Full Length Research Paper

An investigation of emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to some variables

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The purpose of this study is for the emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to some variables. The participants were 306 (135 girls and 171 boys) six-year-old children attending nursery school. Data were collected from Assessment of Children’s Emotional Skills and personal information form. In order to analyze data, t test, one way variance analysis and tukey test were employed. The findings of the study revealed that emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school significantly varied according to the variables of gender, educational level of mother and father, the status of receiving previous pre-school education and number of children in the family.

Key words: Emotional skill, children, nursery school.

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are important part of life which seriously affects all aspects of life (Azaran, 2004). Every individual, even a few-months-old baby has emotions. One can obtain every important information about people only by evaluating emotions. Each emotion has a motivating characteristic, a personal meaning and an expression reflected in behaviors (Çeçen, 2006). Emotions have a very important role for a child in continuing his/her life, communicating and orientation of his/her behaviors. Emotional development of children determines how they acquire various emotions and how they express these emotions to themselves, to their parents and to others. Emotions and reflection of emotions in behaviors have a very important role in all stages of an individual’s life (Denham, 1998).

The changes in social life and human relationships in recent years (increased divorce rates, negative effects of media and television, developing technology, parents’ spending less time with their children due to heavy work load) increased the problems of children. To overcome these inevitable changes, number of scientific studies particularly in the field of psychology has increased. Previous studies emphasized that emotional and social skills were effective in social relationships, academic and psychological development of children (Tuyan and Beceren, 2005). The concept of emotional skill involves the ability of recognizing one’s own emotions, understanding other people’s emotions, expressing one’s emotions in line with the culture they live in, making associations between social rules and emotions, the ability of coping with negative emotions by using control strategies and the skills of understanding how emotions influence human relationships (Saarni, 1999). Development of emotional skills in a child starts in family environment after birth. Being a model is considerably effective in developing emotional skills at early age. Family as a model has a significant role in development of emotional skills in a child. Children develop methods to control their own emotions by observing the emotions and reactions experienced by adults in social relationships.

Families teach their children to recognize and express their emotions with the reactions they give in daily life (Berk, 1994). It is important for the families to be a good model for their children with their appropriate behaviors and to give them the opportunity to use their abilities in line with their development (Shapiro, 2004). Previous research found that development of emotional skills of

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children influenced other areas of development and that it was closely related with particularly social, academic, emotional and behavioral development. Behavioral problems which appear particularly in early and middle childhood period are caused by the deficiencies in acquisition of emotional skills (Novick, 2004). Children whose emotional skills did not develop in pre-school period experience difficulty in establishing relationships with their peers and tend to use anger, aggression, rage reactions to their peers or adults (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1995). Research on social development and peer relations at early age reported that development of emotional skills were important in building appropriate peer relations (Linsey and Colwell, 2003; Parke et al., 1992). Understanding the emotions of friends with whom a child builds social relationships is vital for the continuation of the relationship.

Since failure to understand or misunderstanding of the emotions of the individual in friend relationships determines the reaction, it is of great importance for the continuation of the relationship. In addition to positive peer interaction and appropriate social communication, children recognition of their own emotions, understanding other people’s emotions and the skills of accurately expressing the emotions enable them to understand classroom rules and to build friendship relationships more easily (Dunn and Hughes, 1998). Children’s knowledge of accurately expressing negative emotions they experienced prevent them to show negative behaviors and thus to experience conflict with their peers (Frick et al., 1991).

According to Walker and Golly (1999), the children who lacked enough social and emotional skills failed to fulfill the expectations of school and could not have the skills of establishing friendships and adapting to live with other people. Moreover, these children often create negative and destructive effects on other children unintentionally (Egeland et al., 2002). Based on these explanations, investigation of emotional skills of pre-school children is of great importance. This study aimed to determine whether emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school varied according to some personal characteristics.

METHODS
Participants
The survey model was used in the current study. The participants were 306 (135 girls and 171 boys) six-year-old children attending nursery school in Konya/Turkey.

Instrument

Personal information form

Personal information form includes questions about variables of gender, educational level of mother and father, the status of receiving previous pre-school education and number of children in the family.

The assessment of children’s emotion skills (ACES)

While collecting data about children’s emotional skills the Assessment of Children’s Emotion Skills ACES which is developed by Shultz and Izard (1998) and adopted into Turkish by Durmusoglu et al. (2009) was used. The assessment of six year old children’s emotional skills test is composed of three sub-tests; identification of emotions test, understanding emotions and expression of emotions. Identification of emotions sub-test is composed of 12 pictures depicting emotional face expression (happy, sad, angry, and scared). Understanding emotions sub-test is composed of 12 pictures that depicts sample emotional events children may come across in daily life. Expression of emotions sub-test is composed of 12 pictures depicting emotional expressions children show towards sample events (Schultz and Izard, 1998).

At the end of reliability and validity study done by Durmusoglu et al. (2009) scores from factor analysis, item strength, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, total item correlation and item differentiation were considered and 2 items from identification of emotions sub-test, 2 items from understanding emotions sub-test and 2 items from expressing emotions sub-test were removed. Final form of the test has 30 items. In validity study, factor analysis was made to identify content validity and factor loads were found 0.35 to 0.59 in identification of emotions sub-dimension; 0.30 to 0.63 in understanding emotions sub-dimension; 0.31 to 0.68 in expressing emotions sub-dimension. In addition to factor loads for validity study correlation coefficients for sub-dimensions were evaluated and found out 0.568 between identification of emotions sub-test and understanding emotions sub-test; 0.428 between identification of emotions sub-test and expressing emotions sub-test; 0.472 understanding emotions sub-test and expressing emotions sub-test.

According to these values, there is 0.01 level significant differences between sub-tests.

About content validity of the test, opinions of experts are asked. Experts in the field examined the test and stated that it has the quality to measure pre-school children’s emotional skills in three sub-dimension; identification of emotions, understanding emotions and expression of emotions about four main emotions (happy, sad, angry, scared). In reliability study of the test test-retest was used and the following reliability values were found; understanding sub-test 0.87, identification sub-test 0.82, expression sub-test 0.78 and total score 0.79. KR20 reliability technique was used and following reliability values were found; identification sub-test 0.83, understanding sub-test 0.89, expression sub-test 0.83 and total score is 0.81. In addition to arithmetic median, standard deviation, total item correlation, item difficulty and item differentiation scores were evaluated for item analysis and they support the reliability of the test. t-test results about significance between the top 27% and bottom 27% for each sub-test and for total test score proves that test is successful in differentiating successful and unsuccessful groups. When scoring the test each correct answer is given 1 point and false answers and “do not know” answers are given 0 point.

For identification of emotion test, minimum score is 0 and maximum score is 10. For understanding emotions sub-test minimum score is 0 and maximum score is 10. For expression of emotions sub-test minimum score is 0 and maximum score is 10. For total emotional skills minimum score is 0 and maximum score is 30.

Data analysis

In statistical data analysis, t test, one way variance analysis and tukey test were employed. SPSS 16.0 was used for data analysis.
RESULTS

T-test was used to compare emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to gender. The results are given in Table 1. Table 1 indicated that emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school significantly varied according to gender variable and that the skills of identification, understanding and expression of emotions and total emotional skills of girls were significantly higher than those of boys. One way variance analysis was used to compare emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to educational level of mothers. Tukey test was used to determine the groups with significant differences. The results are given in Table 2. Table 2 indicated that according to variance analysis results, emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school significantly varied according to educational level of mothers. According to Tukey test results performed to determine the groups with significant differences, the scores of children whose mothers graduated from primary school were lower in all dimensions of emotional skill when compared to those whose mothers graduated from high school or university. In addition, it was found that emotional skills of children whose mothers were high school graduates were significantly lower than those whose mothers were university graduates. One way variance analysis was used to compare emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to educational level of fathers. Tukey test was used to determine the groups with significant differences. The results are given in Table 3. Table 2 indicated that according to variance analysis results, emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school significantly varied according to educational level of fathers. According to Tukey test performed to determine the groups with differences, similar to educational level of mothers, as the educational level of fathers’ increased, emotional skills of children significantly increased as well. T-test was used to compare emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to receiving previous pre-school education. The results are given in Table 4.

As indicated in Table 4, it was found that emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school significantly varied according to the variable of previously receiving pre-school education. It was found that the skills of identification, understanding, expressing emotions and total emotional skills of the children who previously received pre-school education were significantly higher than those of the children who were attending pre-school education for the first time. Tukey test was performed to determine the groups with significant differences. Test results showed that the skills of identification, understanding, expressing emotions and total emotional skills of the children who were single child or coming from a family with four-children were significantly lower than those of the children who were coming from a family with two-children or three-children.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school significantly varied according to the variables of gender, educational level of mother and father, the status of receiving previous pre-school education and number of children in the family. It was found that the scores of recognizing, understanding, expressing emotions and total emotional skills of girls were significantly higher than those of boys and emotional skills of girls were higher than those of boys. This finding is consistent with the findings of Davis (1995) and Bosacki and Moore (2004), suggesting that the skills of recognizing emotions of girls...
were higher than those of boys. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Kyoung and Hye (1999), who found that the skills of understanding and expressing emotions of girls were higher than those of boys. The fact that girls had higher scores of emotional skills than boys confirms the general behavior in the society particularly in expressing emotions by girls.

On the other hand, the society gives less approval to expression of emotions by boys and perceives this as a sign of weakness. These approaches result in adopting different attitudes in the forms of raising boys and girls. For these reasons, it can be thought that girls have higher skills of expressing their emotions when compared to boys. The findings of the study on educational level of mother and father showed that as the educational level of mothers and fathers increased, emotional skills of children significantly increased as well. This finding is consistent with the findings of Gülay (2008), suggesting that

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**Table 2.** One way variance analysis results of the comparison of emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to educational level of mothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>( \bar{X} )</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Tukey Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of emotions</td>
<td>1. Elementary school</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>636.44</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. High school</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. University</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>636.44</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Identification of emotions:*

1. Elementary school: \( p < 0.01 \)
2. High school: \( p < 0.01 \)
3. University: \( p < 0.01 \)

**Table 3.** One way variance analysis results of the comparison of emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to educational level of fathers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>( \bar{X} )</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Tukey Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of emotions</td>
<td>1. Elementary school</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. High school</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. University</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Identification of emotions:*

1. Elementary school: \( p < 0.01 \)
2. High school: \( p < 0.01 \)
3. University: \( p < 0.01 \)

**Understanding of emotions:*

1. Elementary school: \( p < 0.01 \)
2. High school: \( p < 0.01 \)
3. University: \( p < 0.01 \)

**Expression of emotions:*

1. Elementary school: \( p < 0.01 \)
2. High school: \( p < 0.01 \)
3. University: \( p < 0.01 \)

**Total emotion skill:*

1. Elementary school: \( p < 0.01 \)
2. High school: \( p < 0.01 \)
3. University: \( p < 0.01 \)
Table 4. T-test results of the comparison of emotional skills of six-year-old children attending nursery school according to receiving previous pre-school education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiving previous pre-school education</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>28.58</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>27.01</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>27.07</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total emotion skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>10.79</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>24.16</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>29.78</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.01

pre-school children whose mothers had a high educational level showed less social and fearful behaviors; while they showed more helping behavior to others and were exposed to less peer violence and that they had a better social status. Another finding of the same study was that as the educational level of fathers increased, social status scores of children increased as well, and that they were exposed to less peer violence.

This finding is also consistent with the findings of our study. Parent-child relationship might affect social relationships and social competencies of children. Burchinal et al. (2002) reported that as the educational level of parents increased, their attitudes towards their children improved their all development areas were more effectively supported through higher quality activities. Children who have close relationships with their parents grow into individuals who are sensitive to the people in their social environment, open to communication, extraverted in social relationships and who show positive attitudes (Gülay, 2008). Behaviors of parents to support social and emotional development of their children might be effective in developing a self-comfortable, independent personality, which enables them to know how to protect their own rights, to build cooperation and solidarity with others; to become balanced, adaptable and peaceful with themselves and others (Kandir and Alpan, 2008). Bretherto et al. (2005) reported that the children whose fathers spend time and play with them have self-confidence.

The findings of this study suggesting that as the educational level of the parents increased, emotional skills of the children significantly increased and that parents were among the most important models greatly influencing emotional expressions and social skills of children were found to be consistent with literature data (Denham et al., 1997).

The findings of our study concerning the variable of the status of receiving previous pre-schools education revealed that emotional skills of the children who previously attended pre-school education were significantly higher than those of the children who were attending pre-school for the first time.

This finding is consistent with the findings of various studies in the literature (Tuğrul, 1992; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Ramazan, Ural and Güven, 2004) which reported that long term; qualified pre-school education positively supported social and emotional development of children. Another finding of the study was that emotional level of a single child was significantly lower than that of the children coming from families with two children or three children. This finding is consistent with the study of Er Gazeloğlu (2000) which reported that psychosocial development of the children who had one or two siblings at home were higher than those of single children. This might be explained by the fact that the children who had a sibling at home had a suitable environment where they can communicate, observe emotions and find the opportunity of understanding, recognizing and expressing emotions. However, in our study it was found that when number of children at home exceeded three, emotional intelligence of children decreased. This might result from shortage of time in offering children activities to support emotional development and showing interest in their children and additional burdens brought by increased number of children.

REFERENCES


Novick R (2004). Early years are learning years. NAEYC.


