

ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL READINESS AND PEER RELATIONS OF FIVE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between school readiness and peer relations of five-year-old children's. The sample group of research consisted of 300 preschoolers. The data of this study were collected with the help of Personal Information Form, "Marmara Primary School Readiness Test" and "The Child Behavior Scale". As a result of statistical analyses, positive relationships were found between the children's peer relations social behavior subscale scores and school readiness math skills, science skills, sound skills, drawing skills, labyrinth skills, cognitive and language development, social-emotional development, physical development and self-care skills subscales. In other words, children who show more frequent prosocial behaviors had higher levels of school readiness in the sample group. Furthermore, negative relationships were observed between some subscales of school readiness and children's peer relationships aggression, asocial behaviors, anxiety-fear behaviors, exclusion and hyperactivity sub dimensions. So children who show more frequent negative behaviors in peer relations had lower levels in some subscales.

Keywords: Preschool education, peer relations, school readiness, five-year-old children.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of school readiness was emphasized for the first time in 1964 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and was defined as "the sum of a child's entire skills acquired prior to starting school" (Skeete, 2006, p. 2). In alignment with this definition, Oktay (2010) defines school readiness as the child's reaching a developmental stage up to a level that will allow him/her to accomplish school education, as the child's maturation in a balanced way within a significant background in all developmental areas and as having the proficiency to display all required features in learning. Katz (1991), on the other hand, has stated that while the concept of school readiness is usually utilized to mean "readiness to gain literacy", children's general social and intellectual development should also be engraved in the concept of school readiness. Oktay (1983) also defines school readiness as the child's reaching a certain maturity level in order for him/her to learn reading and writing, as well as his/her acquiring the prior knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to undertake this task. Dockett and Perry (2009) contributed to the definition of school readiness by grouping this prior knowledge, skills, and attitudes under five sub-categories. These five subcategories are listed as i. physical and motor development, ii. social and emotional development, iii. tendency to learn, iv. language development, and v. cognition and general culture. As can be understood from these five subcategories, it is not sufficient for a child to accomplish in-class activities by reaching a certain mental capacity. For the child to display the same level of accomplishment in play and other extracurricular activities, s/he is required to have matured

physically and socially as well. Otherwise, the child is excluded, and thus cannot benefit from the leading function of schooling, namely socialization (Yavuzer, 2004).

While discussing the concept of school readiness, Güler (2001) puts emphasis on the fact that the child needs to be ready for the school physically, mentally, and socially. Polat Unutkan (2003), on the other hand, draws attention to the emotional readiness of children in addition to physical, mental, and social aspects. Polat (2010) states that for a child to be emotionally healthy, s/he needs to be able to communicate with people, i.e. with siblings, peers, and adults, with ease and needs to be willing to learn. According to Raver, children who are emotionally healthy are able to gain favorable skills during early-childhood education and start first grade elementary school ready (as in Kotil, 2005). School readiness encompasses children's all areas of their whole life in a way to affect a child's ability to learn, and because it is "relationship" focused, the relations between families and educators are of utmost importance in transition to schooling (Dockett and Perry, 2002). Adler (1964), explaining bonding with the concept of social interest, depicts a person's relationships as the most significant determinant of one's own well-being (Atik et al., 2014). It has been put forward that the school, schooling age, the amount of time spent in pre-schooling, early education, receiving education prior to school, the teacher, family and family environment, socio-economic status of the family, communication with the parents, child care, educational level of parents, and positive peer relations are all factors affecting school readiness (Harman and Çelikler, 2012).

Peer relations first emerge as simple expressions like a smile, and evolve into complicated, reciprocal, and synchronized patterns of behavior only within a period of a few years (Ladd, 2005). At the age of 3 or 4, children start to communicate with other children with a purpose. Starting at these ages, the power of peer relations start to show its effect in line with human nature. With the existence of other children, a child explores, analyzes, and examines the real world. Relations with peers determine a child's self-worth and well-being. The most essential function of peer groups is to enable the child to compare the world outside the family and to provide the child with a source of knowledge. Thanks to the feedback the child receives from his/her peers, s/he evaluates what s/he is doing fine and not so fine (as in Uysal and Nazlı, 2010). Therefore, for the children, peers have a central role in childhood and teenage years. Peers provide accompaniment and entertainment, they assist in problem-solving, personal acceptance and emotional development, and they are fundamental in identity development (Wentzel, 2009). That is, establishing healthy peer relations is not only a significant and indispensable part of children's social development, but it is also one of the essential elements of psychological harmony and life-long social communication (Gülay, 2008).

As Hartup (2009) puts it, peers are a "necessity", not a "luxury" for human development. In other words, positive peer relations have an utmost significant value in general development of small children (Walker, 2009). The reason is that children acquire social knowledge through social interaction with others –peers and adults (as stated in Yolari, 2014). Peer relations contribute to a child's cognitive, social, emotional, psychological, and physical development (Gülay, 2010). The existence and significance of peer relations prior to elementary school, i.e. pre-school period, cannot be denied. Developing positive peer relations during pre-school period helps in rapid adaptation to school life, supports mental skills, social competence, and emotional harmony, and eases the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and behaviors (Çetin, Bilbay, and Kaymak, 2002).

In today's conditions, factors like nuclear families' becoming more commonplace, mothers being more involved in professional life, and lessened relations with neighbors cause the children to spend less time with their peers outside the school. Preschool education is a step of education whereby children can get prepared for elementary school by developing together with their peers. A wide body of research has revealed that children benefiting from preschool education have a higher level of school readiness than those who do not receive preschool education (Yazıcı, 2002; Polat Unutkan, 2007a; Kırca, 2007). For this reason, it is of grave importance to study whether there is a relationship between peer relations and levels of school readiness of preschool children, and if there is what the direction and degree of this relationship is.

Based on all this, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between peer relations and school readiness level of 5-year-old children attending preschool.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, relational screening model was utilized in order to examine the relationship between peer relations and school readiness level of 5-year-old children attending preschool according to subscales of existing scales. Relational screening model was preferred as the study aims to determine the existence and/or degree of covariance among two or more variables.

Population and Sample

The population of the study is comprised of 5-year-old children enrolled in state schools kindergarten in 2014-2015 academic year in Osmaniye city center. While there were 3573 students enrolled in kindergarten 5-year-old level in Osmaniye city center in 2014-2015 academic year, it was learnt by the time the data collection process started in these classes that there were 2967 students at the age of five from the Directorate of National Education, and thus with the aim of reaching the 10% of the minimum population, the researchers reached 300 students.

Sample of the study was determined through simple random sampling method. According to Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, Demirel (2012), the method in which each member of the subset has an equal probability of being chosen— by replacing the chosen subset – is called simple random sampling. Sampling of the study consisted of 300 5-year-old children attending a total of 43 nursery classes within 4 independent kindergartens, 6 elementary schools, and 2 secondary schools in Osmaniye city center in 2014-2015 academic year.

Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used in the research that were Marmara Primary School Readiness Test, The Child Behaviour Scale, and Personal Information Form.

Personal Information Form: Another data collection tool used in order to reach the demographic information of the students was "Personal Information Form". In this form, information like gender, number of siblings, parents' educational level, socioeconomic status, and whether the student was enrolled in a pre-school educational facility before was collected. However, due to the large scale of the study and limitations on page numbers here, only demographic information is presented for personal information form, and not the rest of the analysis.

Marmara Primary School Readiness Test (MPRT):The test was developed and standardized by Özgül Polat Unutkan in 2003 to measure the school readiness of the preschool children. The Scale consists of two forms that are the application form and the development form. The application form was comprised of 5 parts as mathematics (47 questions), science (14 questions), sound (8 questions), drawing (3 questions) and the labyrinth (2 questions). The tool includes 74 questions and each of them were applied by the researcher one to one. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach α value) was found to be considerably high ($r=.93$ $p<.01$).The cronbach alpha values of the subscales were($r=.96$ $p<.01$) for mathematics, ($r=.88$ $p<.01$) for sound, ($r=.86$ $p<.01$) for science, ($r=.81$ $p<.01$) for drawing and ($r=.95$ $p<.01$) for labyrinth. On the other hand the development form includes 4 sub-scales that are mind and language development, socio-emotional development, physical development, and self-care skills as well as 175 items and each item was filled by the teachers. The internal consistency coefficient values were also found significantly high for all subscales, too (Polat Unutkan, 2003).

The Child Behavior Scale: This scale is a measurement tool, developed by Ladd and Profilet (1996), to evaluate the peer relations of preschool children according to information provided by teachers and it was translated into Turkish in 2008 by Hülya Gülay Ogelman. The scale includes six

subscales as aggression with peers, prosocial behavior with peers, asocial behavior with peers, anxiety–fear, exclusion by peers, and hyperactivity–distractibility. All the items of the scale are evaluated according to the expressions “Never”, “Sometimes”, and “Always”. The aggression with peers subscale was made up of 7 items and the internal consistency coefficient was 0.87. The prosocial behaviors with peers subscale was made up of 10 items and the internal consistency coefficient was 0.91. The asocial behaviors with peers subscale was made up of 7 items and the internal consistency coefficient was 0.84. The anxiety-fear subscale was made up of 9 items and the internal consistency coefficient was 0.78. The exclusion by peers subscale was made up of 7 items and the internal consistency coefficient was 0.89 and finally the hyperactivity subscale was made up of 4 items and the internal consistency coefficient was 0.83. All of the scale was consist of 44 items (Gülay, 2008).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted and evaluated through spss15 packaged software. Whether there was a relationship between children’s peer relations and their levels of readiness for elementary school was analyzed through pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Throughout the study, statistical significance level was taken as 0.05, but 0.01 significance levels were additionally shown in tables.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Findings Related to Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Group

Variable		f	%
Gender	Girl	156	52
	Boy	144	48
	Total	300	100
Maternal Education Level	Elementary Education	122	40,7
	Secondary Education	122	40,7
	Higher Education	56	18,7
	Total	300	100
Paternal Education Level	Elementary Education	79	26,3
	Secondary Education	113	37,7
	Higher Education	108	36
	Total	300	100
Number of Siblings	An only child	35	11,7
	A sibling	113	37,7
	Two siblings	94	31,3
	Three or more siblings	58	19,3
	Total	300	100
Socioeconomic Status	Low	47	15,7
	Average	226	75,3
	High	27	9
	Total	300	100
Preschool Education Attendance	One year	210	70
	Two or more years	90	30
	Total	300	100

As can be seen in the Table 1, 156 (%52) of the children were girl and 144 (%48) of them were boy. 122 (%40,7) mothers of the children participated in the study graduated from elementary school, while 122 (%40,7) of them graduated from secondary school and 56 (18,7) of them completed higher education. On the other hand, 79 (%26,3) of the fathers graduated from elementary school, 113

(%37,7) of them got their grades from secondary school and 108 (%36) of them completed higher education. 35 (11,7) of the children were only the child in their families, while 113 (%37,7) of them had a sibling, 94 (31,3) of them had two siblings and 58 (%19,3) of them had three or more siblings. 47 (%15,7) of the children participated in the study had low socio-economic status, 226 (%75,3) of them had average and 27 (%9) of them had high socio-economic status. 210 (%70) of the children had one-year attendance to preschool while 90 (%30) of them had two or more years.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Test Results on Children’s MPRT-Scale Subscales Score Averages and Child Behavior Scale Subscales Score Averages

		Aggression	Prosocial Behaviors	Asocial Behaviors	Anxiety-fear	Exclusion	Hyperactivity
Maths	R	-,182	,368	-,135	-,224	-,255	-,269
	p	,002**	,000**	,019*	,000**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Science	R	-,087	,205	-,125	-,205	-,257	-,235
	p	,133	,000**	,030*	,000**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Sound	R	-,127	,210	-,005	-,099	-,048	-,135
	p	,028*	,000**	,929	,086	,406	,019
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Drawing	R	-,243	,333	-,091	-,168	-,239	-,292
	p	,000**	,000**	,114	,004**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Labyrinth	R	,024	,129	-,086	,056	-,079	-,015
	p	,674	,025*	,138	,333	,172	,800
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Total Score	R	-,192	,387	-,144	-,237	-,280	-,295
	P	,001**	,000**	,012*	,000**	,000**	,000**
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

As can be seen in Table 2, a positive relationship was found between “Maths” subscale and “Total Score” of the MPRT Scale and “Prosocial Behaviors” subscale of Child Behavior Scale, and a meaningful negative relationship was found with “Aggression”, “Asocial Behaviors”, “Anxiety-fear”, “Exclusion”, and “Hyperactivity” subscales ($p < .05$). That is, as the children’s “Maths” subscale and “Total Score” of the MPRT Scale increase, their “Prosocial Behaviors” subscale scores of Child Behavior Scale increase as well, whereas “Aggression”, “Asocial Behaviors”, “Anxiety-fear”, “Exclusion”, and “Hyperactivity” subscale scores decrease. While no significant relationship was found between “Science” subscale of the MPRT Scale and “Aggression” subscale of Child Behavior Scale ($p > .05$), a significant positive relationship with “Prosocial Behaviors” subscale and a significant negative relationship with “Asocial Behaviors”, “Anxiety-fear”, “Exclusion”, and “Hyperactivity” subscale was found ($p < .05$). In other words, as the children’s “Science” subscale scores of MPRT Scale increases, “Prosocial Behaviors” subscale scores increase as well, yet “Asocial Behaviors”, “Anxiety-fear”, “Exclusion”, and “Hyperactivity” subscale scores decrease. While no significant relationship was found between “Sound” subscale of the MPRT Scale and “Asocial Behaviors”, “Anxiety-fear”, “Exclusion”, and “Hyperactivity” subscales of Child Behavior Scale ($p > .05$), a significant positive relationship with “Prosocial Behaviors” subscale and a significant negative relationship with “Aggression” subscale was found ($p < .05$). In other words, as the children’s “Sound” subscale scores of MPRT Scale increases, “Prosocial Behaviors” subscale scores of Child Behavior Scale increase as well, yet “Aggression” subscale scores decrease. While no significant relationship

was found between "Drawing" subscale of the MPRT Scale and "Asocial Behaviors" subscale of Child Behavior Scale ($p > .05$), a significant positive relationship with "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale and a significant negative relationship with "Aggression", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscales was found ($p < .05$). In other words, as the children's "Drawing" subscale scores of MPRT Scale increases, "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale scores increase as well, yet "Aggression", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscale scores decrease. Finally, while no significant relationship was found between "Labyrinth" subscale of the MPRT Scale and "Aggression", "Asocial Behaviors", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscales of Child Behavior Scale ($p > .05$), a significant positive relationship with "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale was found ($p < .05$). In other words, as the children's "Labyrinth" subscale scores of MPRT Scale increases, "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale scores increase as well.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Test Results on Children's MPRT-Development Scale Subscales Score Averages and Child Behavior Scale Subscales Score Averages

		Aggression	Prosocial Behaviors	Asocial Behaviors	Anxiety -fear	Exclusion	Hyper-activity
Cognitive and Language Dev.	r	-,189	,408	-,229	-,294	-,402	-,390
	p	,001**	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Social-emotional Dev.	r	-,271	,458	-,228	-,336	-,409	-,421
	p	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Physical Dev.	r	-,129	,286	-,111	-,127	-,380	-,336
	p	,025*	,000**	,054	,028*	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Selfcare Skills	r	-,199	,361	-,098	-,244	-,386	-,385
	p	,001**	,000**	,089	,000**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300
Dev. Total Score	r	-,213	,432	-,211	-,297	-,423	-,414
	p	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**	,000**
	n	300	300	300	300	300	300

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

As can be seen in Table 3, a meaningful positive relationship was found between "Cognitive and Language Development" and "Social Emotional" subscales and "Development Total Score" of the MPRT-Development Scale and "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale of Child Behavior Scale, and a meaningful negative relationship was found with "Aggression", "Asocial Behaviors", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscales ($p < .05$). That is, as the children's "Cognitive and Language Development" and "Social-Emotional" subscales and "Development Total Score" of the MPRT-Development Scale increase, their "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale of the Child Behavior Scale increase as well, whereas "Aggression", "Asocial Behaviors", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscale scores decrease. While no significant relationship was found between "Physical Development" and "Selfcare Skills" subscales of the MPRT-Development Scale and "Asocial Behaviors" subscale of Child Behavior Scale ($p > .05$), a significant positive relationship with "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale and a significant negative relationship with "Aggression", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscales was found ($p < .05$). In other words, as the children's "Physical Development" and "Selfcare Skills" subscale scores of MPRT-Development Scale increases, their "Prosocial Behaviors" subscale scores increase as well, yet "Aggression", "Anxiety-fear", "Exclusion", and "Hyperactivity" subscale scores decrease.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A positive relationship was found between **prosocial behavior** sub-dimension scores of children's peer relations and **mathematical, science, sound, drawing, labyrinth skills, cognitive and language development, social-emotional development, physical development and self-care skills** subscales of school readiness. This significant relationship between all subscales of MPRT scale and prosocial behaviors sub-dimension scores of Child Behavior Scale can be interpreted to show that the children who can establish good relations with their peers have higher levels of school readiness. In other words, it can be asserted that since social behaviors children establish with their peers bring about latent learning, they help the children to be better at these skills in question. Yüksel, Küçükoğlu Kurtuluş, and Ünsal (2013) also found a positive significant relationship between social-emotional development and social competence in their longitudinal study conducted with preschool children. According to the study, this significant relationship emerged not only in preschool period but also in first grade elementary school. In Polat Unutkan's (2007b) study in which the effects of having siblings and relations with siblings on school readiness were analyzed, it was revealed that the siblings variable affected school readiness positively. In her research in which she examined whether there was significant difference between acceptance and rejection conditions of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders and their academic success, Şad Demir (2007) stated that she found significant difference in favor of students gaining acceptance. In addition, Elliot (2002) stated in his/her study conducted with third and fourth grade students that social competence affects academic achievement positively. In another research conducted with 5 and 6-year-old children, Gülay (2011) reached the conclusion that social skills are a predictor of adaptation to school. Similarly, in her study conducted with 5 and 6-year-old children, Erten (2012) suggested that social skills, peer relations, and social standing together are predictors of school adaptation level and that children's school adaptation levels increase as their positive prosocial behavior and social standing levels increase. The results of the aforementioned studies confirm the findings of this study.

A negative relationship was found between **aggression** sub-dimension scores of children's peer relations and **mathematical, sound, and drawing skills, cognitive and language development, social-emotional development, physical development and self-care skills** sub-dimensions of school readiness. In other words, children displaying aggressive behavior have lower levels of school readiness in these areas of development. A negative relationship was found between **asocial behavior** scores of children's peer relations and **mathematical, science, cognitive and language development, and social-emotional development** sub-dimensions of school readiness. In other words, children displaying higher levels of asocial behavior have lower school readiness scores in mathematical, science, cognitive and language development, and social-emotional development.

A negative relationship was found between **anxiety-fear** sub-dimension scores of children's peer relations and **mathematical, science, drawing skills, cognitive and language development, social-emotional development, physical development and self-care skills** sub-dimensions of school readiness. Children displaying anxiety-fear behaviors more frequently have lower scores in these development areas. In other words, they have lower levels of school readiness in these development areas.

A negative relationship was found between **exclusion** sub-dimension scores of children's peer relations and **mathematical, science, drawing skills, cognitive and language development, social-emotional development, physical development and self-care skills** sub-dimensions of school readiness. That is, children feeling excluded from the classroom have lower levels of school readiness in the mentioned areas of development.

A negative relationship was found between **hyperactivity** sub-dimension scores of children's peer relations and **mathematical, science, drawing skills, cognitive and language development,**

social-emotional development, physical development and self-care skills sub-dimensions of school readiness. To put it differently, hyperactive children have lower levels of school readiness in these areas of development.

In short, it can be stated that the more children display aggression, asocial behavior, anxiety-fear, exclusion, and hyperactivity –all perceived negatively in terms of peer relations, the lower their levels of readiness to elementary school. These results can be suggested to have resulted from the fact that children who display what we generalize as negative peer relations, i.e. aggressive behavior, asocial behavior, having anxiety-fear feelings, exclusion, hyperactivity, seem to get engaged less in learning environment. In agreement with this study, in a study conducted with third and fourth grade students, Elliott (2002) found that problematic behaviors affect academic success negatively. In another study of hers, Şad Demir (2007) researched whether there is a significant difference between children's acceptance and rejection, and their academic success, and found significant difference to the disadvantage of rejected students. In another piece of research Boulton, Don and Boulton (2011) conducted, the relationship between children's peer relations and their love of school was examined. It was found in the research that peer relations are a significant determiner of love of school variable. The results of these studies seem to be in alignment with the findings of this study.

Note: This study is a part of Nevra Atış Akyol's master thesis.

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