

The Effects of the 6 February Kahramanmaras Earthquakes on Secondary Education in the Earthquake-Affected Region: The Case of Kahramanmaras Province

Hüsne Mehtap Süt¹

[Fatih Anatolian High School]

[nazlisut@gmail.com/

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4138-6934>]

ABSTRACT

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The earthquake that occurred in Kahramanmaras on 6th February 2023 had an impact on the physical, social, psychological and educational aspects of many lives across Türkiye. The purpose of the study is to analyse the problems of secondary education institutions in the city of Kahramanmaras, analyse the role of earthquakes which have negative consequences in education and discuss the problems encountered by students, teachers and school administrators. A quantitative design was used and data were gathered by using structured questionnaires to students in secondary schools who are directly affected by the disaster. The SPSS 22.0 was used to analyse data of the survey with the aid of frequency distribution, t test, analysis of variance and reliability analysis. Results indicate 90% of students felt unsafe in school, 68% felt there were a lack of educational resources and 65% experienced trauma, anxiety or stress. Shelter, nutrition, safety, psychosocial exhaustion, uncertainty about the future, lack of educational facilities, decreased motivation, lack of resources and access to distance education were some of the key issues. The results also identify mental health, physical health, goal setting, resilience, coping and emotional competence issues. Therefore, educational continuity during major disaster necessitates disaster education for the community, equitable digital provision, systematic preparation of education personnel to maintain the teaching during disaster and accessible psychosocial support, as well as safe infrastructure. The study is carried out on Kahramanmaras Province.

Keywords: earthquake, secondary education, educational continuity, student well-being, Kahramanmaras

1. Introduction

Usually, an earthquake is a natural phenomenon resulting from the release of energy from a rock

in the Earth's crust. The energy is liberated in this way causing the shaking and vibrations, which is the earthquake (Ozdoğan, 1993).

Earthquakes felt at the Earth's surface are along the fractures below the surface referred to as faults. They are measured on the Richter scale or the moment magnitude scale or other scales. High magnitude earthquakes have destructive effects and can threaten all living beings, cities and settlements depending on the country, its level of development or progress. Other natural hazards can also be caused by earthquakes, such as landslides and a tsunami. It is crucial to be ready for earthquakes and take preventive and harm-reduction steps to deal with natural disasters. One of the natural disasters often experienced in Türkiye and all over the world is earthquakes.

These three major earthquakes which are centered in Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023, was one of the biggest disasters in the history of the Republic of Türkiye (Duruel, 2023). They spread destruction in 11 provinces, including Kahramanmaraş, leaving thousands of people dead and millions of people homeless and to other regions (Erdoğan, 2023). The earthquake also had a destructive effect on social, economic and psychological life, buildings and structures. Although the effects of the disaster were felt throughout society, they placed particularly significant pressure on the education system and students (Giyik, 2024).

1.1. Aim and Significance of the Study

This study examined the educational problems encountered by secondary school students under the Ministry of National Education following the Kahramanmaraş-centred earthquakes of 6 February 2023. The limited number of studies addressing the problems experienced by secondary school students, together with Türkiye's high exposure to such risks, motivated the selection of this topic. The study aims to determine how earthquakes and similar natural disasters affect education and to identify methods through which these effects can be addressed. More specifically, it investigates disruptions in secondary education institutions in Kahramanmaraş, their effects on students,

and potential contributions towards resolving these problems.

1.2. Research Problem

Earthquakes cause large-scale interruptions and problems within education systems. Following the earthquakes of 6 February 2023 in Kahramanmaraş Province, physical damage to secondary education institutions, disruption to teaching and learning, students' disengagement from education, and psychosocial problems constituted the study's principal concerns. The research problem therefore centres on understanding and identifying the effects of this major disaster on secondary education institutions in Kahramanmaraş, analysing their implications for the education system, and helping to make that system more resilient to possible future disasters.

'What problems do secondary school students experience in their education after an earthquake, what forms of support do they need to address these problems, and what are their attitudes and expectations concerning their educational processes?'

1.3. Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study covers the effects of the 6 February Kahramanmaraş-centred earthquakes on secondary education institutions in Kahramanmaraş Province. It focuses exclusively on Kahramanmaraş; other earthquake-affected provinces fall outside its scope. Its limitations include time constraints during data collection, post-disaster transport and communication difficulties in the region, and the possible influence of participants' psychological conditions on the data-collection process.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

1.4.1. The Concept of Disaster and the Distinction Between Disaster and Catastrophe

Earthquakes are exceptional events that possess all the characteristics of disasters while also carrying the risk of catastrophic consequences. The destruction they cause in essential areas such as housing, health, and education may lead

to prolonged disruption of social order (Tercan, 2019). The following section therefore examines their effects on education in detail.

1.4.2. Effects of Earthquakes on Education

The multidimensional consequences of earthquakes—including destroyed schools, systemic disruption, interrupted learning, and adverse psychological effects on education stakeholders—seriously threaten educational continuity. These consequences include physical, structural, pedagogical, and psychological effects, as well as barriers to educational access (Ozgölet & Utkucu, 2021).

Such losses to educational infrastructure in earthquake-affected regions eliminate the physical safety of learning environments and weaken students' motivation to participate in education (Ozel, 2015).

This situation may cause educational losses to become permanent, particularly among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (Alkın, 2021).

1.4.3. Resilience of Türkiye's Education System to Earthquakes

The resilience of the education system to earthquakes should not be assessed solely in terms of physical structures. It should also encompass the preparedness of administrators, teachers, officers, auxiliary staff, and other personnel; education in disaster and crisis management; coordination during crises; psychosocial support services; and the capacity to develop long-term policies (Yılmaz, 2014). Educational resilience to disasters should be supported not only by information-based approaches but also by strategies focused on behavioural development (Akcil et al., 2016). More broadly, curriculum-reform evidence indicates that teacher-capacity development, digital readiness, equitable infrastructure and quality-assurance mechanisms are important for scalable educational reform (Bhatti & Iqbal, 2026).

Since 2020, the post-disaster response plans of the Ministry of National Education have come

under the spotlight under the 'Ministry of National Education Disaster and Emergency Management Plan'. These plans include school evacuation procedures, assembly location planning, and communicating with students and parents, but there are still significant implementation gaps in practice (Abay et al., 2023). This shows that there is no flexible and resilient structure in the education system in case of disasters (Dikmenli & Yakar, 2019).

Especially in a country where it is impossible to live without earthquakes, restructuring the education system in line with the reality is not an option but a necessity (Avcı, 2019).

With the earthquakes that occurred in Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023, the issue of disaster preparedness in the education system in Türkiye was put back on the agenda. The earthquakes directly impacted 11 provinces and seriously damaged 11,699 schools and preschools, resulting in 95 destruction, 504 severe damage and 331 moderate damage (Education and Science Workers' Union, 2023). 3.7 million students did not report to school (MEB, 2024) in the 11 provinces.

1.4.4. Effects of the Kahramanmaraş-Centred Earthquakes

The Kahramanmaraş earthquakes caused extensive destruction and had profound social, economic, and educational effects. Damage to physical infrastructure interrupted teaching and learning while creating serious difficulties in people's living conditions.

Social and Economic Effects

Physical damage to agricultural land caused crop losses and made it difficult for farmers to continue their production activities (Artantas & Gursoy, 2024).

In the industrial sector, modernisation projects and infrastructure investments aimed to increase production capacity and reactivate the region's economic potential (Firat, 2022).

Educational Infrastructure and Recovery Efforts

Furthermore, because some schools had insufficient classroom capacity, students had to be transferred to other schools, which adversely affected their psychosocial adjustment (Değerliyurt, 2023).

In this context, establishing temporary education centres and promoting distance education through technological infrastructure were among the most important measures adopted (Karacaoglu et al., 2024).

Challenges Faced by Secondary Education Institutions

Another important challenge in the educational process was the increase in absenteeism and the resulting difficulties in maintaining school attendance (Asik, 2021).

Expanding online education platforms and technological solutions should be regarded as an effective means of supporting educational processes under such circumstances (Değerliyurt, 2023).

1.4.5. Effects of Earthquakes Specific to Secondary Education

Although earthquakes affect an entire country, they have particular and profound effects on learning in secondary education institutions. These effects include disruption to academic achievement, difficulties maintaining educational continuity, and challenges in students' and teachers' adjustment to daily life. Because secondary education is a critical period in which students' academic achievement is shaped and they prepare for examinations such as the Higher Education Institutions Examination, the effects of earthquakes may have long-term consequences for their futures.

Effects on Academic Processes

In Adıyaman, many students, together with their classmates and teachers, lost their motivation to learn and experienced declines in academic achievement (Genc et al., 2023).

Professional support programmes should also be implemented to enhance teachers' motivation and ensure their active participation in lessons (Karacaoglu et al., 2024).

Transported Education and Distance-Education Solutions

This situation increased educational inequalities and widened the achievement gap between students (Bozgedik et al., 2024).

It is also important to provide the necessary training and develop support mechanisms so that teachers can play an effective role in both approaches (Sen, 2023).

Effects on Student and Teacher Motivation

Resolving problems encountered in educational processes will help students and teachers feel more valued, which will positively affect their motivation (Bilen & Polat, 2022).

1.4.6. Psychosocial Support and Rehabilitation

Earthquakes leave deep wounds in people's lives and comprehensively affect the education system. In this process a number of psychological, social and economic difficulties are experienced by students and teachers. Therefore the psychosocial support and rehabilitation in post-earthquake education is crucial. The need to help students and teachers reengage with education is essential not only to reestablish the normal functioning of the education system, but also in enabling individuals to heal from trauma (Caliskan & Kaya, 2021).

Psychological Support and Educational Readjustment for Students

Teachers need to be active and enthusiastic in engaging with students, to be sensitive to their developmental needs, to understand their needs and to ensure that this support is provided. Dialogue among teachers, students and parents can also help in the process. This support supports students' academic performance and enhances their emotional coping mechanisms (Aka, 2023).

Teachers' Psychological Condition and Roles

Supportive work environment helps teachers to be more involved in educational processes (Demirtas et al., 2023). The practical preparation, professional skills, resources, and institutional support mechanisms for teachers are strengthened (Alabay, 2026). Evidence from higher education similarly indicates that employee engagement and supportive human-capital practices are associated with teaching-service quality (Alsetri et al., 2026). Specialised training may be more effective when educational personnel also experience motivation and job satisfaction (Ullah & Asghar, 2024).

Effects on Rehabilitation Processes

Comprehensive solutions addressing the needs of students and teachers should be developed through cooperation among parents, local authorities, and non-governmental organisations (Tascı & Ozsoy, 2021).

1.4.7. Distance Education and the Use of Technology

From a technological perspective, distance education, tablets, and online preparation support have secured a permanent place within crisis-management strategies by maintaining educational continuity and enabling students to access information.

Distance-Education Practices in Earthquake-Affected Regions

Effective implementation of distance education requires improved technological infrastructure and equal access for all students (Turkeli et al., 2023). Digital inclusion depends not only on access to devices and internet infrastructure but also on digital literacy, socioeconomic position, and users' ability to engage effectively with digital resources (Maharjan, 2026). Patterns of internet use may also vary according to students' sociodemographic circumstances, with implications for access and participation in technology-supported education (Talaue et al., 2025).

In Kahramanmaraş, such investments would not only support educational sustainability but also strengthen social resilience and contribute to an education system better prepared for possible future earthquakes (Aydın & Aytac, 2023).

Digital Transformation and Technology Use During Earthquakes

Training and guidance programmes were organised to improve digital skills and overcome these challenges. Teachers were supported in preparing online lesson plans, interacting with students, and using digital learning tools (Telli & Altun, 2023).

Contribution of Distance Education to Educational Continuity

In the long term, expanding internet access, making technological devices available to a wider population, and improving digital skills will facilitate more effective implementation of the distance-education model (Avdar & Avdar, 2022).

1.4.8. Post-Earthquake Education Management

Cooperation among relevant stakeholders enables solutions such as distance education, transport services, and strengthened technological infrastructure to be implemented more comprehensively (Filiz et al., 2023).

1.4.9. Educational Infrastructure and Recovery Processes

The measures adopted to ensure the sustainability of the education system aimed to restore the effective provision of educational services in the region (Cengiz & Peker, 2023).

At the same time, planning reconstructed school buildings to meet the needs of students and teachers improves the quality of the educational environment (Karabacak, 2023).

1.4.10. Previous Studies

Among earlier studies on this subject, Alparslan et al. (1999) investigated the effects of the 1999 Marmara earthquake among 1,118 people in the Golyaka district of Bolu Province. Children were included in the research. The results identified

rates of 84% for stress disorder and 20% for sleep disorder, as well as the presence of depression.

A metaphor form developed by the researcher was used as the data-collection instrument, and students were asked to express their thoughts concerning the concepts of earthquakes and floods through metaphors. Content analysis of the data identified 152 different metaphors for earthquakes and 124 for floods. Earthquake metaphors were classified into categories involving shaking, death, cutting or piercing, fracture, destruction, natural disaster, means of transport, and anomaly. Flood metaphors were classified into nine categories: containing water, death, natural resources, natural disaster, time, course material, play, vehicles, and difference. By exploring students' perceptions of disaster concepts, identifying misconceptions, and emphasising the importance of social studies in developing disaster awareness, the study contributes to the disaster-education literature.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Procedure

The purpose of this study is to explore the impacts of the 6 February 2023 earthquakes which occurred in the central area of Kahramanmaraş on second school students in Kahramanmaraş Province. It was a quantitative research method and complemented with literature review. In detail, the physical, psychological and social impacts on secondary schools affected by the earthquake in Kahramanmaraş were analyzed. During data collection, students were interviewed individually and the results were analysed together with the data from the questionnaires.

2.2. Population and Sample

This study was conducted in secondary education institutions that have been impacted by the earthquakes that occurred in Kahramanmaraş Province on 6 February 2023. It encompassed schools which suffered physical damage and disruption to their educational processes. Participants were selected by simple

random sampling from a sample that was initially selected using purposive sampling. There were 417 students, comprising 264 girls and 153 boys.

2.3. Data-Collection Instruments

A questionnaire designed specifically to evaluate the psychological and academic status of students after the earthquake was used to collect data. It was based on five-point Likert-type items ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Damage assessment reports on school infrastructure and education materials were also used as well as statistical data provided by local education directorates.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data obtained were analysed quantitatively. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyse the quantitative data. The responses to the questionnaire were subjected to descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to compare the differences in responses between student groups. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normality of data, when normality was not assumed, non-parametric methods (Mann-Whitney U test) were applied. The results were tabulated and graphed for presentation and interpretation.

3. Results

Data collected from the study was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0). The impact of 6 February earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş Province on secondary school students in the affected area was analysed through some variables. Frequency and descriptive analyses (number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were conducted for students' demographic characteristics and the scale measuring the earthquakes' effects.

Before analysing the data, variance homogeneity and the normality of the scale data were tested to determine which statistical tests should be used. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was conducted, and histograms were examined.

Because interpreting the data solely on the basis of the normality test could be incomplete, the mean, variance, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and detrended Q-Q plot values were also evaluated to determine the appropriate analytical technique. The dataset was examined for outliers before the tests were conducted. A normality test was applied to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution, and skewness and kurtosis values were examined. As the data were normally distributed, the analysis

proceeded using the parametric t-test and ANOVA.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

This section presents statistical results obtained from frequency analysis, t-tests, and ANOVA to examine the views of participating secondary school students in Kahramanmaraş Province regarding the scale on the effects of the 6 February Kahramanmaraş earthquakes and the relationships among selected questionnaire statements.

Table 1. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	309	61.9
Male	188	38.1
Total	500	100.0

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the participating secondary school students. Of the participants, 61.9% were girls and 38.1% were boys. These figures indicate that most participants were girls.

Table 2. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
14 years	16	6.9
15 years	103	44.6
16 years	84	36.4
17 years	28	12.1
Total	417	100.0

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of participating secondary school students by age. It indicates that 16% were aged 14, 6.9% were aged 15, 44.6% were aged 16, and 36.4% were aged 17. According to these figures, most secondary school students were aged 17.

Table 3. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by School Type

School Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Anatolian High School	113	22.6
Science High School	216	43.2

School Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total	329	100.0

Table 3 presents the distribution of participating secondary school students by school type. The statistics indicate that 22.6% attended an Anatolian High School and 43.2% attended an Imam Hatip High School. According to these figures, Anatolian High School students constituted the majority of the sample.

Table 4. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by Field of Study

Field of Study	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Verbal	38	7.6
Quantitative	155	31
Equally Weighted	222	44.4
Language	82	16.4
Total	417	100.0

Table 4 presents the distribution of participating secondary school students by field of study. Of the students, 7.6% studied verbal subjects, 31% studied quantitative subjects, 44.4% followed the equally weighted track, and 16.4% studied languages. According to these figures, most participants studied quantitative subjects.

Table 5. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by Grade Level

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grade 9	69	13.8
Grade 10	367	73.4
Grade 11	60	12
Grade 12	2	0.4
Total	498	100.0

Table 5 presents the distribution of participating secondary school students by grade level. Of the students, 13.8% were in Grade 9, 73.43% were in Grade 10, 12% were in Grade 11, and 2% were in Grade 12. According to these figures, most students were in Grade 12.

Table 6. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by Whether They Were Directly Affected by the Earthquakes

Directly Affected by the Earthquakes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	292	58.4

Directly Affected by the Earthquakes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	205	88.7
Total	497	100.0

Table 6 presents the distribution of students according to whether they were directly affected by the earthquakes. The distribution indicates that most students reported being directly affected.

Table 7. Distribution of Responses to the Question, 'Do You Continue to Live in the Place Where You Lived Before the Earthquakes?'

Continuing to Live in the Pre-Earthquake Place of Residence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	365	33.7
No	132	12
Total	497	100.0

The participating secondary school students continued to live in the city in which they had lived before the earthquakes. Table 7 presents the relevant statistics, which indicate that most students reported continuing to live in the same place as before the earthquakes.

Table 8. Distribution of Participating Secondary School Students by Need for Psychological Support After the Earthquakes

Need for Psychological Support	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	153	5
No	159	73
Total	409	100.0

Table 8 presents the distribution of participating secondary school students according to their need for psychological support after the earthquakes. The statistics indicate that most students reported not needing psychological support after the earthquakes.

3.2. Examination of Relationships Between Variables

T-tests and ANOVA were conducted to determine whether secondary school students' views regarding the effects of the earthquakes differed according to their demographic characteristics.

4. Discussion

Based on gender, this study revealed that the female students outnumbered male students.

This gap might partly be due to the sampling process, but must be understood in the broader social context of post-earthquake experiences. Social roles, family responsibilities, resource access and psychological vulnerabilities can impact experiences and reactions to disasters, meaning that not all social groups are equally affected (Kasapoglu & Ecevit, 2001). Studies conducted in the past have revealed unique psychosocial challenges women might face after earthquakes due to displacement, insecurity,

caring responsibilities, and the breakdown of social support networks (Aydin & Aytac, 2023). Women students can also have increased worries about their personal safety, family health and wellbeing, continuity of their studies, and the future. However, this does not prove that the effects of the earthquake on the education and psychology of female students were more severe than that of male students. This would need the comparative analysis of gender data and analyses using inferential statistical tests. However, the distribution indicates that gender responsive strategies are critical to the design of education programmes in post-earthquake situations. Psychological support, safe learning environments and educational recovery programmes should address the possibly different needs of females and males in school. There is also a need for increased collaboration between schools, families, local authorities and support organisations for successful recovery (Tasci & Ozsoy, 2021).

5. Conclusion

Following the 6 February Kahramanmaraş-centred earthquakes, the changes experienced by secondary school students in Kahramanmaraş Province were not limited to the physical conditions of education. Students also assumed roles during the crisis and became active participants in their circumstances. Their sense of school, education, and student identity was disrupted, while pain, loss of relatives, and emotional disengagement took priority.

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Profound suffering, including the loss of entire families, caused extensive social and psychological devastation.

One very important finding was that in digital learning there were many challenges that were identified for many of the pupils. Students' motivation and academic engagement was also reduced because they were not getting enough face-to-face interaction with the teachers. The pedagogic support for distance learning was insufficient, learning was even more difficult.

5.1. Recommendations

The results of the study revealed a number of recommendations that could help mitigate the issues faced by the secondary school students following the earthquakes. Immediately, the essential infrastructure in disaster areas should be restored. Immediate earthquake resistant construction of schools nationwide, improvement of physical conditions, and provision of education equipment and materials, enabling students to receive safe teaching and learning while in school. Buildings in high risk areas should be inspected and buildings that need intervention should be taken care of to establish safe environments.

The findings indicate that secondary school students experienced psychological problems. Psychological support services should therefore be provided to students after earthquakes and expanded to reduce the risk of subsequent trauma.

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8. Author Declaration

The author declares that this manuscript is original, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration elsewhere. The study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical principles, and participation was voluntary. The author reports no external funding and declares no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest.