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Identifying parent views regarding social skills

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify social skills teaching strategies employed by mothers and fathers in rearing their children. The sample of the study is composed of 222 children aged 60-72 months attending pre-schools and their mothers and fathers (444) in the city center of Bolu. In the research, “Survey Form” and “Social Skills Strategies Scale” were used. The results of the study show statistically meaningful differences for mothers and fathers participation points to the importance of social skills and the sub-dimension of “Skills Related to the Acceptance of Consequences (SRAC).”

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1. Introduction

Social skills allow people to start and continue positive social interactions with others and they are skills such as communication, problem solving, decision making, self-management and peer relations (Dowrick, 1986; Bacanlı, 1999; Çetin et al., 2003; Deniz, 2003; quoted in. Avşar, 2004; Kapıkıran, İvrendi & Adak, 2006; quoted in. Seven & Yoldaş, 2007; Christophersen & VanScoyoc, 2008). Social skills are beneficial for both parties that take part in the interaction and they are accepted by the community. Social skills have many benefits such as commencing, continuing and terminating interactions, dealing with negative situations and undertaking and solving conflicts (Güçlü, 1998; Bacanlı, 1999). Social skills are especially important for children to develop good relationships with others, to obey the social rules, to undertake responsibility, to share and cooperate, to help the others and to utilize their rights (Çubukçu & Gültekin; 2000).

Pre-school period is a critical phase in the acquisition of social skills just as in all developmental phases. The social skills acquired in early years form the basis of successful and effective communication with others (McClellan & Katz, 2001). In addition to the school, families play an important part in the acquisition of social skills. Children learn about social skills by modeling their parents and by observing how the individuals in the immediate environment behave in social situations (Yüksel, 2001; Özabacı, 2004; Akman & Gülay, 2006). Not being provided a suitable environment to display the social skills, not receiving appropriate support and training from parents and having characteristics that can be classified as coy or reserved can be mentioned among the factors that inhibit children from learning social skills (Akkök, 2006).

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When the primary school teachers were asked about the reasons why students were not equipped with social skills at the levels that are appropriate for their age in a study undertaken by Genç (2005), the teachers listed reasons related to the families as the first two most important factors and claimed that the situation is a result of parent indifference (81.9 %) and the result of not establishing sufficient levels of school-parent cooperation (76.9%). It was determined in various other studies in the field that parent attitudes and behaviours are important factors in the acquisition of social skills by children (Updegraff, McHale & Crouter, 2001; Park & Cheah, 2005) and lack of social skills are related to difficulties observed in children and social and emotional behaviour problems that can be seen in the future as a result of these (Çetin et al., 2003; Awbrey et al., 2008).

As can be inferred from these, the family has an important role and responsibility in the acquisition and sustainability of social skills. Along the same lines, the study aims to identify the views of mothers and fathers about the social skills their children should possess and strategies they utilize in that regard.

2. Method

The study aims to determine the circumstances regarding the views of mothers and fathers with children between 60-72 months of age and the social skills strategies that they utilize in rearing their children. In the scope of this general aim, answers to the questions below were sought after:

- Is there a meaningful difference in social skills that mothers and fathers find important in their children?
- What are the most important social skills for children according to mothers and fathers?
- What are the most highly utilized methods by mothers and fathers in developing the social skills of their children?
- What are the most highly utilized methods by mothers and fathers in handling conflicts between children?

In the study undertaken by survey model, mothers and fathers (n=444) of 222, 60-72 month-old children attending pre-school educational institutions in Bolu Provincial center formed the working group of the study. 'Survey Form' with three sections which was developed by the researchers and 'Social Skills Assessment Scale' developed by Avcıođlu (2007) for children between 4-6 years old were used as data collection tools in the study.

2.1. Survey Form

The first section of the survey form which was developed by the researchers by undertaking a literature review of related materials consists of questions regarding demographical information about the child and the parents. Second section of the form consists of a question with 10 different options related to the identification of 3 methods that the mothers use the most in developing social skills in their children. The third section is composed of a question with 13 different options geared towards identifying the three most commonly used methods for mothers in solving the conflicts among children. In the last two sections, mothers are asked to write down if they use any methods other than the ones mentioned in the options. Expert views were taken as the criterion for assessing the validity of the survey and prior to the data collection process, a group of 20 individuals other than the sample group were given a pre-test for piloting and necessary modifications were undertaken accordingly.

2.2. Social Skills Assessment Scale

This scale of 62 items was developed for 4-6 year old children in pre-school age in order to identify their social skills levels and it consists of 9 sub-groups such as Interpersonal Skills (IS), Anger Management and Adaptation Skills (AMAS), Skills Related to Dealing with Peer Pressure (SRDPP), Self-Control Skills (SCS), Oral Expression Skills (OES), Skills Related to the Acceptance of Consequences (SRAC), Listening Skills (LS), Skills Related to the Development of Aims (SRDA) and Skills Related to the Completion of Tasks (SRCT). In the 5 point Likert Scale, the items were rated as 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Usually', 'Often' and 'Always'. In addition to the sub-groups, the whole scale can also be scored. The highest and lowest scores from the sub-groups are in the range of item numbers multiplied by 5 and 1. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 62 and the highest score is 310. Obtaining low scores from the scale means not having sufficient social skills whereas high scores mean possessing them. Cronbach Alpha reliability co-efficient was found to be .98, split-half reliability co-efficient was found to be .89 and test-retest reliability co-efficient was found to be .83 in internal reliability tests that were undertaken to determine the reliability of the scale.

Social Skills Assessment Scale was modified after obtaining necessary permits in order to adapt it to be able to assess the level of consideration that the mothers of 4–6 year olds have in terms of the social skills their children should have. Some items were changed such as the change in ‘Says sorry when she/he makes a mistake’ to ‘It is important that she/he says sorry when she/he makes a mistake’. Items were rated using the criteria: 1-strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- undecided, 4-agree and 5- strongly agree. The Cronbach Alpha reliability co-efficient was found to be .94 when the scale was modified that way.

In order not to let mothers and fathers affect each other, they were given the forms to fill with 15-days intervals. In addition to percentage and frequency values, t-test was also used in the analysis of the data.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this section, the data obtained during the study was analysed and presented in tables along with interpretations.

The results of the study that was undertaken with the aim of identifying the views of mothers and fathers with 60–72 month-old children about social skills showed that 47.3% of the children in the sample was females and 52.7% was males. 33.8% of the parents in the sample had only one child, 54.1% had two and 12.2% had three or more children.

Table 1. t-test results of parent scores for consideration of social skills of children

Sub-dimensions	Parent				t	p
	Mother (N=222)		Father (N=222)			
	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S		
Interpersonal Skills	55.55	6.92	55.01	7.12	1.18	.238
Anger Management and Adaptation Skills	32.01	5.71	31.60	5.35	.95	.339
Skills Related to Dealing with Peer Pressure	37.41	5.30	37.44	5.58	.08	.932
Self-Control Skills	40.93	5.71	40.53	6.13	1.02	.306
Oral Expression Skills	29.06	5.20	28.40	4.74	1.95	.052
Skills Related to the Acceptance of Consequences	16.30	2.77	12.18	2.91	19.12	.000*
Listening Skills	20.64	3.39	20.64	5.07	.01	.989
Skills Related to the Development of Aims	13.05	2.11	12.99	2.06	.43	.665
Skills Related to the Completion of Tasks	13.91	1.85	13.81	3.77	40	.685
General Total	258.90	30.85	252.64	32.67	3.03	.003*

Sd=221

When the levels of consideration related to the social skills of their children shown by mothers and fathers in Table 1 were examined, it was seen that there is a meaningful difference between the mean averages of mothers and fathers in the sub-dimension ‘Skills Related to Acceptance of Consequences’ [$t_{(221)}=19.12$, $p<.01$] and in Social Skills Scale in general [$t_{(221)}=3.03$, $p<.01$]. The other 8 sub-dimensions does not display such a meaningful difference. This points to the fact that mothers consider social skills as more important than fathers. The findings of the studies by Jamyang-Tshering (2004), Kazdin (1985) and Raine (1993) which state meaningful differences between gender and social skills also support the results of the current study.

3.1. Social skills that mothers and fathers find important:

According to the data obtained from the *Social Skills Assessment Scale* the three social skills that mothers definitely agree to be important are; in order; ‘giving back an object which has been borrowed from someone else’, ‘saying sorry when there is a mistake’ and ‘working towards completing the task or tasks that are given to him/her’. The expression which the mothers find less important in this list is ‘ignoring peer pressure’. The three social skills that fathers definitely agree to be important are; in order; ‘saying sorry when there is a mistake’, ‘working towards completing the task or tasks that are given to him/her’ and ‘finishing the task or tasks that are given to him/her on time’. The expression which the fathers find less important in this list is ‘compromising with his/her friends when there are differences of opinion’.

Table 2. The most commonly used methods by mothers and fathers in developing the social skills of their children

METHODS	Mother			Father		
	N		%	N		%
I make sure that my child learn the right behaviour by telling him/her that his/her behaviour is right or wrong.	171	(1)	77.0	180	(1)	81.1
I provide oral gratification when he/she displays good behaviour (I compliment my child)	136	(2)	61.3	121	(3)	54.5
I act as a model for the behaviours I demand from my child.	131	(3)	59.0	135	(2)	60.8
I give him/her responsibility in order to teach the right behaviour.	89	(4)	40.1	88	(4)	39.6
I provide practise for my child to master these skills.	35	(5)	15.8	37	(5)	16.7
I gratify my child by buying something he/she wants when my child displays the desired behaviours.	29	(6)	13.1	27	(7)	12.2
I have my child think for a while by letting him/her stop what he/she is doing when my child makes a mistake	28	(7)	12.6	19	(8)	8.6
I give my child the chance to solve his/her own problems.	23	(8)	10.4	29	(6)	13.1
I punish him/her in order for my child to learn the right behaviour.	22	(9)	9.9	22	(9)	9.9
I ignore my child when he/she makes a mistake.	2	(10)	0.9	8	(10)	3.6
TOTAL-Mothers and fathers were asked to identify the three methods that they most commonly employ. (222x3)	666			666		

When Table 2 was examined it was seen that 77% of mothers and 81.1% of fathers preferred the item ‘I make sure that my child learn the right behaviour by telling him/her that his/her behaviour is right or wrong’ and both mothers and fathers chose the same method as the first item in their list. The item ‘I ignore my child when he/she makes a mistake’ was seen to be the least preferred item by both mothers and fathers. The preferences of mothers and fathers show very slight differences and they are generally found to prefer the same methods. It is very important for mothers and fathers to use the same methods in developing the social skills of their children because it is a positive process in the acquisition of social skills by children.

Table 3. The most commonly used methods by mothers and fathers in dealing with conflicts among children

METHODS	Mother			Father		
	N		%	N		%
If children have a fight; I teach them how to share their toys, how to wait for their turns, how to solve arguments by talking.	176	(1)	79.3	154	(1)	69.3
If the children are hitting each other; I teach them the rules of solving conflicts by talking instead of using fists	97	(2)	43.7	131	(2)	59.0
If children have a fight; I explain them why they should not fight.	95	(3)	42.8	99	(3)	44.6
If children have a fight; I let them try to terminate the argument before I intervene.	71	(4)	32.0	69	(4)	31.1
If the children are hitting each other; I stop them so that they can not repeat it again	53	(5)	23.9	46	(5)	20.7
If children have a fight; I provide more toys or I direct them to another activity so that they will have no reason to fight.	48	(6)	21.6	44	(6)	19.8
If children have a fight; I punish them by removing the toy which has caused the discussion.	41	(7)	18.5	34	(8)	15.3
If children have a fight; I punish them by asking them to pause or end the game.	32	(8)	14.4	42	(7)	18.9
If the children are hitting each other; I encourage him/her to think how his/her friend is feeling.	20	(9)	9.0	8	(11)	3.6
If the children are hitting each other, I let them try to terminate the argument before I intervene.	16	(10)	7.2	20	(9)	9.0
If the children are hitting each other, I punish them by scolding them or asking them to terminate the game so that they will see the consequences of such actions.	13	(11)	5.9	13	(10)	5.9
If the children are hitting each other, I punish them by slapping or spanking so that they can learn the feeling that beating creates.	2	(12)	0.9	2	(13)	0.9
If children have a fight; I ignore them so that they will not go on fighting.	2	(13)	0.9	4	(12)	1.8
TOTAL (222x3)	666			666		

When the methods of dealing with conflicts used by mothers and fathers are examined in Table 3, it is seen that both mothers (79.3%) and fathers (69.3 %) prefer the method ‘**If children have a fight; I teach them how to share their toys, how to wait for their turns, how to solve arguments by talking**’. It is observed that this method is followed by the method ‘**If the children are hitting each other; I teach them the rules of solving conflicts by talking instead of using fists**’ and it was preferred by 43.7% of the mothers and 59% of the fathers. This method is followed by the method ‘**If children have a fight; I explain them why they should not fight**’ which was preferred by 42.8% of the mothers and by 44.6 % of the fathers. It is observed that mothers and fathers have the same selections

in the first six methods regarding the most commonly preferred methods when dealing with conflicts among children.

Although the ratios change in the most commonly preferred methods by mothers and fathers, it is seen that the priorities do not change. It shows that similar methods are used in social skills that are considered important by mothers and fathers. This situation is thought to have occurred due to the ages of mothers and fathers, the fact that they share the same house or prior child rearing experiences. It is interesting to note that methods that rely on oral explanations take the first ranks in the list and method of ignoring is the least commonly used method among the ones that are used to develop social skills.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The results of the study undertaken in order to examine the views of mothers and fathers of 60-72 month-old children about social skills show statistically meaningful differences between one of the sub-dimension “Skills Related to the Acceptance of Consequences (SRAC)” and in Social Skills Scale in general.

In developing the social skills of children, majority of the mothers and fathers preferred the item ‘I make sure that my child learn the right behaviour by telling him/her that his/her behaviour is right or wrong’ and in dealing with the conflicts among children they adopted and preferred the item ‘If children have a fight, I teach them how to share their toys, how to wait for their turns, how to solve arguments by talking’. In the framework of these results, it is possible to offer these suggestions:

In this study, as regards to the social skills development the views of mothers and fathers are taken into consideration alone without examining their social skills levels. It will be beneficial to compare the social skills levels of mothers and fathers by social skills assessment tools and to examine the family structure, socio-economic conditions, family participation and participation in training activities etc. in determining the strategies that are used in developing the social skills in children.

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