (Takayama 2008b). Regarding QSL, it is crucial that policy makers implement political innovation and curricular reform regardless of the internal and external reference to the fluctuating PISA rankings. Since QSL is inseparable from citizens’ perceptions of schooling culture and overall quality of life, they should also understand the universality and uniqueness of their own culture and other cultures in regard to QSL rather than promoting a de-contextualised policy borrowed from elsewhere. Finally, emphasis should be placed on the need for educational authorities to strengthen or sustain educational welfare in spite of worldwide economic crises and educational restructuring.

Notes

1. PISA results have affected by way of ‘shock’ or ‘glorification’, such as the PISA shock discourses in Germany after PISA 2000, abolition of *yutori* (low pressure) reform in Japan after PISA 2003 and the endorsement of the equality-oriented comprehensive school model in Finland. However, owing to Finland’s diminishing success since PISA 2006, there has also been more criticism of its educational system.
2. Prior to analysis, the value scales of the single items presented in Table 4 were standardised so that the higher values always indicated a stronger agreement on the item in question.
3. Bronfenbrenner (1979) investigated human development in the context of ecology systems consisting of individuals, micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations of a developing person in a specific setting, such as a home or school, with particular physical and material characteristics. A mesosystem denotes the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates. An exosystem refers to settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by phenomena in the direct setting where the person lives. Finally, the macrosystem indicates consistencies of the lower-order systems that exist or could exist as belief systems or ideologies at the cultural level.
4. Private education refers to supplementary education that Korean students receive other than regular school curriculum after school hours. It includes lessons by private educational institutions (for-profit cram schools, *hagwon*), private tutoring, home-study materials and Internet-based lectures. As of 2013, 68.8% of Korean primary and secondary school students participated in private education and spent 6.9 (primary school students, including students who do not participate in private education) and 6.5 hours (lower secondary school students, including students who do not participate in private education) per week, respectively (Statistics Korea 2015).
5. Despite relatively market-based selective educational welfare in Korea compared to Finland, social concern for universal welfare has increased. For instance, welfare policies such as tax-

funded school meals at primary and secondary school levels have been gradually extended after provincial elections in 2009 (Jang and Jeong 2011).

6. According to the definitions of Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), masculine society emphasises success in competition (e.g. academic achievement), outcomes and superiority, whereas feminine society values the quality of life, modesty and caring of marginal groups. In a long-term oriented society, restraint is considered a virtue; on the other hand, leisure time is appreciated in a short-term-oriented and indulgent society.
7. Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 61).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Table A1. Principal component analysis, rotated component matrix (varimax with Kaiser normalisation).

	Component 1 General satisfaction	Component 2 Peer relations	Component 3 Teacher–student relations	h^2
I feel like I belong at school	.573	–.364	–.139	.481
I feel happy at school	.728	.279	–.184	.642
Things are ideal at my school	.776	.079	–.231	.661
I am satisfied with my school	.743	.097	–.309	.657
Other students seem to like me	.419	.534	–.045	.462
I make friends easily at school	.361	.604	–.004	.495
I don't feel like an outsider at school	.039	.862	–.063	.748
I don't feel awkward and out of place at my school	.187	.718	–.149	.573
I don't feel lonely at school	.088	.864	–.059	.758
Students get along well with most teachers	–.169	–.055	.670	.480
Most teachers are interested in students' well-being	–.147	–.028	.777	.626
Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say	–.183	–.056	.795	.668
If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers	–.121	–.108	.749	.587
Most of my teachers treat me fairly	–.157	–.078	.761	.609
<i>Eigenvalues</i>	1.163	2.350	4.934	
<i>% of variance</i>	8.31	16.78	35.25	
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>	.783	.815	.829	

Note: Figures in bold indicate the component to which the individual items were included.