



INVESTIGATION OF THE COGNITIVE EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE AFFECTIVE SITUATIONS

Devrim Erginsoy Osmanoğlu¹ⁱ,
Selma Erdağı Toksun²

¹Department of Educational Sciences,
Faculty of Education,
Kafkas University, Turkey

²Department of Social Sciences and
Turkish Language Education,
Faculty of Education,
Kafkas University, Turkey

Abstract:

Emotions serve a function of preparing individuals' psychological responses to various situations by affecting their decisions in every part of their lives. Cognitive emotion regulation processes lead individuals to identify their priorities and to make life plans and to act in accordance with these plans. In much of the research focusing on emotion regulation, which is of a vital importance for the individual, it is claimed that the healthy expression of emotions depends on how the babyhood, early childhood and adolescence periods are spent. Thus, the current study aims to reveal the emotion regulation strategies employed by the middle school 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade students and to explore whether they vary significantly depending on the gender variable. The current study adopted the cognitive emotion regulation strategies divided into nine main categories by Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001). The current study employed the field survey method aiming to explore phenomena in their natural conditions. A total of 127 students participated in the study. Two data collection tools were used in the current study. The first data collection tool is comprised of three stories left uncompleted to be completed by the students and the second data collection tool is an interview form made up of a single question. The collected data were subjected to descriptive analyses and then the emerging emotion regulation strategies are presented together with their frequencies. When the obtained data were generally evaluated, it was found that both male and female students employ passive strategies such as *acceptance*, *ruminatıon (focus on thought)* and *positive refocusing* almost at every grade level.

ⁱ Correspondence: email erginsoy@hotmail.com

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1. Introduction

Emotions serve a function of preparing individuals' psychological responses to various situations by affecting their decisions in every part of their lives (Gross and Thompson, 2007). In addition, emotions are accompanied by elements such as bodily changes, verbal and nonverbal emotional expressions and movements (Çeçen, 2018). When individuals organize their emotions in a flexible and controlled way, their emotions function in ways such as activating their resources to achieve their objectives, establishing healthy social relationships and creating a positive self-perception (Roque and Verissimo, 2011). But if they do not emerge in a manner suitable to the corresponding situation, become too intense, and the same emotional state lasts too long, many problems can arise (Werner and Gross, 2010, Öztürk and Uluşahin, 2015). These criteria, which express mental health, indicate that stress coping and emotion regulation skills are very important for psychological health. For this reason, the development of emotion regulation skills plays a central role in preventive interventions and psychological treatment modals for some psychological problems and disorders (Bridges, Denham and Ganiban, 2004).

When the processes of coping with anxiety and stress are examined, it can be seen that Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe coping as a way of adjustment in response to acute or chronic stressful events or conditions and / or as a response to stress. Lazarus (1984) addresses coping strategies under two main headings. These are: 1) Problem-focused strategies (active) entailing the individual to get into action to correct the existing situation and to struggle to find a solution to the problem, 2) Emotion-focused strategies involving distancing the anxiety-inducing situation from cognition without getting into action (*avoidant-passive*) (cited in Pehlivan, 1994; Burger, 2006; Karabulutlu, 2010). Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, and Thomsen & Wadsworth (2001) define coping as "*conscious eager efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology and the environment in response to stressful events or conditions*". Emotional regulation; according to Gross (2013), refers to the processes by which we influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them.

Current conceptualizations of coping and emotional regulation suggest that these two concepts are not synonymous. That is, coping and emotion regulation are closely related but differ in a few ways (Compas et al., 2014). First difference is that while emotion regulation involves both controlled and automatic processes, coping involves only controlled desires. Second difference is that while coping only refers to reactions to stress, emotion regulation includes processes related to positive and negative emotions that can also arise in distressful situations ([Webb, Miles & Sheeran 2012](#)). Thus, it is seen that emotion regulation operates in a scope much larger than stressful situations. Third difference is that emotion regulation refers to both emotions organized by internal factors and emotions organized by external factors. On the other

hand, stress coping occurs in stressful situations and may be related to external factors such as social support. Namely, coping processes are consciously controlled by the individual experiencing the situation in such a way as to target the problem. On the other hand, emotion regulation processes can be managed by another person.

Gross's (2001, 1998) Process Model of Emotion Regulation, which provides an explanation of how emotions are regulated, suggests two types of regulatory strategies, which are antecedent-focused and response-focused strategies. Antecedent-focused strategies refer to things we do before the emotion response tendencies have become fully activated while response-focused strategies refer to things we do once an emotion is already underway, after the response tendencies have been generated. Emotion regulation strategies have both behavioral and cognitive dimensions. While in using behavioral strategies, the individual tries to change/regulate an emotion he/she experiences by focusing on another activity, in using cognitive strategies, the individual attempts to regulate the emotion at cognitive dimension (cited in Ecirli & Ogelman, 2015). It is thought that the cognitive emotional regulation processes to be used in this study; as stated by Ekman, lead the way in which individuals determine their priorities and make life plans and get into actions within the framework of these plans. When two individuals with similar thoughts but different emotions are taken into consideration, it can be seen that individual emotions can direct two individuals to completely different behaviors. This shows the importance of emotions, which are defined as impressions aroused by certain objects, events or individuals in the inner world of the individual; as original spiritual arousals (TDK, 2018) and of the positive regulation of these emotions.

Cognitive regulation of emotions whose basis is laid in babyhood and early childhood periods is one of the most important pre-requisites of an adaptive life. Looking for the formula of happiness, many researchers contend that the internal harmony of the individual enhances his/her subjective well-being and life satisfaction and that happiness entirely depends on this internal harmony (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2001, s. 143). Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven (2001) argue that cognition or cognitive processes can play an important role in determining how stressful the individual life will be, the intensity of emotions and regulation of emotions. Considering one of the main principles of the cognitive approach that man's perceptions, understandings and cognitions play an important role in his emotional reactions, Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001) divided emotion regulation strategies into 9 categories.

1. Self-blame: Refers to thoughts of blaming oneself for what you have experienced in case of negative situations.
2. Acceptance: Refers to thoughts of accepting what has been experienced and resigning oneself to what has happened.
3. Rumination or focus on thought: Refers to reflecting on the emotions and thoughts related to negative events.
4. Positive refocusing: Refers to thinking about enjoyable and pleasant issues rather than the real event.

5. Refocus on planning: Refers to thinking about which steps to take or making plan, thinking about how to handle the negative event and what kinds of measures to take.
6. Positive reappraisal: Refers to thoughts related to assignment of positive meanings to the experienced event so that it can contribute to personal development.
7. Putting into perspective: Refers to thoughts of underrating how serious the event is or of underestimating its value compared to other events.
8. Catastrophizing: Refers to thoughts explicitly emphasizing how terrifying the event is or focusing on the distressful aspect of the experienced event.
9. Other-blame: Refers to thoughts of blaming others for what has happened to you (Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven, 2002; cited in Onat and Otrar, 2010; Ataman, 2011).

In much of the research focusing on emotion regulation, which is of a vital importance for the individual, it is claimed that the healthy expression of emotions depends on how the babyhood, early childhood and adolescence periods are spent (Werner and Gross, 2010). The developmental pattern of the child's coping and emotional regulation skills reflects the coordination and interaction of his/her social, cognitive, emotional and mental development processes (Compas et al., 2014). It has been determined that children who are not particularly supported in terms of their socio-emotional development suppress their emotions and experience problems in establishing close and sharing relationships with their peers (John and Gross, 2004).

It has been reported that environmental factors that play a potentially important role in the development of emotion regulation during childhood and adolescence may be parents, (Campos et al., 2004) relationships with teachers, peers and friends, culture and media (Eisenberg and Morris, 2002). Experts such as Rogers (1951) also state that the individual recognizes his/her capacity through interactions with others and sets goals and objectives through positive or negative evaluations (cited in Hiçdurmaz & Öz, 2011).

For this reason, it is important to determine which cognitive regulation strategies primary school children frequently use and to direct emotional regulation methods in all life experiences and education processes in this direction (Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven, 2001). The idea that "*thoughts give rise to emotions and emotions give rise to behaviors*" requires that the cognitive dimension of emotional regulation be addressed. In this context, this study is important in terms of revealing cognitive emotional regulation methods applied by middle school students who are transitioning from childhood to adolescence to problem situations. Though there is a great deal of quantitative research on cognitive emotion regulation (Onat and Otrar, 2010; Ataman, 2011; Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven, 2002; Choi, 2003; Ravindran, Matheson, Griffiths, Merali and Anisman, 2002), the current study employed a qualitative research method, which makes it original.

The current study aims to elicit the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by middle school children and to explore whether they vary significantly by gender. To this end, answers to the following questions will be sought.

- What are the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by the 5th grade students?
- What are the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by the 6th grade students?
- What are the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by the 7th grade students?
- What are the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by the 8th grade students?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The current study employed the field survey method aiming to explore phenomena in their natural conditions.

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study are 127 5th-8th grade middle school students attending two state schools located in the city of Kars.

2.3 Data Collection

Two data collection tools were used in the current study. The first data collection tool is comprised of three stories left uncompleted to be completed by the students. The participating students were invited to complete these uncompleted stories. The Lamb and Bird stories used in the current study were selected from among the psychoanalytic stories of Luisa Düss (1940). The Düss Story Test is one of the most sophisticated techniques developed to solve children's complex problems (www.kimpsikoloji.com). The stories used in this test have been constructed in such a way as to be comprehensible and interesting to this age group. The third story used in the current study is a moving story written by the researchers. The third story is about a child moving to a new place and what can be done for him to get accustomed to his new neighborhood.

The second data collection tool is an interview form made up of a single question. The question in the interview form is; "How do you cope with your sadness, depression or embarrassment?". Through the data derived from the students' responses to this question, it was aimed to elicit the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by the students to cope with their negative emotions such as sadness, depression or embarrassment.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data collected from the middle school students were subjected to descriptive analyses and the obtained emotion regulation strategies are presented with their frequencies. The stories completed by the students were separately read by each researcher and then coded under the cognitive emotion regulation themes proposed by Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001). After a short interval, the same procedure was repeated. In order to confirm whether the codes listed under the conceptual categories reached in the current study represent these conceptual categories, the codes and code-related categories of two independent researchers were compared. As a result, the inter-coder reliability was found to be .85 (Reliability =agreement/agreement + disagreement (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Moreover, the two researchers conducted discussion on the codes they disagreed to agree on the themes they would be put under. Male students are coded as E and Female students are coded as K.

3. Findings

The data derived from the responses to the question “What are the cognitive emotion regulation strategies employed by the 5th grade students?” are presented below.

Table 1: The data derived from the completion of the Lamb Story by the 5th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
11 M	3	15	5	5	3	3	-	7	-
18 F	4	12	21	19	11	7	5	19	23
Total	7	27	26	24	14	10	5	26	23

As can be seen in Table 1, the most frequently used thinking pattern by the 5th grade students in the completion of the Lamb Story is *acceptance*. It is followed by “*catastrophizing*” and “*focus on thought*”. Another remarkable finding is that while the female students used negative constructs of thought such as “*acceptance, focus on thought, catastrophizing, other-blame*” more frequently, the male students used the constructs of thought such as accepting negative situations and submission more frequently.

Some samples taken from the students’ writings and the codes they belong to are given below; Acceptance: “*Elder lamb takes his mother’s advice and eat weeds every day. ...The mother says the lamb “go and collect weed, I am hungry, too”. The elder lamb goes to collect weed. (E)*” “*Pamuk cannot do anything, but accept. (K)*” Other-blame: “*She talks to herself. “Oh, a new sheep has come and I have been forgotten; I have lost favor”. (K)*” Catastrophizing: “*One day, wolves attack lambs and eat all the lambs and hens; the farmer*

hides from the wolves but one of the wolves goes inside through a window and eats the farmer. (K) Focus on thought: *“While thinking how she can bear giving up milk, she starts to believe that her mother does not love her. (K)”*.

Table 2: The data derived from the completion of the Bird Story by the 5th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
12 M	2	5	8	7	20	5	1	6	1
16F	-	3	3	3	23	3	2	3	3
Total	2	8	12	10	43	8	3	9	4

As can be seen in Table 2, the most frequently used thinking pattern by both the male and female 5th grade students in the completion of the Bird Story is *refocus on planning*. Refocus on planning: *“She has understood that she has not been flying for long. She has thought what to do for her. (K)” “Baby bird and her father go to look for the mother. (K)” “Birds have immediately gone to rescue their mother. She said to the mouse “you should gnaw the trap”. (E)”*

Table 3: The data derived from the completion of the Moving Story by the 5th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
10 M	1	11	6	8	3	4	4	2	1
18 F	-	14	17	24	12	13	4	2	3
Total	1	25	23	32	15	17	8	4	4

As can be seen in Table 3, the most frequently referred thinking patterns by the 5th grade students in the completion of the Moving Story are *positive refocusing* and *focus on thinking*. Positive refocusing: *“She immediately started to play with them, and went on playing for days. (K)” “Ali went out and played hopscotch with his friends. (E)”* Acceptance: *“But he had to go to the school. He had to be educated. (K)”* The findings in this section revealed that when the female students encounter a new and depressing situation, they tend to think about which steps they will take or make plans, to create positive meanings related to the event experienced and to think about pleasing and enjoyable issues in the face of inability to cope with a problem.

Table 4: The data derived from the 5th grade students' responses to the question
 "How do you deal with your sadness, depression and embarrassment?"

	Female (f)	Responses	Male (f)	Responses
Self-blame	1	I feel embarrassed again	0	
Acceptance	3	I treat well I leave the spot I behave as if nothing happened	4	I leave the spot I treat well I try to get calm, I take a deep breath
Focus on thought	14	I talk with my friends about my problem I share with a friend to whom I trust I share with my parents I share with someone I talk about it with a member of my family I share with my best friend	7	I talk with someone I like I get rid of it with the support of my friends I share with someone I share with my friends I talk with my best friend about it I share
Positive refocusing	4	I have fun I go somewhere and I try to forget my sadness there I think about good things I try to forget and look ahead	15	I laugh I sing rap I think about good things I have fun I play with my friends I listen to songs I play I study I read the Koran I focus on some other things
Refocus on planning	2	I consult to my family I directly talk to the concerned person	0	
Catastrophizing	2		1	around
Other-blame	1	I do the same thing to the other person	1	I get angry

As can be seen in Table 4, both the male and female 5th grade students use the thinking patterns of *focus on thought* and *positive refocusing* most frequently to deal with their sadness, depression and embarrassment. That is, the students stated that in general they continuously think about their emotions and thoughts related to negative incidences or they prefer to think about more pleasant issues.

Table 5: The data derived from the completion of the Lamb Story by the 6th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
13 M	-	12	5	3	3	2	1	4	2
16 F	1	22	13	5	11	1	5	6	2
Total	1	34	11	8	14	3	6	10	4

As can be seen in Table 5, both the male and female 6th grade students referred to the thinking pattern of *acceptance* most frequently in the completion of the Lamb Story. Acceptance: “*She is now used to eating weed in the forest. (K)*” “*Then, the elder lamb eats hay. (K)*” “*As the milk is finished, she must eat weed and the elder lamb has accepted this. (E)*” It was also found that the female students tend to focus on new thoughts related to negative events.

Table 6: The data derived from the completion of the Bird Story by the 6th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Otherblame
13 M	1	2	4	2	11	2	1	3	2
16 F	-	4	6	13	14	1	2	3	3
Total	1	6	10	15	25	3	3	6	5

As can be seen in Table 6, both the male and female 6th grade students used the thinking pattern of *refocus on planning* the most frequently in the completion of the Bird Story. This strategy is concerned with how to deal with a negative situation and what kinds of precautions to take. Refocus on planning: “*They started to look for the mother and father. (E)*” “*She is far away from her mother and father. She is trying to find a home for herself. (K)*”. Again the female students tend to frequently use positive refocusing, which is seen as a means of avoidance in the face of negative situations.

Table 7: The data derived from the completion of the Moving Story by the 6th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other blame
13 M	-	4	2	9	8	2	2	1	-
16 F	-	9	10	18	3	3	6	2	-
Total	0	13	8	27	11	5	8	3	0

As can be seen in Table 7, the dominant pattern of thinking used by both the male and female students in the completion of the moving story is *positive refocusing*. That is, they tend to focus on pleasing thoughts when they are confronted with negative situations that are believed to be not changeable. Positive refocusing: “They have now a better friend than the previous ones. (K)” “Their new friend is a very good and polite person. (K)” “He told his name to everyone and he has instantly made friends. (E)”

In Table 8, the data, themes and frequencies derived from the participating students’ responses to the question in the interview form “How do you deal with your sadness, distress, and embarrassment?” are presented.

Table 8: The data derived from the 6th grade students’ responses to the question “How do you deal with your sadness, distress and embarrassment?”

	Female Responses (f)	Male Responses (f)
Self-blame		1 I apologize
Acceptance	3 I listen	4 I close my ears and say nothing I never think about it I forget I go home and wait until tomorrow
Focus on thought	7 I feel sad I stay alone I endure in silence I share it with a member of my family I share it with my most trusted friend I consult to my counseling teacher	8 I talk to my teachers about it I endure in silence I talk to my friends about it I spill guts I talk to my parents about it
Positive refocusing	12 I console myself I sing I discover something I do things that make me happy I eat something I spend time with my family I do something I close my eyes and count I do	10 I get rid of my stress I listen to music I walk around I sing I change the topic I drink tea or coffee I eat I wash my hands and face

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		something that makes me happy I listen to music		
Refocus on planning	5	I consult to people who are close to me I solve that problem I think k for help to solve the problem	3	I get information from a few people I endure and ask for help when the correct time comes I make them surprised
Catostrophizing	8	I stay alone and shout I hit my belongings I cry	2	I cry
Other-blame	1	I talk to the other person	1	I do not go to the other person

As can be seen in Table 8, both the male and female students used the thinking patterns of *positive refocusing* most frequently when they encounter negative emotional situations. Moreover, the female students used the thinking pattern of *catostrophizing*, which is also defined as focusing on the distressing aspect of the situation experienced.

Table 9: The data derived from the completion of the Lamb Story by the 7th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catostrophizing	Other-blame
16 M	-	18	4	6	6	-	4	10	5
15 F	2	23	11	8	3	3	2	14	5
Total	2	41	15	14	9	3	6	24	10

As can be seen in Table 9, the 7th grade students referred to the thinking patterns of *acceptance* and *catostrophizing* most frequently in the completion of the Lamb Story. The students wrote completions emphasizing that the lamp felt sorry and was seized with the thought of *catostrophizing* but then accepted the situation. Acceptance: “She says; “mother, I do not drink any milk different from yours and thus decides to eat weed”. (K)” “Elder lamb should start eating weed in the pasture and the mother sheep gives her warm milk to the younger lamb. (E)” *Catostrophizing*: “Though the elder lamb wants to drink milk, she has to eat weed, but she does not like it and then she runs away from the farm. (K)” Acceptance and *catostrophizing* “The elder lamb feels a bit sad (catestrophizing) but she accepts (acceptance), in a very bad mood (catostrophizing) she finds fresh weed and eats them until evening (acceptance). (E)”

Table 10: The data derived from the completion of the Bird Story by the 7th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
14 M	-	2	1	5	17	2	3	3	-
16 F	1	1	4	6	17	1	1	11	2
Total	1	3	5	11	34	3	4	14	2

As can be seen in Table 10, both the male and female students most frequently referred to the thinking pattern of *refocus on planning* entailing students to think about the steps to be taken to deal with the situation while completing the Bird Story. Refocus on planning: “Finally she decides to make a nest for herself. (K)” “The baby bird gives up crying and tries to fly. She tries few times but she cannot fly; yet, she does not give up trying. (K)” “The bird grows up and makes a home for herself. (E)”

Table 11: The data derived from the completion of the Moving Story by the 7th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
16 M	-	1	6	17	11	1	3	7	2
15 F	2	7	10	13	11	4	5	4	1
Total	2	8	16	30	22	5	8	10	3

As can be seen in Table 11, as in 5th and 6th graders, the thinking pattern of *positive refocusing* is dominant in the completions of the Moving Story by the 7th graders. Positive refocusing: “He says “Of course I will play, and starts playing with them. (E)” “He is used to his new friends; he has sound friendships with them. (E)” “After that that child has become the best friend of him and they are always together. (K)” Another thinking pattern remarkable in the students’ completions is *refocus on planning*. Refocus on planning: “He is waiting to get introduced to them and make friends by talking to all of them. (K)”

In Table 12, the data, themes and frequencies derived from the participating students’ responses to the question in the interview form “How do you deal with your sadness, distress, and embarrassment?” are presented.

Table 12: The data derived from the 7th grade students' responses to the question
 "How do you deal with your sadness, distress and embarrassment?"

	Female (f)	Responses	Male (f)	Responses
Self-blame	1	When I hurt myself		
Acceptance	5	I immediately leave the spot I calm down I withdraw I stay alone	2	I calm down I do not know
Focus on thought	5	I share with my intimate friends I talk about it with my family I share with my friends I talk about it with someone I share with my mother, aunt	7	I keep it to myself I do not talk to anyone I talk to my friends I talk to my mother I share with my most trusted friend
Positive refocusing	14	I go to someone who values me I try to recall the day that I like the most I think about other things I count up to 20 I pray I attend to some other things I play I read I paint I think about good things I change the topic I listen to songs I get some fresh air	21	I attend to some other things I walk around I think about other things I do not read I play I do test I let my friends make me laugh I watch TV I pray the God to help me I think about other things I wash my hands and face
Refocus on planning	3	I ask for help from the counseling teacher I try to solve the problem by talking		
Catostrophizing	5	I cry I talk to my pillow confidently		
Other-blame	1	I do not talk to that person	1	I beat someone

As can be seen in Table 12, as in the 5th and 6th graders, the thinking pattern of *positive refocusing* is dominant among the 7th graders.

Table 13: The data derived from the completion of the Lamb Story by the 8th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catostrophizing	Other-blame
19 M	-	15	2	3	5	3	2	7	1
18F	4	17	10	7	9	7	2	11	7
Total	4	32	12	10	14	10	4	18	8

As can be seen in Table 13, the thinking patterns of *acceptance* and *catostrophizing*; as in the other grades, are more dominant among the 8th graders. Acceptance: “*She accepts the other lamb as her sister and they live happily together. (K)*” “*At first, she is a bit jealous of the younger lamb but she cannot bear her remaining hungry and starts to eat weed (K)*” “*She appreciates it and starts to eat fresh weed. (E)*” Catostrophizing: “*The elder lamb is lonely and she gets ill out of sadness. The owner seeing this slaughters her. (K)*”

Table 14: The data derived from the completion of the Bird Story by the 8th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catostrophizing	Other-blame
19M	-	1	-	8	11	-	-	7	1
18F	-	3	9	3	20	3	1	12	-
Total	0	4	9	11	31	3	1	19	1

As can be seen in Table 14, as in the bird stories of the other graders, the 8th graders also most frequently used the thinking patterns of *refocus on planning* and *catostrophizing* in their completion. Refocus on planning: “*Her father immediately calls the police squirrels and the police squirrels come and investigate the case. (E)*” “*The wind does not stop yet and finally she finds a solution and hides inside a trunk of a tree and then her mother and father come to the trunk of this tree and they live happily together. (K)*” Catostrophizing: “*And then the father and mother cannot move anymore and die. (E)*” “*With the death of her mother and father, she stays alone in the whole world. (K)*”

Table 15: The data derived from the completion of the Moving Story by the 8th grade students

	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on thought	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
19 M	1	9	8	15	7	2	2	7	1
18 F	-	11	13	11	11	5	3	2	2
Total	1	20	21	26	18	7	5	9	3

As can be seen in Table 15, in the completion of the Moving Story, the thinking patterns of *positive refocusing*, *focus on thought*, *acceptance* and *refocus on planning* were frequently used by the 8th grade students. Positive refocusing: “He has met with new people, new friends and new people. His teachers love him a lot and he is very happy. (E)” Focus on thought: “He is very worried as he thinks that his friends may not accept him. (K)” Acceptance: “The child was going to miss his old neighborhood and friends but he has to get used to his new environment. (K)”

In Table 12, the data, themes and frequencies derived from the participating students’ responses to the question in the interview form “How do you deal with your sadness, distress, and embarrassment?” are presented.

Table 16: The data derived from the 8th grade students’ responses to the question “How do you deal with your sadness, distress and embarrassment?”

	Female (f)	Responses	Male (f)	Responses
Self-blame			1	I compensate for my mistakes
Acceptance	6	I keep silent I do not care I try to forget I behave as if nothing happened	7	Nothing I do not do anything I do not know With nothing I do not make it clear I leave the spot I try to endure I remain calm
Focus on thought	6	I hide somewhere I do not make it clear, I keep it to myself I talk to people who love me I talk to a friend I share my sadness with someone	8	I keep it to myself I go to a room to be alone and think I walk unhappily I talk to someone close to me I share I tell it to my close friends
Positive refocusing	9	I walk around outside I go to my friends I read I play football	13	I wash my hands I do something that makes me happy I spend time with my family

		I listen to songs		I drink tea
		I go out and walk around		I spend time with my siblings
		I try to recall good things		I spend time with my friends
		I do something I like		I study
		I strengthen my friendship ties		I go on the internet
				I play
				I start play-like fight with my friends
				I have a good time with my friends
Refocus on planning			3	I consult to my teacher
				I think on my own
				I try to be strong
Catostrophizing	5	I cry	2	I cry
Other-blame	1	I get my revenge from him/her	2	I swear
				I give the finger

As can be seen above, while the female 8th grade students most frequently used the thinking pattern of *acceptance* while dealing with the negative situations, the male 8th graders used the thinking pattern of *focus on thought*. Moreover, the thinking pattern of *catostrophizing* was used more than the female 5th and 6th graders.

4. Discussion

Unlike other living things, human being understands and interprets the environment as an active living thing with mental processes such as attention, perception, thinking. Through these interpretations, they shape their behaviors. A number of studies revealing the role of emotion regulation in the initiation, continuation, and treatment of psychopathology show that psychiatric disorders include incompatible emotion regulation (Werner and Gross, 2010). Emotion regulation is crucial in order to adapt to social life, academic life and peer relations. Garnefski et al. (2002) developed a Cognitive Emotion Regulation Scale to investigate only the thoughts of individuals about an adverse event or situation after it has been experienced. Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001) divided cognitive emotion regulation into 9 main categories.

In the current study, the bird and lamb stories; two of the psychoanalytic stories by Luisa Düss (1940), were used. These stories were left uncompleted for the middle school students to complete them and then the data collected from their completions were analyzed to classify under these 9 categories.

As a result of the analysis conducted to determine how emotion regulation strategies vary depending on the gender and grade level variables, it was found that while the 5th grade female students used the thinking patterns of *“acceptance”*, *“focus on thought”*, *“positive refocusing”* more frequently, the 5th grade male students used the thinking patterns of *“acceptance”* more frequently. Both the male and female 6th grade students used the thinking patterns of *“acceptance”*, *“focus on thought”* and *“positive refocusing”* more frequently. The 7th grade female students used the thinking patterns of

“acceptance”, “focus on thought”, “positive refocusing”, “putting into perspective” and “catastrophizing”, which strongly emphasizes the terror induced by the event experienced, more frequently. The 7th grade male students used the thinking pattern of “focus on thought”, “positive refocusing”, “putting into perspective” and “refocus on planning”, which refers to thoughts about how to deal with a negative event and what kinds of precautions should be taken, more frequently. Both the male and female 8th graders preferred “acceptance”, “focus on thought”, “positive refocusing” and “catastrophizing” as the main ways of basic thinking.

Other research focusing on the effect of gender on the use of cognitive emotion regulation strategies has revealed that the strategies of “focus on thought” and “devaluing an event” are used more frequently by females (Garnefski et al., 2002; Martin and Dahlen, 2005). All these results concur with the findings of the current study showing that both the male and female students more frequently used the strategies of *focus on thought* referring to reflecting on the emotions and thoughts related to negative events and *catastrophizing* referring to thoughts explicitly emphasizing how terrifying the event is or focusing on the distressful aspect of the experienced event. Another remarkable point is that they also frequently used the strategy of *acceptance* referring to thoughts of accepting what has been experienced and resigning oneself to what has happened. Moreover, it was observed that rather than using *positive refocusing* referring to thinking about enjoyable and pleasant issues rather than the real event to solve the problem, they prefer to use thinking patterns directed to avoidance of the negative event. The current study showed that the gender has little effect on the use of cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

Another important finding is that the 5th and 6th grade students more frequently used the strategies of “acceptance” and “focus on thought” referring to reflecting on the emotions and thoughts related to negative events. On the other hand, the 7th and 8th graders were found to have a higher tendency to use the strategy of “catastrophizing”. Moreover, the 7th and 8th graders produced longer texts than the 5th and 6th graders. These findings may indicate that with increasing age, detailed and intense understanding of emotions also develops. Furthermore, as the 7th and 8th graders are in the puberty period, they experience their emotions more intensely; thus they can be more emotional. In this period, even a small resentment can easily and instantly affect their mood and relations. Due to the severity of emotions, adolescents can more easily develop a pessimistic viewpoint and feel worried about future.

When all the results are evaluated, then it is seen that the strategies of “acceptance” and “catastrophizing” were used relatively more in the completion of the Lamb Story. In the completion of the Bird Story; on the other hand, the strategies of “refocus on planning” and “catastrophizing” were used relatively more. In the completion of the Moving Story produced by the researchers, the dominant thought is “positive refocusing”. That is, the children prefer activities such as playing having a potential to induce psychological comfort to avoid the concern created by the act of moving.

The results derived from the children’s responses to the question “How do you deal with your sadness, distress or embarrassment?” to determine which cognitive

emotion regulation strategies are used to cope with anxiety-inducing situations showed that the most frequently preferred ways of thinking are “*acceptance, focus on thought and positive refocusing*”.

Childhood period is a period in which many cognitive changes occur and emotion understanding capacity starts to improve. Development of many social skills and prevention of behavioral problems can be possible through the improvement of affective skills. Choi, (2003) and Ravindran, Matheson, Griffiths, Merali and Anisman, (2002) found that majority of the depression patients use passive methods such as *acceptance, focus on thought and positive refocusing* (cited in Ataman, 2011). Garnefski et al. (2002) reported that depression is associated with avoidance and positive refocusing. Though positive refocusing is viewed to be an effective tool for short-term adaptation, it is believed to prevent effective adaptation in the long-term (Garnefski et al., 2001) because the person prefers avoidance-focused coping strategies by attempting to think about more pleasant events instead of dealing with the real problem. In light of these findings reported in the literature, it can be argued that one of the most important tenets of education should be to teach students the thinking patterns focusing on the development of individuals’ capacity of dealing with difficult situations, the recovery after experiencing negative events and utilizing the outcomes of experienced events for positive changes. In this way, generations who are self-sufficient, can survive, can cope with stressful situations, can develop new perspectives and can think in a future-oriented manner (Seligman, 2002) can be generated. For this to happen, families and educators should give proper responses conducive to children’s emotional health and should be role models for children to express their emotions properly. Moreover, children’s basic emotional needs such as caring about them, accepting and appreciating them, loving and respecting them and consoling them when necessary should be met (Bowlby, 1997). After a cartoon watched or a story read together with the child, parents should talk about the emotions of the heroes and the behaviors exhibited on the basis of these emotions by heroes with the child because children can know and learn about many people around them, their characteristics and their relationships they establish with people around through books, cartoons, pictures, colors and creative ways of expression. This is a life experience indirectly gained by the child and he/she makes use of such experiences in his/her life (Öner, 2007). Therefore, a great care should be taken about what kinds of messages are given by an element used in the process of education and which ways of thinking or which methods of problem solving are promoted by this element.

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Devrim Erginsoy Osmanođlu, Selma Erdađı Toksun
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BY MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE AFFECTIVE SITUATIONS

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