ABSTRACT. The present study examines school satisfaction among 1,090 Dutch and ethnic minority children aged between ten and twelve in relation to their school context. Data were gathered in 51 classes from 26 schools. Individual and classroom variables were examined simultaneously, using multilevel analysis. Controlling statistically for general life satisfaction and teacher likeability, the results show that the effects of educational performance and peer victimization on school satisfaction were mediated by perceived scholastic competence and social self-esteem, respectively. In addition, ethnic minority groups were more satisfied with school than the Dutch pupils, and girls were more satisfied than boys. Multilevel analysis showed that school satisfaction was dependent on the classroom context. The academic and social climate in the class had positive effects on the level of satisfaction with school. The percentage of Dutch pupils, the percentage of girls and the number of pupils had no significant independent effects on school satisfaction.

School satisfaction is a major aspect of children’s quality of life. It is important in and of itself and children have a right to feel good about themselves and the institutions in which they function. Schools should be caring and supporting settings that children value and enjoy. Furthermore, the level of school satisfaction is important because it affects psychological well-being, as well as school engagement, absentee rate, drop-out and behavioral problems (e.g. Ainley, 1991; Reyes and Jason, 1993). Hence, it is important to understand how children rate their school and to know which factors are related to the level of school satisfaction.

Although children spend a great deal of their time in school, there is relatively little attention for school satisfaction. Proposals for educational changes and school reform typically focus on academic achievement and devote little attention to evaluative and affective outcomes. In the Netherlands, for example, where the present
study was conducted, most of the educational discussions focus on cognitive development and its assessment.

School satisfaction is also a rather neglected research topic. Little is known about children’s enjoyment and evaluation of school. There is only a small number of studies on school satisfaction (e.g. Baker, 1998; Cock and Halvari, 1999; Huebner and McCullough, 2000; Huebner et al., 2001; Okun et al., 1990). Furthermore, most studies have focused on the presumed consequences of school satisfaction; few, however, have examined possible determinants or predictors. In addition, little theoretical work has been done in this area. Theoretically, different perspectives used for explaining general life satisfaction are possible, such as social comparison theory, goal theories, and stress and coping approaches (see Diener et al., 1999).

The present study uses a social cognitive perspective for examining global school satisfaction among elementary school children (ten to twelve years of age) in the Netherlands. A social cognitive perspective maintains that school satisfaction follows from the cognitive interpretation of the fulfillment of psychological needs that are essential to child development. Competence and relatedness are considered two of the most basic needs to human growth (Connell and Wellborn, 1991; Deci and Ryan, 1991). Hence, it is examined whether educational performance and perceived academic competence as well as peer relations and social self-esteem affect global school satisfaction. Furthermore, possible differences are examined between ethnic majority and minority group children, as well as between boys and girls. Finally, by means of multilevel analysis, school characteristics as well as children’s individual characteristics are examined. Multilevel analysis allows to investigate further and more adequately the proposed interrelationship between personal and environmental variables in the determination of school satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999; Huebner and McCullough, 2000; Huebner et al., 2001).

**Competence and Relatedness**

Social cognitive approaches on motivation and development maintain that people have intrinsic strivings and needs. Furthermore, people's evaluations and behavior would be affected by the extent to which these needs are considered or perceived to be met.