

ANALYSING THE SCHOOL READINESS OF PRESCHOOLERS FROM THE ASPECT OF THE SOCIAL SKILLS WHEN THEY START PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the relation between the readiness of the 66-72-month-old children in terms of the social skills in pre-service education institutions and their social skills at primary school was investigated. The population of the study consisted of 33 children who attended Marmara University Atatürk Education Faculty Prof. Dr. Ayla Oktay Pre-school Education Application Unit in the 2011-2012 academic year and started primary school in the 2012-2013 academic year. As the study was carried out by means of collecting data from the same population in specific time intervals, it can be described as a longitudinal study. In order to collect data, the Marmara Primary School Readiness Test and the School Social Behavior Scales were used. The readiness of the children for the school in terms of social development during the pre-school education and their social skills were assessed, and the evaluation was conducted again to assess the social skills of the children at the primary school environment. Considering the results of the study, it was identified that preschoolers with age-appropriate level of school readiness and social skills adapt to the school more quickly than their peers and their younger friends when they start primary school. In addition, it was found that the children in the study group performed in accordance with their potentials in their academic studies. The findings were also discussed from the perspective of social adaptation skills of the 66-month-old children who are eligible to start school.

Key Words: Preschool education, social skills, school readiness.

INTRODUCTION

Socialization is a lifelong learning process. Once a child is born, he/she is involved in a continuous socialization process (Tuna, 2006). Socialization first starting on the mother's lap expands and develops with the involvement of the other family members and the environment in the process. The family is the smallest building block of the society in which the child gets to know and to experience the rules of the society. In addition to the family and the environment in general, the school is the first social institution enabling the children to adapt to the society they live in (Oktay, 2000). The children find at school many of the opportunities

they cannot find at home. They tend to play games with their peers. By this means, they interact with their peers and learn to cooperate with them. They develop the habit of sharing and taking care of others (Yörükoğlu, 2000). As Polat Unutkan (2003) indicates, during this period, children endeavor to adhere to the societal rules and to socialize within this society. However, some children encounter difficulties in the process of acquiring the social skills mentioned above. Thus, communication problems can be observed between children with good social skills and the ones lacking these skills. This situation results in the isolation of the children with a lack of social skills from their peers. Moreover, these children face various problems in their later years regarding inter-personal communication, emotional-behavioral life, school and professional career and social contexts in general (Avcıoğlu, 2005).

The social skills acquired at an early age have a direct influence not only on the social development of the children but also on their learning process, and thus their academic skills. Although it is known that the social and emotional developments of the children affect their success at school, most children start school lacking these essential skills (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird & Kupzyk, 2010 ; Ladd, Harold & Kochel, 2006; Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010). Razon (1981) points out that the immaturity of the children in terms of social skills is one of the reasons for the failure at school. The feeling of inadequacy at school might negatively influence their self-perception. Furthermore, as suggested by Bandura, if the children's perception of their self-efficacy is lower than their actual efficacy, they cannot use their full potential and tend to be inactive and lazy (Senemoğlu,2011).

Children may feel stressed at different levels as they pass classes. The transition from kindergarten to primary school is especially stressful as childhood games in the kindergarten are replaced by a more rule-based education process at the primary school. In addition to the behavioral, cognitive, socio-emotional and physical concerns of the children; new tasks assigned to them and the challenging social environment at the primary school also make the transition hard (Graue, 1992; Fox, Dunlap & Cushing, 2002). It is possible for children to deal with this transition only when they have social skills, such as self-confidence, empathy and the ability to ask for help when needed (Shure & Spivack,1979; Denham, 2006). These social skills can be acquired more quickly by means of pre-school education. Pre-school education institutions not only support children to socialize but also develop skills such as making discoveries through trial and error, sharing, studying in cooperation with peers, solving problems and self-determining. The basic concepts and skills acquired by preschoolers thanks to their natural curiosity and discovery skills play a supportive role for their future learning (Gizir, 2002; Güven, et.al, 2004.; Milsom,& Glanville,2010; Ayhan, 1998). A successful pre-school period leads to their readiness for school and their academic achievement (Ladd, Harold & Kochel, 2006; Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010; Elliott, Barnard, & Gresham, 1989; Görmez, 2007); besides, it facilitates transition to the primary school. For the children lagging in terms of school readiness and a successful pre-school period, it is impossible to catch up with their peers during their whole school life (Bub, 2009; Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010; Morais & Rocha 2000). As a result, having social skills in the pre-school period may be a variable predicting children's level of primary school readiness.

Therefore, in this research study, the relation between the level of readiness of the 66-72-month-old children in terms of the social skills in pre-school education institutions and their social skills at primary school was investigated. The sub-purposes of the study are as follows:

- 1- Is there a relationship between the level of primary school readiness of the 66-72-month-old children and their social behaviors in pre-school and primary school in terms of socio-emotional developments during the pre-school period?
- 2- Do the school readiness levels of children who received pre-school education predict their level of social skills at primary school?
- 3- Is there a relationship between the social competences and their negative behaviors of the 66-72-month-old children in pre-school and their social competences at primary school?
- 4- Does the level of social skill in pre-school and primary school vary on the basis of the age variable?

METHOD

Research Design

In this research study, the single screening model, which is a type of general screening model, was applied. Research models conducted for the identification of the variables are called as single screening models. By means of single screening models, temporal developments and changes can also be identified. Such research studies are called as longitudinal research studies carried out by means of observations and cross-sectional approaches. In observations, the variable, whose temporal development and change is to be specified, is observed focusing on the same elements or units either continuously or at regular intervals starting from a certain point (Karasar, 2005). This study is a longitudinal study aiming to follow the social adaptation process of primary school children in the 2012-2013 academic year after they attended the Marmara University Prof. Dr. Ayla Oktay Pre-school Education Unit in the 2011-2012 academic year.

Participation

The population of the study was comprised of children who completed Marmara University Prof. Dr. Ayla Oktay Pre-school Education Unit in the 2011-2012 academic year and started primary school in the 2012-2013 academic year. Among the total number of 35 children, 14 were female (40%) and the remaining 21 were male (60%).

Among the children population participating in this study, 8 children were born in January-March 2006 (22,9%), 5 children in April-June, 2006 (14,3%), 5 children in July-September, 2006 (14,3%), 9 children in October-December, 2006 (25,7%) and 8 children were born in January-March, 2007 (22,9%). The age groups of the children born in the first three months of 2007 were divided into three periods as they directly started primary school in the 2012-2013 academic year.

Of all the participants, 13 children had pre-school education for two years (37,1%), 21 children for three years (60%), one child for 4 years (2,9%).

Data Collection Tools

Marmara Primary School Readiness Test (MPRT): The test was developed by Özgül Polat Unutkan in 2003 as a part of her PhD thesis. The scale was designed and standardized specifically for Turkish children so as to reveal to what extent 60-78-month-old children are ready for the primary school in terms of basic skills and each developmental area included in the scale. The Scale includes two forms that are the Application form and the Development form. The item total, item remaining and discriminant analysis of the scale yielded significant results at the level of $p < .001$. The confirmatory factor analysis and the validity analysis of the scale were carried out using the data collected from 1002 children. The Cronbach α value of the Development form was found to be .982 while the Cronbach α value of the Application Form was found to be .930. The Application form is comprised of 5 parts as mathematics, science, sound, drawing and the labyrinth and 74 questions. The questions were prepared in line with application areas needed by the children for the preparation for the primary school. The responses given by the children were scored as (1) if they were correct and (0) if they were incorrect. 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. Each item designed to be filled by teachers or parents has four possible responses related to the frequency of the behavior displayed by the child: always (3 points), often (2 points), sometimes (1 point) and never (0 point). The socio-emotional development sub-scale is comprised of 40 items and the maximum score obtained from this scale is 120. The Cronbach α value of the socio-emotional development sub-scale was found to be .942 (Unutkan Polat, 2003).

School Social Behavior Scales (SSBS): School Social Behavior Scales were developed by Kenneth W. Merrell in 1993 and translated into Turkish by Yüksel (2009). Aiming to evaluate the levels of social skills of pre-school and

primary school children, the scales designed in line with the five-point Likert model is comprised of 65 items. As a result of the linguistic equivalence analysis, each item was found to be significantly related to one another at the level of $p < .001$. The item total, item remaining and discriminant analysis of the scale revealed significant results at the level of $p < .001$. The confirmatory factor analysis and the validity analysis of the scale were done using the data collected from 467 students and teachers. The Cronbach α value for both sub-scales was found to be .98. School Social Behavior Scales is comprised of two sub-scales that are social competence and negative social behavior. The Social Competence sub-scale includes three sub-dimensions, such as interpersonal relationship, self-control skill and academic skills while the Negative Social Behaviors sub-scale has three sub-dimensions that are assailant-angry, antisocial-aggressive and destructive-demanding.

Procedures

The data was collected from 66-72-month-old children attending the Application Unit in the 2011-2012 academic year. The social skills of the children were identified through the "School Social Behavior Scales" (SSBS). On the other hand, the socio-emotional sub-dimension of the "Marmara Primary School Readiness Test" (MPRT) was focused on to assess children's readiness for primary school in terms of their social development. The assessment of the children during the pre-school period was carried out in April, 2012 while their social skills at the primary school was investigated by means of the SSBS in the first term of the 2012-2013 academic year. The scales were administered in 9 months intervals. By this means, the changes and developments of the children participating in this study were observed during nine months.

The applications throughout the pre-school period were carried out by their classroom teachers while the primary school applications were done by their classroom teachers at the primary school they were attending at that time.

Data Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed using the SPSS 16.0 statistical package program. The relationship between children's level of social behavior at school and their readiness for primary school as well as the relationship between their social skills in pre-school and primary school were investigated by means of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. The Kruskal Wallis-H Test, a non-parametric technique, was also applied to reveal whether the levels of social skills in the school environment vary depending on the age variable. Besides, the Mann Whitney-U was applied to the obtained data in order to realize in which groups the difference occurred. The significance of the data gathered for the study was tested at the level of .05 and in two ways.

FINDINGS

In order to answer the first research question, the researchers focused on the relationship between the scores of 66-72-month-old children obtained from the "socio-emotional development" sub-dimension of the MPRT and the scores obtained by pre-school and primary school students from the "social competence" (SC) and "negative social behaviors" (NSB) sub-tests of the SSBS.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Done to Identify the Relationship between the Scores of "Socio-emotional Development" Sub-dimension of the MPRT and Scores of SSBS Applied in Pre-school

		Pre-school SC	Pre-school SSB	Pre-school SSBS Total
Socio-emotional Development	r	,935**	,833**	,931**
	p	,000	,000	,000
	N	35	35	35

As can be realized from the table, the relationship between the scores of MPRT's "Socio-emotional Development" and the scores of the "social competence" sub-scale of the SSBS applied in pre-school ($r=.935$; $p<.01$) was found to be statistically significant at the level of $p<.01$ and positively meaningful. The same is also true for the relationship between the scores of the MPRTS's socio-emotional development sub-dimension and the scores obtained from the "negative social behaviors" sub-scale ($r=.833$; $p<.01$) and for the total score of the SSBS ($r=.931$; $p<.01$).

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Done to Identify the Relationship between the Scores of "Socio-emotional Development" Sub-dimension of the MPRT and Scores of SSBS Applied in the Primary School

		Primary School SC	Primary School SSB	Primary School SSBS Total
MPRT Socio-emotional Development	r	,799**	,714**	,828**
	p	,000	,000	,000
	N	31	31	35

As can be understood from the table, the relationship between the scores of MPRT's "Socio-emotional Development" and the scores of the "social competence" sub-scale of the SSBS applied at the primary school was found to be statistically significant at the level of $p<.01$ and positively meaningful ($r=.799$; $p<.01$). The same case also applies the relationship between the scores of the MPRTS's socio-emotional development sub-dimension and the scores obtained from the "negative social behaviors" sub-scale ($r=.714$; $p<.01$) and for the total score of the SSBS ($r=.828$; $p<.01$).

The second research question of the study was "Do the school readiness levels of children who received pre-school education predict their level of social skills at primary school?" To be able to answer this question, the regression analysis was applied.

Table 3: The Results of the Regression Analysis Showing Whether the School Readiness Levels of Children who Received Pre-school Education Predict Their Levels of "Social Competence", "Negative Social Behavior" and "School Social Behavior" at Primary School (PS)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Model	R	R ²	Beta	t	p
MPRT	P.S.Social Competence	Model 1	,437	,191	,437	2,792	,009
	P.S.Negative Social Behavior	Model 1	,351	,123	,351	2,155	,039
	SSB Total	Model 1	,415	,173	,415	2,623	,013

As can be realized in Table 3, as a result of the regression analysis applied to identify the extent to which the MPRT can justify the sub-scales of SSBS scales that are "Social Competence" ($F=7,796$; $p<.05$), "Negative Social Behavior" ($F=4,644$; $p<.05$) and the total score of the SSBS ($F=6,881$; $p<.05$), the model was found to be significant. Thus, the predictive power of MPRT scale predicting the "Social Competence" ($R^2=.191$; $p<.05$), "Negative Social Behavior" ($R^2=.123$; $p<.05$) sub-scales of SSBS and the total scores of the SSBS ($R^2=.415$; $p<.05$) was found to be significant. School readiness justifies around 19% of the social competence levels, around 12% of the social behavior levels and around 17% of the school social behavior levels of the children who started primary school after receiving pre-school education.

To give an answer to the third research question "Is there a relationship between the social competences and their negative behaviors of the 66-72-month-old children in pre-school and their social competences at primary

school?" the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was applied and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Done to Identify the Relationship of the Scores of the SSBS and its Sub-tests Applied in Pre-school with the Scores of the SBSS and its Sub-tests Applied at Primary School

		Pre-school SC	Pre-school SSB Total	Pre-school SSBS Total	Primary School SC	Primary School SSB	Primary School SSBS Total
Pre-School SC	r	1	,804**	,950**	,878**	,656**	,875**
	P		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	35	35	35	31	31	35
Pre-School OSD	r	,804**	1	,949**	,721**	,936**	,844**
	P	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	35	35	35	31	31	35
Pre-school SSBS Total	r	,950**	,949**	1	,869**	,873**	,905**
	P	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	35	35	35	31	31	35
Primary School SC	r	,878**	,721**	,869**	1	,710**	,919**
	P	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	31	31	31	31	31	31
Primary School SSB	r	,656**	,936**	,873**	,710**	1	,931**
	P	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	31	31	31	31	31	31
Primary School SSBS Total	r	,875**	,844**	,905**	,919**	,931**	1
	P	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	35	35	35	31	31	35

The table above shows that there is a positively meaningful and a statistically significant relationship at the level of $p < .01$ between the scores of the SSBS's "social competence" sub-scale applied in pre-school and the "negative social behaviors" sub-scale ($r = .804$; $p < .01$). The scores of the SSBS's "social competence" sub-scale was also found to be significantly and positively related to the total scores of the SSBS ($r = .950$; $p < .01$); to the "social competence" scores of the SSBS applied at primary school ($r = .878$; $p < .01$); to the "negative social behaviors" sub-scale ($r = .656$; $p < .01$) and to the total scores of the SSBS ($r = .875$; $p < .01$).

The scores obtained from the SSBS's "negative social behaviors" sub-scale applied in pre-school were found to be statistically ($p < .01$) and positively related to the total scores of the SSBS ($r = .949$; $p < .01$); to the "social competence" scores of the SSBS applied at the primary school ($r = .721$; $p < .01$); to the scores obtained from the "negative social behaviors" sub-scale ($r = .936$; $p < .01$) and to the total scores of the SSBS ($r = .844$; $p < .01$).

On the other hand, the total scores obtained from the SSBS administered in pre-school were found to be statistically ($p < .01$) and positively related to "social competence" sub-scale administered at primary school

($r=.869$; $p<.01$); to the scores obtained from the “negative social behaviors” sub-scale ($r=.873$; $p<.01$) and to the total scores of SSBS ($r=.905$; $p<.01$).

The scores obtained from the “social competence” sub-scale administered at primary school were found to be statistically ($p<.01$) and positively related to the scores obtained from the “negative social behaviors” sub-scale also administered at primary school ($r=.710$; $p<.01$) and to the total scores of the SSBS ($r=.919$; $p<.01$).

A significantly meaningful relationship at the level of $p<.01$ and a positively meaningful relationship were also revealed between the “negative social behaviors” sub-scale administered at primary school and the total scores of the SSBS applied at primary school ($r=.931$; $p<.01$).

The forth research question of the current study was “Does the level of social skill in pre-school and primary school vary on the basis of the age variable?”. The Kruskal Wallis-H Test was used to answer this question. The results are illustrated on Table 4.

Table 5: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test used to Determine whether the scores of the “Social Competence” Sub-scale Administered in Pre-school Vary Depending on the “Age Groups”.

Date of Birth	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	sd	P
January-March 2006	8	26,31			
April-June 2006	5	23,70			
July-September 2006	5	22,10	20,535	4	,000
October-December 2006	9	16,67			
January-March 2007	8	5,06			
Total	35				

As can be realized from the table, the Kruskal Wallis-H test applied to determine whether the scores of the “social competence” sub-scale administered in pre-school vary depending on the “age groups” showed that the difference between children’s age groups and mean ranks was statistically significant ($\chi^2=20,535$; $sd=4$). Following this statistical operation, complementary comparison techniques were used to identify which groups caused the meaningful difference found through the Kruskal Wallis-H. As there is not a test technique available for this purpose, the Mann Whitney-U test was used as a technique preferred in binary comparisons.

As a result of the analysis, it was found that the difference is between the groups who were born in January-March, 2006 and in October-December, 2006 ($U=9,00$; $z=-2,598$; 01) and in January-March, 2007 ($U=0,00$; $z=-3,361$; 01). The difference was found to be in favor of the group who were born in January-March, 2006.

On the other hand, difference was found between groups born in January-March, 2007 and in April-June, 2006 ($U=2,50$; $z=-2,565$; 01); groups born in July-September, 2006 ($U=0,00$; $z=-2,93$; 01) and groups born in October-December, 2006 ($U=2,00$; $z=-3,372$; 01). The difference was found to be against the group who were born in January-March, 2007.

Table 6 : Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test used to Determine whether the Scores of the “Negative Social Behaviors” Sub-scale Administered in Pre-school Vary Depending on the “Age Groups”

Date of Birth	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	sd	P
January-March 2006	8	17,81	14,230	4	,007
April-June 2006	5	24,80			
July-September 2006	5	26,90			
October-December 2006	9	18,67			
January-March 2007	8	7,62			
Total	35				

As can be understood from the table, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis-H applied to reveal whether the mean rankings of the “negative social behaviors” sub-scale applied in pre-school vary depending on the children’s age variable, it was found that the difference between the age groups of the children and the mean ranks was significantly meaningful ($\chi^2=14,230$; $sd=4$; 007). As a result of the Mann Whitney U Test applied to identify which groups caused the difference, it was realized that the difference was against January-March, 2007. The difference was found to be between the group born in January-March, 2007 and the group born in January-March, 2006 ($U=8,00$; $z=-2,52$; 001); the group born in April-June, 2006 ($U=7,00$; $z=-1,93$; 05); the group born in July-September, 2006 ($U=1,00$; $z=-2,78$; 01) and the group born in October-December, 2006 ($U=9,00$; $z=-2,60$; 01).

Table 7: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test used to Determine whether the total Sores of the “School Social Behaviors Scales” Administered in Pre-school Vary Depending on the “Age Groups”

Date of Birth	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	sd	P
January-March 2006	8	21,81	16,970	4	,002
April-June 2006	5	25,90			
July-September 2006	5	24,60			
October-December 2006	9	17,11			
January-March 2007	8	6,12			
Total	35				

As can be understood from the table, the Kruskal Wallis-H used to identify whether the mean rankings of the total scores of the “School Social Behaviors Scales” applied in pre-school vary depending on the age variable revealed that the difference between the age groups of the children and the mean ranks was significantly meaningful ($\chi^2=16,970$; $sd=4$; 002). The Mann Whitney U Test applied to understand which groups caused the difference showed that the difference was against the group born in January-March, 2007. It was found that the difference was between the group born in January-March, 2007 and the group born in January-March, 2006 ($U=1,00$; $z=-3,27$; 001); the group born in July-September, 2006 ($U=1,00$; $z=-2,78$; 01) and the group born in October-December, 2006 ($U=4,00$; $z=-3,07$; 002).

Table 8: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test used to Determine whether the Scores of the “Social Competence” Sub-scale Administered at Primary School Vary Depending on the “Age Groups”

Date of Birth	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	sd	P
January-March 2006	8	18,94			
April-June 2006	5	18,00			
July-September 2006	5	23,80	12,686	4	,013
October-December 2006	9	13,33			
January-March 2007	4	3,88			
Total	31				

As can be realized from the table, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis-H applied so as to identify whether the mean rankings of the “Social Competence” sub-scale applied at primary school vary depending on the age variable, it was revealed that the difference between the age groups of the children and the mean ranks was significantly meaningful ($\chi^2=12,686$; $sd=4$; 013). The Mann Whitney U Test used to show which groups caused the difference revealed that the difference was against the group born in January-March, 2007. It was found that the difference was between the group born in January-March, 2007 and the group born in January-March, 2006 ($U=0,00$; $z=-2,71$; 007); the group born in April-June, 2006 ($U=2,00$; $z=-2,21$; 027); the group born in July-September, 2006 ($U=0,00$; $z=-2,46$; 014) and the group who were born in October-December, 2006 ($U=1,00$; $z=-2,10$; 034).

Table 9: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test used to Determine whether the Scores of the “Negative Social Behaviors” Sub-test Administered at Primary School Vary Depending on the “Age Groups”

Date of Birth	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	sd	P
January-March 2006	8	15,81			
April-June 2006	5	19,80			
July-September 2006	5	24,30	9,737	4	,045
October-December 2006	9	13,44			
January-March 2007	4	7,00			
Total	31				

As can be seen in the table, the Kruskal Wallis-H applied in order to identify whether the mean rankings of the “negative social behaviors” sub-scale applied at primary school vary depending on the age variable showed that the difference between the age groups of the children and the mean ranks is significantly meaningful ($\chi^2=9,737$; $sd=4$; 045). The Mann Whitney U Test applied to reveal from which group the difference stems showed that the difference was between the group born in July-September, 2006 and the group born in January-March, 2007 ($U=0,50$; $z=-2,34$; 019). The difference was found to be in favor of the group born in July-September, 2006.

Table 10: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test used to Determine whether the Total Scores of the “School Social behavior Scales” Administered at Primary School Vary Depending on the “Age Groups”

Date of Birth	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	sd	P
January-March 2006	8	20,56			
April-June 2006	5	23,40			
July-September 2006	5	28,30	18,187	4	,001
October-December 2006	9	17,78			
January-March 2007	8	5,88			
Total	35				

As can be realized from the table, the Kruskal Wallis-H used to reveal whether the mean rankings of the total scores of the “School Social Behaviors Scales” applied at primary school vary depending on the age variable revealed that the difference between the age groups of the children and the mean ranks was significantly meaningful ($\chi^2=18,187$; $sd=4$; 001). The Mann Whitney U Test applied to find from which group the difference stems revealed that the difference was against the group born in January-March, 2007. The difference was between the group born in January-March, 2007 and the group born in January-March, 2006 ($U=1,00$; $z=-3,28$; 001); the group born in April-June, 2006 ($U=4,00$; $z=-2,38$; 018); the group born in July-September, 2006 ($U=0,00$; $z=-2,97$; 003) and the group born in October-December, 2006 ($U=6,00$; $z=-2,91$; 004).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the readiness of the 66-72-month-old children in terms of the social skills in pre-school and their social skills at primary school. The findings are discussed below in relation to the research questions.

As a result of the statistical analysis, it was concluded that social skill levels of the 66-72-month-old children are related to their socio-emotional developments. A significant positive relationship was found between the socio-educational development scores in pre-school and primary school and the social competence, negative social behavior and the total scores of the SSBS. It was also found that social skills can predict primary school readiness. Besides, it was observed that the education aiming to support the social skills in the pre-school period positively affects children’s level of social skills at the primary school, and thus enables children to adapt to the primary school environment with more ease.

In many of the research studies, it was proven that providing pre-school education aiming to enhance children’s social skills have a positive influence on their socio-emotional developments and school readiness (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird & Kupzyk, 2010; Knoff, 1990; Metin, 1999; Uysal, 1996; Ayhan, 1998; Polat Unutkan, 2003; Boz, 2004; Atilgan, 2001). For instance, Massetti ve Stroch Bracken (2010) investigated the school readiness of the children who have problems in terms of social skills and behaviors. Uğur (1998) found that the average scores of socialization of the children who attended private and state pre-schools were higher than those who have not attended a pre-school. Studying whether the social skill levels of the 6-year-old children continuing kindergarten affect school maturity, Tunçeli (2012) revealed that the maturity level of the children with a higher level of social skill have a higher level of school maturity when compared to children with a lower level of social skill. In the study, it was also revealed that the profession, age and education background of the family influence children’s social skills and school maturity. Likewise, Wohlwend (2007) showed that receiving pre-school education and playing at school during childhood positively affect children’s reading skills, adaptation to the class and their social life and facilitate their learning of school rules. Balat Uyanık (2003) and Çimen (2000) also revealed that when compared to children who have not attended kindergartens, children starting the primary school after the kindergarten are in a better position with regards to mental, social,

emotional development as well as skills and interests, physical development and health; furthermore, these children were found to be more harmonious and successful in terms of social skills. Stacey Storch & Fischel (2007), also conclude that social skills and abilities have an impact on children's school readiness. It was revealed in their study that the social skills of the children having problems regarding social skills and behaviors improved during the pre-school period after attending pre-school education institutions since the age of four. It was also found that their verbal and mathematical skills developed and they became ready for school. Likewise, Mashburn and Pianta (2006) found that supporting the communication process between parents-child, child-teacher, parents-teacher during the pre-school period strengthens children's school readiness and social relationships. In Özbek's (2003) study, a significantly meaningful relationship was found between attending pre-school and the improvement of the primary school students' social skills such as initiating and maintaining the relationship, doing tasks collaboratively within a group, coping with stress, planning and problem-solving, maintaining self-control. This significant result was in favor of the students having pre-school education. Moreover, it was proven in different empirical studies that children's emotional maturity, activities done at home and school to boost their language as well as other cognitive activities are important for the beginning of a successful school career (Lake, Al Otaiba & Guidry, 2010; Snow, 2006; Polat Unutkan, 2003; Vernon Feagans & Blair, 2006; Ülkü, 2007).

In the current research study, it was revealed that the level of social skills of pre-school and primary school children vary depending on the age variable. Children born in January-March, 2006 were found to have higher levels of social competence and lower levels of negative social behavior when compared to other age groups, especially the ones born in January-March, 2007. Polat Unutkan's (2003) study entitled "Preparation and Standardization of the Marmara Primary School Readiness Scale" showed that 5, 5:5 and 6-year-old children are mature enough to start school. It was also found that there is no significant difference between 5:5-year-old children and 6-year-old ones; however, it was stated that 5-year-old children are not mature enough from a developmental perspective. In another study, Esaspehlivan (2006) aimed to explore whether 78 and 68-month-old children are ready to start the first grade of the primary school and focused on their school readiness. According to the results of the study, there is a significant difference between 78 and 68-month-old children in terms of school readiness. In addition, a significantly higher level of school readiness was found for children who have attended pre-school education institutions. Stipek and Byler (2001) worked on the academic achievements, social behaviors, interaction with teachers as well as the academic skill-related self-images of children in three years following their initial year at kindergarten. For this study, 200 children at lower socio-economic levels were selected. As a result of the study, it was concluded that during the first grade of the primary school, children starting the kindergarten at an older age were in a more advantaged position in terms of academic achievement. During the kindergarten period, older children were found to perform better academically. In summary, it was indicated by the researchers that the academic performance levels of the children who start kindergarten at a younger age are lower than the elder children; nevertheless, the influence of the school starting age on children's success level disappears in few years at the primary school.

Considering the findings of the current study, it would be fair to state that 66-month-old children starting primary school in the 2012-2013 academic year encountered more problems in terms of social skills when compared to their classmates. It is known that the social skills affect academic skills at the same time. For that reason, 66-month-old children should be exposed to individual and group sessions so that they can be supported in terms of social skills before they are accepted to the primary school. Such activities not only meet their developmental needs in the process of adapting to the primary school but also strengthen their academic skills.

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