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Kindness as an important element of social emotional education at school: translation and initial validation of the Polish version of the *School Kindness Scale* – a preliminary study

Życzliwość, jako istotny element edukacji społeczno-emocjonalnej na terenie szkoły: tłumaczenie i walidacja polskiej wersji szkolnej skali życzliwości (*School Kindness Scale*) – badania wstępne

Abstract

Introduction. The article highlights the need to shape students' socio-emotional skills and recognizes kindness as the foundation necessary to build these competencies. A questionnaire may be used to recognize the involvement of the school community in the formation of benevolent attitudes and produce the *School Kindness Scale* (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Aim. The main aim of the article is to present the results of preliminary research for the Polish adaptation and validation of the *School Kindness Scale* questionnaire.

Methods. The study was conducted in May 2021 on a sample of students (N=166 individuals, aged 14 to 21 years (mean age was M=17.260, SD=2.06) in the final grades of

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elementary and secondary schools. It was part of a larger research project carried out by the Department of Education of the City of Poznań. The data obtained were used to analyse the reliability of the Polish translation of the *School Kindness Scale*. The tool tested consists of 5 statements evaluated using the Likert scale. As part of the study on the reliability of the Scale, similar to analyses carried out in other countries, the mean scores obtained for each item were reviewed and Cronbach's Alpha analysis was conducted. A scree plot for the scale was also prepared.

Results. The value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient turned out to be $\alpha=0.792$, which should be considered as a result indicating the satisfactory reliability of the Polish version of the *School Kindness Scale*. Conducting more advanced statistical analyses requires collecting a larger research sample and comparing the results obtained from the *School Kindness Scale* with the results of other Polish language questionnaires testing constructs similar to kindness.

Keywords: kindness, social emotional learning (SEL), pro-social attitude, school, *School Kindness Scale*.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. W artykule zwrócono uwagę na potrzebę kształtowania kompetencji społeczno-emocjonalnych uczniów, traktując życzliwość jako fundament niezbędny do budowy owych umiejętności. Narzędziem służącym rozpoznaniu zaangażowania środowiska szkolnego w formowanie życzliwych postaw jest *Szkolna Skala Życzliwości* (Binfet, Gardemann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Cel. Zasadniczym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników wstępnych badań służących polskiej adaptacji i walidacji kwestionariusza *Szkolnej Skali Życzliwości*.

Materiały i metody. Badanie przeprowadzono w maju 2021, na próbie uczniów ostatnich klas szkół podstawowych oraz ponadpodstawowych (N=166 osób w wieku od 14 do 21 lat (średnia wieku M=17,260, SD=2,06). Stanowiło ono część większego projektu badawczego realizowanego przez Wydział Oświaty Miasta Poznania. Uzyskane dane posłużyły analizie rzetelności polskiego tłumaczenia *Szkolnej Skali Życzliwości* [School Kindness Scale]. Testowane narzędzie składa się z 5 twierdzeń ocenianych przy użyciu skali Likerta. W ramach badania rzetelności Skali, podobnie jak w przypadku analiz prowadzonych w innych krajach, sprawdzono średnie wyniki uzyskane dla poszczególnych itemów oraz przeprowadzono analizę metodą Alfa Cronbacha. Wykonano również wykres osypiska dla skali.

Wyniki. Uzyskana wartość współczynnika Alfa Cronbacha to $\alpha=0,792$, co należy uznać za wynik wskazujący na zadowalającą rzetelność polskiej wersji *Szkolnej Skali Życzliwości*. Przeprowadzenie bardziej zaawansowanych analiz statystycznych wymaga zgromadzenia większej próby badawczej oraz porównania wyników uzyskanych w ramach badania Szkolną Skali Życzliwości z wynikami innych polskojęzycznych kwestionariuszy testujących zbliżone do życzliwości konstrukty.

Słowa kluczowe: życzliwość, społeczno-emocjonalne uczenie się (SEL), postawa prospołeczna, szkoła, *Szkolna Skala Życzliwości*.

Introduction

The definition of kindness

Referring to the dictionary definition, the concept of kindness can be understood as benevolence and friendliness (Sobol, 2005). The phrase dictionary indicates that it is an unselfish, undying, true, cordial, sincere, mutual, and friendly attitude (Skorupka, 2002). On the other hand, the thesaurus gives as synonyms of kind such adjectives as “friendly, helpful, kindly disposed to someone, favourable, gracious, nice, positive, courteous, polite, cordial, warm” (Cienkowski, 1993, p. 363). Many of the interpretations point out as an essential defining element – a friendly disposition, a characteristic of someone who likes other people, wants the best for them and is ready to act in order to do good things for them (*Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego*, n. d.).

Aristotle, when approaching the issue of intellectual and ethical virtues, considered the term kindness in the category of wishing someone well and acting in a disinterested manner, both towards acquaintances and strangers (Barański, 2019). Similarly, Cicero placed great emphasis on the unselfishness of the kindness shown, but pointed out that this attitude should give rise to gratitude and reciprocation (in: Rykaczewski, 1879). In Christian thought, kindness appears in connection with mercy and is treated as a universal virtue (Barański, 2019). Kindness is also seen as one of the social virtues that is expressed in attitude, actions, and words, towards another human being or human community. A kind person alleviates suffering and contributes to the happiness of others. They inspire admiration not so much because of the deed, but because of their friendly attitude. They are able to rejoice in the happiness of others, and are alien to the satisfaction of someone else’s failure (Misiuna, 1995).

These selected definitional attempts indicated above show us the essential character of the concept in question. In humanities and social sciences, kindness is most often defined in two ways. Some authors define it as a character or personality trait, or a kind of attitude, which leads to a certain behaviour towards others (and according to some – also towards oneself). Others see it as a type of prosocial action, motivated by empathy and the ability to take the other person’s perspective (Layous et al., 2012; Layous et al., 2017; Nelson-Coffey et al., 2017).

In this paper, we will describe kindness as a form of pro-social attitude that can be manifested in selfless behaviour for the benefit of others, usually involving social exchanges closely related to everyday life and small expressions of care and goodwill, similarly as the authors of the *School Kindness Scale* (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Modelling kindness in school socio-educational interventions

Regardless of the interpretive perspective we adopt, we remain convinced that kindness can be shaped and enhanced. As a trait, it can be identified and developed, as a behaviour taught and promoted.

Undoubtedly, the school, along with the family, should be the environment that has a strong influence on modelling kind attitudes of children and young persons (Elias et al., 2000). Analysing the core curricula for each stage of education, it becomes noticeable that the concept of kindness, cooperation, and attitude towards others, based on acceptance and respect, has been included in them to a greater or lesser extent. In preschool and early school education, it is described in terms of general objectives in the content concerning the emotional and social spheres of the child (pupil) development. Also in thematic education, starting from the fourth grade of elementary school to the curricula for secondary schools we find these issues (directly or indirectly) (*Nowa podstawa programowa*, n.d.; Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2020). School is therefore an important space for the formation of pro-social behaviours which are underlined by kindness.

Kindness on school grounds can be taught by weaving it into elements of the school curriculum, but also by creating specific programs to shape certain skills (Kaplan et al., 2016). One such way is to implement the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and humanitarian education programs. In the current paper, we will focus on the latter type of activities, due to their more structured, directional, and “closed” format. This perspective is also dictated by the fact that the *School Kindness Scale* is a tool that was created in the context of research on the effectiveness of SEL programs (Binfet, Gademmann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Social and emotional learning evolved primarily from prevention and resilience research. It flourished in the mid-1990s during the great success of publications such as Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence and Gardner’s Multiple Personal Intelligences (Elias et al., 2000).

Kindness and Social Emotional Learning programs

Social and emotional learning (CASEL, n.d.) is the process by which children and adults acquire and effectively use knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. In all of these processes, kindness provides an important foundation upon which subsequent competencies are built. The five core competencies of SEL are as follows:

- self-awareness – identifying and recognizing one’s own emotions, recognizing strengths in oneself and others, feeling self-efficacy and self-confidence;

- self-regulation – impulse control, stress management, perseverance, goal setting, motivation;
- social awareness – empathy, respect for others, and ability to change perspective
- ability to establish and maintain relationships – cooperation, seeking and giving help, communication;
- responsible decision making – evaluation and reflection, personal and ethical responsibility.

Instruction in SEL should be implemented in the context of care, safety, good stewardship, and participation in the classroom, school, and other contexts, and the skills developed should be reinforced by the school, home, and community. As with typical school learning, students acquire knowledge and skills by engaging in activities inside and outside the classroom (Elias et al., 2000).

All children are potential beneficiaries here, including those already at risk, those beginning to exhibit unacceptable behaviours, and those already exhibiting problem behaviours (Elias et al., 2000). Most SEL programs, however, are used as forms of general health promotion and prevention, aimed at preventing behavioural problems by teaching social and emotional competence. SEL is a support system – a concept that organizes, coordinates, and integrates school-based promotion and prevention programs. The most effective forms of implementation involve students, teachers, parents, and community members as partners in the planning, application, and evaluation of SEL. Systematic social and emotional education should begin in kindergarten and continue through secondary school, and consequently should also be linked to higher education constituting an integral part of the school life as well as functioning outside of it (Elias et al., 2000).

Why use SEL programs? As research indicates, they have positive effects on the development of positive attitudes toward self and others, increase the level and range of pro-social behaviours, decrease the incidence of problem behaviour and emotional distress, and improve academic performance. SEL programs significantly and positively affect the level of functioning in socio-emotional variables, such as emotion recognition, stress management, empathy, problem solving, and decision-making skills (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, students who are more self-aware and confident in their own abilities try harder and are more persistent in the face of difficulties and challenges. Individuals who set ambitious performance goals are also more disciplined, self-motivated, better equipped to cope with stress, and organize their approach to studying so that they can learn more and obtain higher grades (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachanet, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). Also, students who use problem-solving skills to overcome difficulties and make responsible decisions about learning and homework have better outcomes. Research on

SEL also suggests that these programs may affect central cognitive executive functions, such as control by inhibition, planning, and set–shifting, which in turn may be the result of better regulation along the affect–cognition line in prefrontal cortical areas (Durlak et al., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Zhai et al., 2015). Scholars emphasize that interpersonal variables, instruction, and environmental support lead to better academic performance. This occurs through norms associated with high expectations and support for educational success, as well as a caring teacher–student relationship that builds engagement and attachment to the school. Approaches to teaching based on understanding, reciprocity, and collaboration, as well as proactive classroom management and cooperative learning and a safe and well-structured environment, encourage and reinforce positive classroom behaviour.

It is likely that the right combination of student socio-emotional competence variables, the atmosphere of the school environment, teacher practices, peer and student–teacher expectations and relationships contribute to rapid, desirable, and lasting change in student behaviour. Maurice J. Elias and colleagues (2000) also indicate that SEL competencies are taught most effectively in an environment that is caring, supportive, and well-managed. The development of autonomy, self-discipline, and ethics is more likely to occur when mutual respect, cooperation, caring, and self-determination are the environmental norm. In other words, a welcoming and friendly school atmosphere and positive interactions within the school community can have a direct bearing on educational success and the perpetuation of expected attitudes.

When considering the introduction of SEL programs, as well as when evaluating them, it is useful to see if, and at what level, the school is doing its job in the area of fostering kind attitudes. Do the resulting behaviours occur on school grounds? How often do they occur? And who is the perpetrator and who is the recipient? Such a diagnosis requires the use of a reliable tool. The *School Kindness Scale* is an example of a questionnaire examining subjective perceptions of the level of dissemination of friendly behaviours on school premises (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Method

Methods and objective of the described study

In the light of promising reports from studies in English-speaking and Turkish-speaking samples (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; Yurdabakan & Uz Baş, 2019), indicating good psychometric properties of the Scale, the decision was made to develop a Polish language version. The already existing translations in Chinese, Japanese, French, and Russian (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, n.d.;

Datu & Park, 2019; Panaghi et al., 2010; Yurdabakan & Uz Başı, 2019) point to the increasing dissemination of the Scale, making it a valuable tool not only for local research but also for cross-cultural comparisons.

Procedure of data collection for the Polish version of the *School Kindness Scale* was carried out as part of a broad survey of school students conducted by the City of Poznań Department of Education in Poznań schools. The study was conducted for the purposes of the project "The strategy of educational development of the city of Poznań 2030".

The study was carried out in two rounds, in February and in May 2021. It covered the last years of primary and secondary school students, excluding special schools. The research questionnaire and the Research Report were prepared by the Research Team of the Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (*Report from surveys of male and female students of Poznań schools within the project*, 2021).

The first round of the study involved 1,043 male and female students, 996 of whom completed valid questionnaires for the analysis. The second round of the study, which aimed to deepen, supplement, or verify the selected themes analysed in the first round of the study, involved 172 participants, mainly from secondary schools, of whom 166 completed valid questionnaires. At this stage of the study, the Polish adaptation of the *School Kindness Scale* questionnaire was used.

Throughout the study, a diagnostic survey was used, carried out by means of a CAWI questionnaire posted on the Internet. The questionnaire used in the study was prepared in two versions: a short version for male and female students of the eighth grade of elementary school and an extended version for male and female students of the second and fourth grades of secondary schools.

The survey was conducted by the Department of Education in cooperation with school principals. The survey was addressed to eighth-grade students and final-year students of secondary schools. It was anonymous and voluntary. The information about the survey and the request to disseminate it among the student community was sent via the internal messenger to all primary and secondary schools administered by the City of Poznań. After getting acquainted with the message, school principals decided whether to join the project.

For students with disabilities, a consent from the parent/legal guardian was required as a condition for participation in the study, which was accomplished through an e-register. Along with a description of the study objectives and the consent form, parents were also given a research survey form for review. Once the parent/guardian gave their consent, a link to the online survey for the student to complete was sent in the feedback.

Due to the fact that at the time of the second round of the study, the Polish version of the *School Kindness Scale* had not yet been validated, the results were used to

determine the reliability of the tool. In further analyses, data necessary for this process were used.

The main research question of our query was whether the Polish translation of the *School Kindness Scale* is reliable.

Participants

A total of 172 students participated in the study; however, due to missing data, results from 166 individuals, aged 14 to 21 years (mean age was $M=17.260$, $SD=2.06$), were further analysed. This number included 53 individuals identifying as male, 105 individuals identifying as female, and 8 individuals identifying differently in terms of their gender identity.

Most of the respondents attended schools offering the opportunity to pass the Matura exam (70.4% in total) and obtained a grade point average between 3.5 and 4.75 (55.4% of respondents) in the year prior to the survey year (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1
Type of school – descriptive statistics.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Type of school | | |
| Comprehensive secondary school | 58 | 34.9 |
| Vocational school | 7 | 4.2 |
| Primary school | 42 | 25.3 |
| Technical secondary school | 59 | 35.5 |
| Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Table 2
Average grade – descriptive statistics.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Average grade in the previous school year | | |
| from 3.5 to 4.74 | 92 | 55.4 |
| from 4.75 | 58 | 34.9 |
| below 3.5 | 16 | 9.6 |
| Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research

As far as parents/guardians of the surveyed students are concerned, the highest percentage of them had vocational education (25.9%), the least numerous were those with primary education (7.2%), and it should be noted that as many as 19.3% of the students did not know what education level their father/guardian had (Table 3).

Table 3

Father's/guardian's education level – descriptive statistics.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| Father's/ guardian's education | Bachelor or higher | 29 | 17.5 |
| | I don't know | 32 | 19.3 |
| | Primary school | 12 | 7.2 |
| | Secondary school | 37 | 22.3 |
| | Degree/Title | 13 | 7.8 |
| | Vocational school | 43 | 25.9 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

The distribution of education levels for mothers/caregivers indicated that they were more highly educated than male caregivers. Slightly more than 1/3 of them had secondary education (31.9%) and 27.1% had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Only 0.6% had completed their education at the elementary school level (Table 4).

Table 4

Mother's/guardian education – descriptive statistics.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| Mother's/ guardian's education | Bachelor or higher | 45 | 27.1 |
| | I don't know | 23 | 13.9 |
| | Primary school | 1 | 0.6 |
| | Secondary school | 53 | 31.9 |
| | Degree/Title | 15 | 9.0 |
| | Vocational school | 29 | 17.5 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Students participating in the study mostly resided in urban areas (51.2% in Poznań, and 23.5% in Wielkopolska, in cities other than Poznań; see Table 5).

Table 5

Place of residence – descriptive statistics.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Place of residence | A city other than Poznań | 39 | 23.5 |
| | Poznań | 85 | 51.2 |
| | Countryside | 42 | 25.3 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Only 2.4% of respondents were individuals with some form of disability and 4.8% were chronically ill (Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6

Participation of individuals with disability in the studied sample – descriptive statistics.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|
| A person with disability | No | 162 | 97.6 |
| | Yes | 4 | 2.4 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Table 7

Participation of chronically ill individuals in the studied sample – descriptive statistics.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|
| A chronically ill person | No | 158 | 95.2 |
| | Yes | 8 | 4.8 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Analyses comparing participants depending in their age, gender, parents' education, and domicile were performed. Due to lack of statistically significant findings these were not presented in the current paper.

The School Kindness Scale – the questionnaire

The *School Kindness Scale* consists of 5 items in the form of statements to which the individual responds on a 5-point scale ranging from: “Definitely yes; Rather yes; Hard to say; Rather not; to: Definitely not”. A full English-language version of the scale, along with the answer key, was developed and first described in 2016 (Binfet, Gaderman, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016) and is currently freely available for research use on the University of British Columbia website (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, n.d.) The Polish version used in the study was developed based on the original English version of the scale. Translation from English to Polish and translation from Polish to English in the “back– translation” procedure were performed by the authors of this publication. After introducing the necessary corrections, the questionnaire items obtained the current form used in the study:

- *Dorośli w mojej szkole pokazują mi jak być życzliwym* [The adults in my school model kindness];

- *Życzliwość często zdarza się w mojej klasie* [Kindness happens regularly in my classroom];
- *Życzliwość często zdarza się w mojej szkole* [Kindness happens regularly in my school];
- *Mój wychowawca/ moja wychowawczyni jest życzliwy/a* [My class teacher is kind];
- *W mojej szkole zachęca się mnie, żebym był/a życzliwy/a* [At my school, I am encouraged to be kind].

Results

Analysis of the survey responses

The analysis of responses to each test item indicates that there is a small percentage of students strongly indicating a lack of kindness in their school, classroom, or from their teachers. Only 3.6% of students reported that adults in their school do not model kindness, and 3% strongly disagreed with the statement that their class teacher is a kind person. For responses to all statements, the rate indicating: “hard to say” was relatively high, and in all but one item, it was about 30% (the exception was “My class teacher is kind”, here only 10.8% of students had no opinion).

The percentage of “Definitely yes” responses is also relatively low for most statements. Only 9% of students declared that adults in their school model kindness, and only 4.2% believed that the statement that kindness happens regularly in their school is definitely true. Although the quoted statistics paint a rather disturbing picture of the emotional climate at school, it is important to note that in the case of the relationship with the class teacher, a significant percentage of students evaluated it positively (as many as 51.2% of students responded “Definitely yes” to the statement “My class teacher is kind”, and another 31.3% believed that this statement is rather true). Also overall, more than half of the students (57.8%) said that they are encouraged to be kind in their school. The distribution of responses to each item of the scale is shown in Tables 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

Table 8
Distribution of the responses to item 1.

| | Frequency | Percent | |
|--|----------------|---------|------|
| Adults in my school model kindness. | definitely yes | 15 | 9.0 |
| | rather yes | 69 | 41.6 |
| | hard to say | 47 | 28.3 |
| | rather not | 29 | 17.5 |
| | definitely not | 6 | 3.6 |
| Total | 166 | 100.0 | |

Source: Own research.

Table 9
Distribution of the responses to item 2.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|--|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Kindness happens regularly in my classroom. | definitely yes | 22 | 13.3 |
| | rather yes | 70 | 42.2 |
| | hard to say | 44 | 26.5 |
| | rather not | 19 | 11.4 |
| | definitely not | 11 | 6.6 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Table 10
Distribution of responses to item 3.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Kindness happens regularly in my school. | definitely yes | 7 | 4.2 |
| | rather yes | 78 | 47.0 |
| | hard to say | 52 | 31.3 |
| | rather not | 23 | 13.9 |
| | definitely not | 6 | 3.6 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Table 11
Distribution of responses to item 4.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------|
| My class teacher is kind. | definitely yes | 85 | 51.2 |
| | rather yes | 52 | 31.3 |
| | hard to say | 18 | 10.8 |
| | rather not | 6 | 3.6 |
| | definitely not | 5 | 3.0 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Table 12
Distribution of responses to item 5.

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|--|----------------|-----------|---------|
| In my school, I am encouraged to be kind. | definitely yes | 39 | 23.5 |
| | rather yes | 57 | 34.3 |
| | hard to say | 48 | 28.9 |
| | rather not | 13 | 7.8 |
| | definitely not | 9 | 5.4 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 |

Source: Own research.

Reliability analysis

In testing the reliability of the *School Kindness Scale*, the mean scores obtained for each item were checked and Cronbach's Alpha analysis was conducted. A scree plot for the scale was also drawn up.

The mean for the Scale was $M=18.00$ ($SD=3.734$; Table 13).

Table 13

Descriptive statistics for the School Kindness Scale.

| Scale statistics | Mean | Variance | Standard deviation | Number of items |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | 18.00 | 13.939 | 3.734 | 5 |

Source: Own research.

The highest mean scores were obtained for statement four, i.e., "My class teacher is kind" ($M=4.24$; $SD=0.992$), the lowest for the statement: "Kindness happens regularly in my school" ($M=3.34$; $SD=0.899$). Details are shown in Table 14.

Table 14

Statistics of the test items on the School Kindness Scale.

| Statistics of the test items | Mean | Standard deviation | N |
|---|------|--------------------|-----|
| Adults in my school model kindness. | 3.35 | 0.990 | 166 |
| Kindness happens regularly in my class. | 3.44 | 1.070 | 166 |
| Kindness happens regularly in my school. | 3.34 | 0.899 | 166 |
| My class teacher is kind. | 4.24 | 0.992 | 166 |
| In my school, I am encouraged to be kind. | 3.63 | 1.092 | 166 |

Source: Own research.

The coefficient value was Cronbach's alpha $\alpha=0.792$, which should be considered as a result indicating satisfactory reliability of the *School Kindness Scale* (Table 15).

Table 15

Cronbach's alpha statistic for the School Kindness Scale.

| Cronbach's alpha | Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items | Number of items |
|------------------|--|-----------------|
| 0.792 | 0.795 | 5 |

Source: Own research.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient values were also checked after removing individual items, the results indicated that the level of reliability remained similar even after reducing the number of statements (the coefficient value still remained above $\alpha=0.7$; see Table 16 for details).

Table 16

Cronbach's alpha statistics after removing items for the School Kindness Scale.

| Items statistics total | Mean of the scale after items removal | Variance of the scale after items removal | Item correlation total | Square of the multiple correlation | Cronbach's alpha after item removal |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Adults in my school model kindness. | 14.65 | 8.907 | 0.686 | 0.561 | 0.715 |
| Kindness happens regularly in my class. | 14.56 | 9.678 | 0.468 | 0.322 | 0.787 |
| Kindness happens regularly in my school. | 14.66 | 9.451 | 0.666 | 0.556 | 0.726 |
| My class teacher is kind. | 13.76 | 10.160 | 0.442 | 0.245 | 0.792 |
| In my school, I am encouraged to be kind. | 14.37 | 8.732 | 0.622 | 0.425 | 0.735 |

Source: Own research.

As part of the factor analysis, a scree plot was drawn (*cf.* Figure 1) and the component matrix was checked. Based on the results, one factor was extracted, accounting for 55.65% of the variance (*cf.* Table 17). The component matrix contains high values between 0.609 and 0.840. (The details are shown in Table 18).

Table 17

School Kindness Scale - total explained variance.

| Component | Initial eigenvalues | | | Sums of squares of charges after extraction | | |
|-----------|---------------------|------------|--------------|---|------------|--------------|
| | Total | % variance | % cumulative | Total | % variance | % cumulative |
| 1 | 2.783 | 55.654 | 55.654 | 2.783 | 55.654 | 55.654 |
| 2 | 0.879 | 17.581 | 73.235 | | | |
| 3 | 0.618 | 12.357 | 85.593 | | | |
| 4 | 0.453 | 9.062 | 94.655 | | | |
| 5 | 0.267 | 5.345 | 100.000 | | | |

Source: Own research.

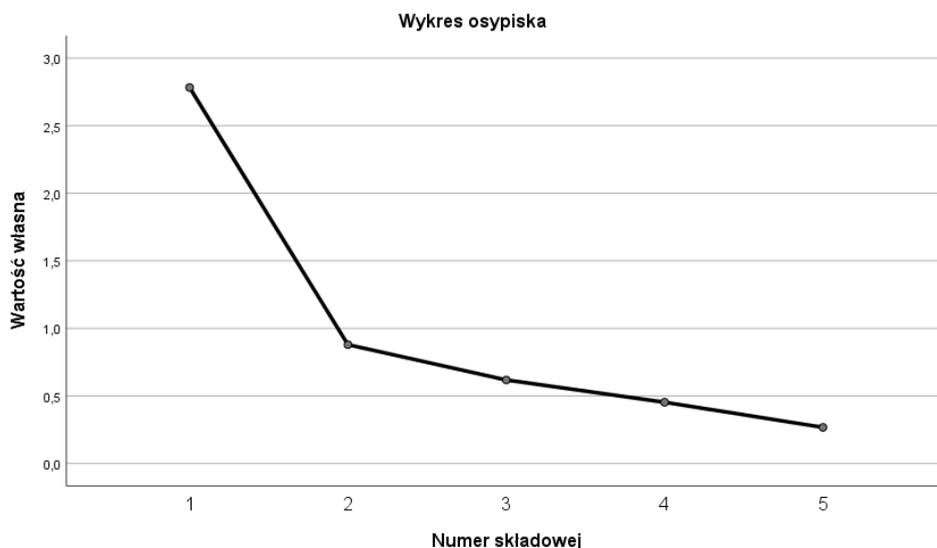


Figure 1. Scree plot for the *School Kindness Scale*. Source: Own research.

Table 18

The matrix of components of the School Kindness Scale.

| Matrix of components | Component 1 |
|---|--------------------|
| Adults in my school model kindness. | 0.840 |
| Kindness happens regularly in my class. | 0.652 |
| Kindness happens regularly in my school. | 0.819 |
| My class teacher is kind. | 0.609 |
| In my school, I am encouraged to be kind. | 0.781 |

Source: Own research.

Discussion

The Polish version of the *School Kindness Scale* in a preliminary study obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of $\alpha=0.792$, which should be considered as a result indicating satisfactory reliability.

The average score in the Scale for the entire surveyed sample was $M=18$ ($SD=3.734$) out of 25: Particularly interesting is the result of the frequency analysis of answers to particular test statements, indicating that more than half of the students strongly agree that their class teacher is a kind person, and if we add those who answered that this statement is "rather" true, it paints a very optimistic picture of the

class teacher, where nearly 80% of the students perceive him/her as a kind person. We can conclude that such high scores should facilitate modelling and consolidating benevolent attitudes in the alumni. However, when analysing the remaining test items, the picture was not so optimistic.

A significant result was obtained from the indications suggesting a lack of firmness in the opinion regarding the level of kindness in the school, and the frequency of its manifestation, by both other students and the school staff (a high percentage of “Hard to say” responses). This raises the question of what is the reason for the differences in the levels of evaluation of kindness experienced from the class teacher and other adults at school. In response to the statement “Adults in my school model kindness”, nearly 30% of students stated that “It’s hard to say”. At the same time, it should be noted that responses to this question accounted for more than 50% of the variance in the results within the sample. This shows how important the attitudes of adult school staff are in evaluating the level of kindness, and more broadly, the socio-emotional climate of the school, as perceived by students. Differences in assessing the attitudes of class teachers and other adults may be related to the special role of the class teacher. After all, it is the teacher who spends most time with the students, has often known them for years and is in close contact not only with the young people themselves, but also with their families. A closer relationship, deeper familiarity, and greater understanding of students’ situations may make it easier, not only for teachers to demonstrate kindness, but also for students to notice it.

Responses suggesting that kindness from peers is something students encounter less frequently – only 4.2% of students strongly agree that kindness happens regularly in their school, and 13.3% that it occurs in their classroom – coupled with a significant, about 30%, number of “Hard to say” responses, seems to suggest that there is room for improvement in the context of socio-emotional education with school children. If, as indicated earlier, the school climate and encountering a friendly attitude from others has a direct influence on educational success, then raising the level of pupils’ well-being is an activity not only in the area of mental (ill)health prevention, but also of raising the level of educational results.

To sum up, according to the analysis, there is a predominant conviction among male and female students that school is a space in which adults can model kind attitudes. This view was expressed by 84 respondents, which constitutes 50.6% of the entire subject group. The evaluation regarding kindness in the classroom is also optimistic, as many as 55.5% of the respondents (N=92) believe that kindness can be observed in the daily life of their classroom. Kindness as a frequent element of the whole school reality is perceived by 85 respondents, this is the opinion of 51.2% of the subject group. Students also positively rated their class teachers. 137 students indicated their friendliness, which constitutes 82.5% of all responses. The results in terms

of attitude formation were also extremely promising, as many as 96 (57.8%) male and female students declared that being kind is encouraged in their schools. Basically, it may be assumed that as regards the diagnosed variables, in the respondents' schools, the climate and atmosphere shared by the whole school community is favourable and conducive to the development of mutual kindness.

However, it should be remembered that there is a group of study subjects who evaluated the school environment in a critical way. As regards statement one, it was 35 respondents (21.1%), as regards statement two, 30 respondents (18%), as regards statement three, 29 respondents (17.5%), as regards statement four, 11 respondents (6.6%), and as regards statement five, 22 respondents (13.2%).

At the same time, it should be noted that some students find it difficult to evaluate the phenomenon of friendliness in their own school, choosing the option "hard to say", indicating neither positive nor negative attitudes. "Sticking to the middle of the scale" can be interpreted in many ways. On the one hand, it may be the result of a lack of motivation to fill out the questionnaire, but it may also stem from an inability to interpret phenomena, make judgments and decisions, or it could be a manifestation of ignorance of key emotional and social competencies, the foundation of which is constituted by kindness, concern, and sensitivity to others.

The revealed positive image of school as a space that models and fosters kind, pro-social attitudes allows us to look into the future with optimism. At the same time, the revealed deficits direct us at paying more attention to the necessity of more systematic and conscious shaping of social and emotional competences of both teachers and students. The above-mentioned SEL programs can serve the acquisition of these abilities. They are based on a process through which children and adults develop the attitudes and skills necessary to understand other people, deal with emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make accurate and responsible decisions. In addition to the effects of better, more frequent, and deeper social relationships, these programs serve to increase self-awareness and control, and research shows that greater resources in the area of social and emotional competence translate into better educational outcomes.

Tools such as the *School Kindness Scale*, i.e., simple, understandable, and short, make it possible to quickly obtain information about the emotional climate in the school and to assess the effectiveness of the process of shaping pro-social attitudes.

The scale has been translated into a number of languages and features in scientific publications from various research centres around the world, which makes it a valuable tool not only for local research but also for cross-cultural comparisons.

The limitation of the presented study is the relatively small sample size. A methodologically correct assessment of accuracy by age group and taking into account other demographic variables would require a sample size of several hundred respondents.

Increasing the number of observations would also make it possible to apply a wider range of methods of statistical and psychometric evaluation of the questionnaire, the analysis of which exceeds the framework of this study. Additionally, comparing the results of the Scale with the results obtained with the help of other tools examining similar constructs would also help to examine its accuracy, which is a necessary procedure for full validation of the *School Kindness Scale*. However, the presented study is preliminary in nature and work on the Scale and its use will continue, which will allow for better understanding of its psychometric properties.

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