

SOCIAL SKILLS OF FIRST-GRADE PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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The purpose of this study is to evaluate the level of social skills of the first-grade primary school students who received preschool education and not. The sample group of the study consists of 521 children studying in the first grade of primary schools in Turkish provinces of Ankara, Kars, Malatya, Iğdir, Samsun, Mersin, Gaziantep, Karabük, Ardahan, Erzurum and Artvin. For the purpose of this study, the Personal Inquiry Form and the Social Skills Form (Gülay, 2004) were used to collect data. The findings of this study indicate that the variable of receiving preschool education has an impact on the frequency of using certain social skills (i.e. greeting, introducing oneself mentioning his/her name, introducing others mentioning their name, complimenting, answering questions, preferring to talk rather than resort to physical force in case of anger, participating in a group, making division of labor and cooperation, reconciling, requesting information and sharing) among first-grade primary school students. The first-grade students who received preschool education use these skills more frequently compared to those who did not receive. There is no difference between the two groups for the other 21 skills in the social skills form.

Keywords: First grade of primary education, Social skills, Preschool education, Preschool children, Primary children

Introduction

Educational opportunities provided to children in preschool age not only support their development but also make positive contribution to parent – child relations. For long years, many studies carried out with various sample groups and in various cultures have shown that preschool education contributes to children's cognitive, emotional, social and bodily development as well as to their family (Horn et al. 2005;

Huffman, Mehlinger and Kerivan, 2000; Jalongo et al. 2004; Pianta et al. 2002; Ramey and Ramey, 1998; Ramey et al. 2000; Tesser and Iedema, 2001). In the early years of their life, children acquire certain critical skills such as talking, walking and self-care, which lay the ground for many future skills (Hawken, Johnston and McDonnell, 2005). Preschool education supports their development in the short run, and contributes to the formation of

positive behaviors in the long run. Experiences support the development of social skills. Therefore, many communities carry out various practices in preschool education to increase the motivation of children, to protect them from violence and to ensure their development.

Preschool education indirectly influences primary education through its effects on children. Preschool education has positive impacts on other stages of education (Al-Sahel 2006; Driessen 2004; Fantuzzo et al. 2005; Pianta et al. 2002). Research demonstrates that behavior problems in preschool period can continue in primary education years (Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004). Similarly, it is known that, compared to their peers, children who receive preschool education have higher levels of learning skills, more diverse skills and higher academic success during primary and secondary education (Sucuka et al. 1999). Downer and Pianta (2006) conducted a research with 832 children for two years, where they studied the impacts of preschool education on the development in the first year of primary school. The results show that family dynamics, academic success and quality of child care in preschool period is directly related with academic success in the first year of primary school. Furthermore, it was found that social competence in the preschool age is one of the preconditions of academic success in the first year of primary education. It is also mentioned that preschool education promotes positive behaviors among children and provides a more dynamic, independent and comfortable life style for them (Tudge et al. 2003). The other components which indicate the

importance of preschool education are its economic and social contributions. Preschool education institutions provide equal opportunity of education and development to children from varying family backgrounds. Moreover, long-term studies about this topic show that children who take preschool education in their early years of life are more advantageous in continuing their further education and having a profession compared to the ones who do not (Seliverstova, 2006). In our country, Mother-Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) conducted a three-stage scientific study called "Early Support Project" for 22 years in order to research the effects of preschool education. The first stage of the research started in 1982. Mothers and their 3 to 5 year-old children living in the suburbs of Istanbul received an education program, and the short-term effects of the program were investigated for four years. At the end of four years, the results demonstrated that the mental development and academic success of children who received either training from their mothers or institutional training was higher than the ones who did not. In 1992, the same children and their mothers were involved in a reinvestigation during the adolescence of children. The results showed that the preschool education maintained its positive effects. Finally, in 2004, measurements were made when the subjects of the study became adults. The findings of this second follow-up study indicated that children who received preschool education either at home or at school continued their education for longer years, had higher rates of admission to higher education and took more part in modern economic and social

life (Kağıtçıbaşı et al. 2005).

Developing social skills is also among the targets of preschool education. There are many reasons which require the development of social skills of preschool children. Social skills support communication skills, academic success and adaptation to school, strengthen peer relationships and create a positive environment in the education setting (Gülay and Akman, 2009; Kemp and Carter, 2005). Furthermore, social skills help children to develop positive perceptions about themselves and others. Children who lack social skills can have problems of school adaptation and peer acceptance, and are more prone to delinquency and school dropout. Social skills which begin to develop with mother-child interaction right after the birth play an important role in the social development of children at preschool age. Therefore, these skills may affect social development in the short and long term. Social skills, recognized as one of the determinants of social competence, affect children's adaptation to social settings out of the family (Anthony et al. 2005; Cheah and Rubin, 2004; Koçyiğit and Kayılı, 2008; Spegman and Houck, 2005). Preschool education institutions provide children with many opportunities to learn and develop social skills (Ekinçi and Gürşimşek, 2009). Children need to acquire, in preschool age, skills such as cooperation, sharing, helping and participating in peer groups as they develop. A preschool education of good quality will meet these needs of children and support their development. Relevant research (Melhuish and Lambidi, 1996) shows that preschool education programs of good

quality affect social adaptation and social skills of children. Based on this knowledge in the literature, this study intends to compare the social skill levels of first-grade primary school students who received preschool education and did not receive preschool education.

Method

This study uses descriptive method based on relational survey model with a view to evaluating the social skills of first-grade primary school students who received preschool education and did not receive preschool education.

Participants

The sample group of the study consists of 521 children (262 (50.3%) girls and 259 (49.7%) boys) studying in the first grade of primary schools in Turkish provinces of Ankara, Kars, Malatya, Iğdır, Samsun, Mersin, Gaziantep, Karabük, Ardahan, Erzurum and Artvin (Table 1). The participants of the study consists of 260 children (49.9%) went to a nursery school and 261 children (50.1%) did not.

2. 2. Measures

The data collection tools of the study are the Personal Inquiry Form and the Social Skills Form (Gülay, 2004). The Personal Inquiry Form, designed by the researchers, consists of questions to collect demographic data about children.

The Social Skills Form is a measurement instrument developed by Gülay in 2004 to identify social skills of 5- and 6-year-old children. The social skills in the form are evaluated according to following points: Always, sometimes and never. The

Table 1. Distribution of the Sample Group by Provinces

Provinces	f	%
Gaziantep	101	19.4
Artvin	95	18.2
Kars	69	11.8
Mersin	42	8.1
Samsun	40	7.7
Malatya	40	7.7
Erzurum	37	7.1
Ankara	35	6.7
Karabük	30	5.8
Iğdır	23	4.4
Ardahan	9	1.7
Total	521	100.0

form is completed by teachers. For the purpose of this study, the researchers took expert opinions from related researchers and teachers to decide whether the form is appropriate for 7-year-old children. The cronbach alpha value is .96 for the application of the form to 7-year-old children.

Procedure

The data collection forms were completed by the teachers of the children in the sample group. The teachers were informed about the purpose of study and measurement tools.

Data Analysis

Chi-square test was used to compare the social skills of first-grade primary school students who received preschool education and did not receive preschool education.

Table 2. Chi-Square Test Results For Using the Skills of Greeting And Introducing Oneself Mentioning His/Her Name According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Greeting		214	82.3	37	14.2	9	3.5	260	100.0	190	72.8	54	20.7	17	6.5	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 7.06$ $p = .029$																	
Introducing oneself mentioning his/her name		212	81.5	43	16.5	5	1.9	260	100.0	186	71.3	61	23.4	14	5.4	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 9.05$ $p = .011$																	

As seen in Table 2, there is a difference in the frequency of using the skills of greeting and introducing oneself mentioning his/her name between the children who received preschool education and who did not. The first-grade primary school students who received preschool education use these skills more frequently than their other peers do ($\chi^2 = 7.06$, $\chi^2 = 9.05$).

Table 3. Chi-Square Test Results for Using the Skills of Starting A Conversation and Keeping A Conversation Going, Listening and Asking Questions According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Starting conversation and keeping it going																			
		178	68.5	52	20.0	30	11.5	260	100.0	154	59.0	72	27.6	35	13.4	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 5.34 \quad p = .069$																	
Listening																			
		209	76.6	33	16.9	18	6.9	260	100.0	200	76.6	44	16.9	17	6.5	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 1.79 \quad p = .407$																	
Asking questions																			
		192	73.8	38	14.6	30	11.5	260	100.0	171	65.5	54	17.7	36	13.8	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 4.541 \quad p = .103$																	

As seen in Table 3, there is no difference in the frequency of using the skills of starting a conversation and keeping a conversation going, listening and asking questions between the children who received preschool education and who did not ($\chi^2 = 5.34, \chi^2 = 1.79, \chi^2 = 4.541$).

Table 5. Chi-square Test Results For Using the Skills of Asking Permission, Obeying Classroom Rules and Participating in A Group According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Asking permission		234	90.0	23	8.8	3	1.2	260	100.0	228	87.4	28	10.7	5	1.9	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 1.066 \quad p = .587$																	
Obeying classroom rules		213	81.9	31	11.9	16	6.2	260	100.0	209	80.1	37	14.2	15	5.7	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = .598 \quad p = .742$																	
Participating in a group		198	76.2	48	18.5	14	5.4	260	100.0	169	64.8	74	28.4	18	6.9	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 8.331 \quad p = .016$																	

As seen in Table 5, there is no difference in using the skills of asking permission ($\chi^2 = 1.066$) and answering questions ($\chi^2 = .598$) according to the variable of receiving preschool education. However, it is found that there is a difference concerning the skill of participating in a group between the groups, and that the children who received preschool education use this skill more frequently ($\chi^2 = 8.331$).

Table 6. Chi-Square Test Results for Using the Skills of Making Division of Labor and Cooperation, Complying With Verbal Instructions and Defining Emotions According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
<hr/>																			
Making division of labor and cooperation		205	78.8	47	18.1	8	3.1	260	100.0	171	65.5	72	27.6	18	6.9	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 12.171 \quad p = .002$																	
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Complying with verbal instructions		207	79.6	47	18.1	6	2.3	260	100.0	188	72.0	62	23.8	11	4.2	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 4.447 \quad p = .108$																	
<hr/>																			
Defining emotions		158	60.8	66	25.4	36	13.8	260	100.0	144	55.2	76	29.1	41	15.7	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 1.676 \quad p = .433$																	

The Table 6 shows that there is a difference in making division of labor and cooperation according to the variable of receiving preschool education ($\chi^2 = 12.171$). Children who received preschool education use this skill more frequently. However, there is no difference in the skills of complying with verbal instructions ($\chi^2 = 4.447$) and defining emotions ($\chi^2 = 1.676$) between the groups.

Table 7. Chi-Square Test Results for Using the Skills of Expressing Wishes and Needs Comfortably, Taking Responsibility For His/Her Own Behaviors and Expressing Emotions Comfortably According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Expressing																			
wishes and needs comfortably		187	71.9	55	21.2	18	6.9	260	100.0	177	67.8	70	26.8	14	5.4	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 2.573$ $p = .276$																	
Taking																			
responsibility for his/her own behaviors		167	64.2	61	23.5	32	12.3	260	100.0	145	55.6	81	31.0	35	13.4	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 4.501$ $p = .105$																	
Expressing																			
emotions comfortably		191	73.5	62	23.8	7	2.7	260	100.0	169	64.8	80	30.7	12	4.6	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 4.940$ $p = .085$																	

As seen in the Table 7, there is no difference between the groups in the frequency of using the skills of expressing wishes and needs comfortably ($\chi^2 = 2.573$), accepting the results of own behavior ($\chi^2 = 4.501$) and expressing emotions comfortably ($\chi^2 = 4.940$).

Table 8. Chi-Square Test Results for Using the Skills of Asking for Information, Sharing and Defending His/Her Own Rights When S/He is Right According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Asking for information		178	68.5	36	13.8	46	17.7	260	100.0	140	53.6	72	27.6	49	18.8	261	100.0	521	100.0
$\chi^2 = 16.634$ $p = .000$																			
Sharing		186	71.8	36	13.9	37	14.3	260	100.0	156	59.8	67	25.7	38	14.6	261	100.0	521	100.0
$\chi^2 = 11.967$ $p = .003$																			
Defending his/her rights when s/he is right		198	76.2	46	17.7	16	6.2	260	100.0	176	67.4	64	24.5	21	8.0	261	100.0	521	100.0
$\chi^2 = 4.913$ $p = .086$																			

According to Table 8, there is a difference in the frequency of using the skills of asking for information and sharing between the two groups. The children who received preschool education use these skills more frequently than the ones who did not ($\chi^2 = 16.634$, $\chi^2 = 11.967$). The same table shows that there is no difference between the two groups, according to the variable of receiving preschool education, in the frequency of defending his/her rights when s/he is right ($\chi^2 = 4.913$).

Table 9. Chi-Square Test Results for Using the Skills of Respecting Friends When They Are Right, Concentrating on a Certain Task Appropriately and Working Independently According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Respecting																			
friends when they are right		188	72.3	59	22.7	13	5.0	260	100.0	181	69.3	58	22.2	22	8.4	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 2.454 \quad p = .293$																	
Concentrating on																			
a certain task appropriately		180	69.2	56	21.5	24	9.2	260	100.0	158	60.5	69	26.4	34	13.0	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 4.506 \quad p = .105$																	
Working																			
independently		187	71.9	46	17.7	27	10.4	260	100.0	165	63.2	65	24.9	31	11.9	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 4.901 \quad p = .086$																	

As shown in Table 9, there is no difference between the groups in the frequency of using the skills of respecting friends when they are right ($\chi^2 = 2.454$), concentrating on a certain task appropriately ($\chi^2 = 4.506$) and working independently ($\chi^2 = 4.901$).

Table 10. Chi-Square Test Results For Using The Skills Of Working In Small Groups (1 To 5 Children), Working In Large Groups (More Than 5 Children) And Persuading According To The Variable Of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Working in																			
small groups (1 to 5 children)		167	64.2	42	16.2	51	19.6	260	100.0	146	55.9	64	24.5	51	19.5	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 6.983$ $p = .072$																	
Working in																			
large groups (more than 5 children)		143	55.0	68	26.2	49	18.8	260	100.0	122	46.7	83	31.8	56	21.5	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = 3.619$ $p = .164$																	
Persuading																			
		119	45.8	94	36.2	47	18.1	260	100.0	114	43.7	102	39.1	45	17.2	261	100.0	521	100.0
		$\chi^2 = .475$ $p = .778$																	

Table 10 shows that there is no difference between the groups in the frequency of using the skills of working in small groups (1 to 5 children) ($\chi^2 = 6.983$), working in large groups (more than 5 children) ($\chi^2 = 3.619$) and persuading ($\chi^2 = .475$).

Table 11. Chi-Square Test Results for Using the Skills of Complimenting, Introducing Others Mentioning Their Name and Answering Questions According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills	Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
	Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																		
Complimenting	149	57.3	60	23.1	51	19.6	260	100.0	110	42.1	98	37.5	53	20.3	261	100.0	521	100.0
	$\chi^2 = 15.048 \text{ p} = .001$																	
Introducing others mentioning their name																		
	186	71.5	52	20.0	22	8.5	260	100.0	155	59.4	75	28.7	31	11.9	261	100.0	521	100.0
	$\chi^2 = 8.51 \text{ p} = .014$																	
Answering questions	202	77.7	36	13.8	22	8.5	260	100.0	170	65.1	65	24.9	26	10.0	261	100.0	521	100.0
	$\chi^2 = 11.411 \text{ p} = .003$																	

As shown in Table 11, there is a difference in the frequency of using the skills of complimenting, introducing others mentioning their name and answering questions between the children who received preschool education and who did not. First-grade primary school students who went to nursery school use these skills more frequently compared to the others ($\chi^2 = 15.048, \chi^2 = 8.51, \chi^2 = 11.411$).

Table 12. Chi-Square Test Results For Using the Skills of Asking For Help, Helping, Reconciling and Thanking According to the Variable of Receiving Preschool Education

Frequency of using social skills		Those who received preschool education								Those who did not receive preschool education									
		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Never		Total		Grand total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Social skills																			
Asking for help																			
$\chi^2 = 3.902$		203	78.1	36	13.8	21	8.1	260	100.0	187	71.6	53	20.3	21	8.0	261	100.0	521	100.0
$p = .142$																			
Helping																			
$\chi^2 = 5.591$		180	69.2	51	19.6	29	11.2	260	100.0	171	65.5	71	27.2	19	7.3	261	100.0	521	100.0
$p = .061$																			
Reconciling																			
$\chi^2 = 5.684$		151	51.8	64	24.6	45	17.3	260	100.0	128	49.0	88	33.7	45	17.2	261	100.0	521	100.0
$p = .058$																			
Thanking																			
$\chi^2 = 2.745$		196	75.4	42	16.2	22	8.5	260	100.0	184	70.5	57	21.8	20	7.7	261	100.0	521	100.0
$p = .253$																			

As shown in Table 12, there is no difference in the skills of asking for help ($\chi^2 = 3.902$), helping ($\chi^2 = 5.591$) and thanking ($\chi^2 = 2.745$) between the groups according to the variable of receiving preschool education. However, as to the skill of reconciling, there is a difference between the groups. The children who received preschool education use this skill more frequently ($\chi^2 = 5.684$).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the variable of receiving preschool education has an impact on the frequency of using certain social skills (i.e. greeting, introducing oneself mentioning his/her name, introducing others mentioning their name, complimenting, answering questions, preferring to talk rather than resort to physical force in case of anger, participating in a group, making division of labor and cooperation, reconciling, requesting information and sharing) among first-grade primary school students. In the first-grade of primary education, the children who had

preschool education use these skills more frequently than their peers who did not receive. Özbek (2003) found out that children who had received preschool education were more competent in “starting and continuing a relationship, cooperating with the group, ensuring self-control” compared to those who had not. These findings are consistent with the results of our study. Our study shows that children who received preschool education use more frequently the skills such as introducing oneself mentioning his/her name, introducing others, cooperating, participating in a group and preferring to talk rather than resort to physical force in case of anger. Erbay (2008) also compared the children who had received preschool education and who had not received such an education, and found that the group that had received preschool education used social skills more frequently compared to the other group. Öztürk (2008) focused on the same topic in her study where she found that there was a difference in the speaking skills of first- and third-grade primary school students who received preschool education. The primary school students who had attended a nursery school used these skills more frequently.

Another finding of this study is that the variable of receiving preschool education does not affect the majority of social skills listed in the social skills form (i.e. starting a conversation and keeping it going, listening, asking questions, thanking, apologizing, asking permission, answering questions, asking help, complying with verbal instructions, defining emotions, expressing the needs comfortably, taking

responsibility for his/her own behavior, helping, defending his/her rights when s/he is right, respecting friends when they are right, concentrating on a certain task appropriately, working independently, working in small groups (1 to 5 children), working in large groups (more than 5 children) and persuading).

In Öztürk (2008), it was found that the variable of receiving preschool education did not lead to any difference between the groups of primary school students in skills such as starting a conversation, complying with the division of labor, expressing emotions and asking for permission.

According to these findings, the skills which show a difference are related with direct interaction in the peer group whereas the ones which do not show difference are generally child-centered. This can be explained by the fact that group works in nursery schools/classes contribute to the development of group-centered relationships.

Previous research shows that receiving preschool education may affect various social skills during primary school education. At this point, it is considered that varying factors such as family-related variables and gender may have an impact on the acquisition of social skills.

Conclusion

The results of this study, which focuses on the effects of the variable of receiving preschool education on social skills, demonstrate that the social skills of children may be further investigated with respect to different variables, e.g. socioeconomic level, family variables, gender,

age, general developmental characteristics, etc. Finding the impacts of different variables on social skills may play a guiding role in determining the deficiencies related with social skills and in eliminating these deficiencies. Furthermore, diversifying research on social skills at preschool and primary education is of importance for increasing the number of children who achieve a healthy social development.

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