

# An Analysis of the Effects of Communication Skills Training Provided to the Mothers of Six-Year-Old Children on the Social Skills of Children

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This study aims to analyze the effects of communication skills training program provided to the mothers on the social skills of their children. The study uses pre- and post- tests control group design. Experiment and control groups consisted of a total of 30 six-year-old children who were enrolled in nursery school. Experiment group consisted of 15 children; control group consisted of 15 children. The mothers of the children in experiment group were provided communication skills training for 13 weeks. SSES (social skills evaluation scale) was administered to the children before and after the training. The results of pre- and post- tests were compared and the effects of mothers' training program on the social skills of the children were investigated.

*Keywords:* social skill, communication skill, children, pre-school, mother

## Introduction

As a social being, humans need to live in interaction with other humans. The greatest need of the individuals as social beings is to be accepted by the social environment. Social development period, which is termed as social interaction period, has a vital role in adaptation of humans to their environment. This period begins from childhood and if it starts and continues successfully, it helps people to pursue healthy and harmonious relationships. Social skills are one of those skills which help adaptation to many social conditions (Özabacı, 2004; Steedly, Schwartz, Levin, & Stephen, 2008).

Social skills refer to the skills which allow: (1) to initiate and pursue positive social relationships, like behaving in line with the related environment; (2) to initiate, pursue and end interaction; (3) to cope with undesirable conditions; and (4) to communicate about conflict-resolving and assertiveness, problem-solving, decision-making, self-management and peer relations. In addition, defending one's personal rights, asking for help from others when necessary are also included in social skills (Kapıkıran, İvrendi, & Adak, 2006; Kara & Çam, 2007; Avcıoğlu, 2005). Social skills also refer to being aware of our own and other people's feelings (Steedly et al., 2008).

Social skills increase quality of life of individuals and make them fulfill their aims. They are considered as a service which one can make use of throughout his/her life. Previous studies found that the children with social

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skills were more successful than their peers who lack adequate social skills (Özabacı, 2004; Palut, 2003). Furthermore, when the children with social skills become adults, they can establish proper relationships with others, work in cooperation, become happy and successful in life, respect the rights and emotions of other people, refuse the requests which are inappropriate for them and ask for help from other people when necessary (Ceylan, 2009).

To achieve these, social skills of the children should be improved from early age and the children should be integrated with the society. Despite of all differences, all theorists agree on the central role of the family in socialization of a child. Particularly, the affection, attention and care of the mother have a significant role in development and socialization of a child. However, during the development period, a child acquires these skills by being directly or indirectly affected from their friends, schools and other socialization sources and learns new communication methods. However, some children can not acquire adequate social skills and sometimes it is necessary to make direct intervention to help children acquire these skills (Kapıkıran et al., 2006; Önder, 2005; Ömeroğlu, Yazıcı, & Dere, 2003). Although social and personal development is included in written targets of our education system, it was observed that in practice the targets mainly focus on competition and academic achievement. Behaviors and skills of the individuals should be improved to enable them to deal with their social problems (Kara & Çam, 2007).

The experts emphasize that the children who have been neglected in childhood and teenager periods are unable to develop healthy social skills; while the children who grow up in democratic family environment, where love, tolerance and care are dominant, have more self-confidence and self-acceptance, are more effective, and extraverted in friendships, can produce creative ideas and are free (Matson & Wilkins, 2009; Çağdaş & Seçer, 2007; Güngör, 2001).

The studies, which investigated the effects of trainings provided to parents, school-family cooperation and participation of the children to the trainings on the children, reported that there was an increase in mental, emotional and social development, school achievement and self-respect of the children (Sala Razi, 2004; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). Therefore, parenting skills of the parents should also be supported. This can be achieved by applying different programs and enabling the participation of the family in the training provided at school. The aim of supporting parenting skills is to increase the quality of parent-child interaction. The objective is to make the mothers more aware of the needs of their children, to enable them to have emotional sensitivity, to make them adopt a communicative attitude than harsh and oppressive attitude and to make them more capable in problem-solving (Bekman & Atmaca Koçak, 2009). The family has an important role in education of a child. Mother and father establish a close relationship with their children and to support the education and development of their children, they should receive education on children's education and development (Can Yaşar, 2001; Tezel Şahin & Özbey, 2009; Tezel Şahin & Ünver, 2005; Mağden, 1993; Kartal, 2007).

In this study, communication skills training program was developed and applied to the mothers with children under the age of six. The effects of the training provided to the mothers on the social skills of the children were investigated. Independent variable of this study was the communication skills training program provided to the mothers, while the dependent variable was the social skills of the children. The study investigated the effect of independent variable on dependent variable.

### Hypotheses

Hypothesis (1): There is no significant difference between social skills evaluation pre-test average scores of the children in experiment and control groups;

Hypothesis (2): There is a significant difference on social skills evaluation post-test average scores of the children between experiment group and control group.

### Method

#### Participants

This study uses pre- and post- tests control group design. The population of the study consists of six-year-old children who were enrolled in nursery school in Konya province of Turkey. Among the population of the study, one experiment group and one control group were formed using random element sampling method. A total of 30 children were included in the study (15 children in experiment group, 15 children in control group). The mothers of the children in the experiment group were provided a 13-week training program. Mothers training program included the following subjects: the role and importance of the family in children's education, the definition of communication and the importance of mother-child interaction, basic elements of effective mother-father-child communication (acceptance, listening, empathy and honesty...), communication language ("you language", "I language"), mother-father-child conflicts and the methods used for solution, parent attitudes, the definition of self-respect and its importance, the importance of self-respect development in children and improving self-respect of parents. Mothers were taught the activities which they can apply at home with their children. They were given homework with the purpose of increasing knowledge and skills of the mothers. The families were sent letters. They were given brochures about the subjects in training program and the training was tried to be lasting.

#### Instrument

SSES (social skills evaluation scale) was developed by Avcioğlu (2003) (as cited in Ekinçi Vural, 2006). The scale contains the social skills four/six-year-old children should have. It is a 5-point Likert type scale containing "Always (5)", "Frequently (4)", "Generally (3)", "Rarely (2)" and "Never (1)". Low scores obtained from the scale indicate that the person does not have adequate social skills, while high scores obtained from the scale indicate that the person has social skills. The original version of the scale contains nine sub-dimensions, however only four sub-dimensions ("interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanation and listening") were used in the present study (see Table 1). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.98; two half reliability was calculated as 0.89, test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.83. Cronbach's alpha reliability values for the general of SSES and for the sub-scales used in the study were calculated as 0.94 for "interpersonal skills", 0.92 for "self-control", 0.93 for "verbal explanation" and 0.86 for "listening skills" (as cited in Ekinçi Vural, 2006; Avcioğlu, 2007).

#### Data Analysis

SPSS 15.0 was used in order to evaluate the data which was collected by the scale employed in the research. In statistical data analysis, Mann Whitney U-test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test were used.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics*

Social skills	Groups	N	Mean rank	Standard deviation
Interpersonal skills	Experiment group: pre-test	15	29.27	4.98
	Experiment group: post-test	15	38.93	3.71
	Control group: pre-test	15	29.93	5.09
	Control group: post-test	15	31.33	5.08
Self-control	Experiment group: pre-test	15	25.80	4.20
	Experiment group: post-test	15	35.13	3.98
	Control group: pre-test	15	26.07	4.30
	Control group: post-test	15	28.47	4.47
Verbal explanation	Experiment group: pre-test	15	17.87	3.93
	Experiment group: post-test	15	25.00	2.27
	Control group: pre-test	15	17.67	4.08
	Control group: post-test	15	19.93	3.83
Listening skills	Experiment group: pre-test	15	15.13	1.46
	Experiment group: post-test	15	19.27	1.28
	Control group: pre-test	15	15.00	1.41
	Control group: post-test	15	16.67	1.18

**Results**

Table 2 indicates Mann Whitney U-test results of the pre-test scores of the sub-dimensions of SSES which was administered to the experiment and control groups before the study. Based on these findings, there is no significant relationship between the pre-test of the control and experiment group children from interpersonal skills ( $U = 98.50$ ,  $z = -0.58$ ,  $p = 0.56$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), self-control ( $U = 104.00$ ,  $z = -0.36$ ,  $p = 0.72$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), verbal explanation ( $U = 108.00$ ,  $z = -0.19$ ,  $p = 0.85$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and listening skills ( $U = 107.00$ ,  $z = -0.24$ ,  $p = 0.81$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) sub-scales. It was found that among the sub-dimensions of SSES, interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanation and listening skills scores of experiment and control groups were similar ( $p > 0.05$ ). In this case, experiment and control groups are equivalent groups.

Table 2

*Pre-test Results of Experiment and Control Groups*

Social skills	Groups	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	z	p
Interpersonal skills	Control	15	16.43	246.50	98.50	-0.58	0.56
	Experiment	15	14.57	218.50			
Self-control	Control	15	16.07	241.00	104.00	-0.36	0.72
	Experiment	15	14.93	224.00			
Verbal explanation	Control	15	15.20	228.00	108.00	-0.19	0.85
	Experiment	15	15.80	237.00			
Listening skills	Control	15	15.13	227.00	107.00	-0.24	0.81
	Experiment	15	15.87	238.00			

Table 3 indicates Mann Whitney U-test results of the scores of the sub-dimensions of SSES of the six-year-old children whose mothers were provided training program (the experiment group) and of the

children whose mothers were not provided the training program (the control group). According to these results, it is found that there is a significant difference between the interpersonal skills scores of children in experiment and control groups ( $U = 29.00$ ,  $z = -3.48$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It is found that there is a significant difference between the self-control scores of the children in experiment and control groups ( $U = 29.50$ ,  $z = -3.46$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A significant difference is found between verbal explanation scores of the children in experiment and control groups ( $U = 28.50$ ,  $z = -3.51$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There is a significant difference between the listening skills of the children in experiment and control groups ( $U = 7.50$ ,  $z = -4.45$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). When average ranks are taken into account, it is found that the scores of the children whose mothers participated in the training program are higher than interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanations, listening skills scores of the children whose mothers did not participate in the training program. This finding indicates that the training provided to the mothers is effective in improving interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanations and listening skills of the children.

Table 3

*Post-test Results of Experiment and Control Groups*

Social skills	Groups	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	z	p
Interpersonal skills	Control	15	9.93	149.00	29.00	-3.48	0.001**
	Experiment	15	21.07	316.00			
Self-control	Control	15	9.97	149.50	29.50	-3.46	0.001**
	Experiment	15	21.03	315.50			
Verbal explanation	Control	15	9.90	148.50	28.50	-3.51	0.000**
	Experiment	15	21.10	316.50			
Listening skills	Control	15	8.50	127.50	7.50	-4.45	0.000**
	Experiment	15	22.50	337.50			

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table 4

*Results of Control Group's Pre-test-Post-test*

Social skills	Pre-test-post-test	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	z	p
Interpersonal skills	Negative ranks	4	6.00	24.00	-1.82	0.07
	Positive ranks	10	8.10	81.00		
	Ties	1				
Self-control	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.46	0.001**
	Positive ranks	15	8.00	120.00		
	Ties	0				
Verbal explanation	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.41	0.001**
	Positive ranks	14	7.50	105.00		
	Ties	1				
Listening skills	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.36	0.001**
	Positive ranks	14	7.50	105.00		
	Ties	1				

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results indicating whether the interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanations, listening skills pre-test and post-test scores of the control group children who participated in the

study significantly varied or not are shown in Table 4. According to analysis results, there is no significant relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group children from interpersonal skills sub-scale ( $z = -1.82$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). It is found that there is a significant difference between pre-test-post-test scores of control group children from self-control sub-scale ( $z = -3.46$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was a significant difference between pre-test-post-test scores of the children in control group from verbal explanation skills sub-scale ( $z = -3.41$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between pre-test-post-test scores of the children in control group from listening skills sub-scale ( $z = -3.36$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results indicating whether the interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanations, listening skills pre-test and post-test scores of the control group children who participated in the study significantly varied or not are shown in Table 5. According to analysis results, there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the children in experiment group from interpersonal skills sub-scale ( $z = -3.41$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Analysis results indicated that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the experiment group children from self-control sub-scale ( $z = -3.42$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the children in experiment group from verbal explanation sub-scale ( $z = -3.42$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It was found that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the children in experiment group from listening skills sub-scale ( $z = -3.42$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). When difference scores, average rankings and sums were taken into account, it was found that this observed difference was in favor of positive rankings, in other words, in favor of post-test score.

Table 5

*Results of Experiment Group's Pre-test-Post-test*

Social skills	Pre-test-post-test	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	z	p
Interpersonal skills	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.41	0.001**
	Positive ranks	15	8.00	120.00		
	Ties	0				
Self-control	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.42	0.001**
	Positive ranks	15	8.00	120.00		
	Ties	0				
Verbal explanation	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.42	0.001**
	Positive ranks	15	8.00	120.00		
	Ties	0				
Listening skills	Negative ranks	0	0.00	0.00	-3.42	0.001**
	Positive ranks	15	8.00	120.00		
	Ties	0				

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

## Discussion

This study analyzes the effects of communication skills training program provided to the mothers of six-year-old-children who were enrolled in pre-school organizations on the social skills of the children. It is concluded that communication skills training provided to the mothers of six-year-old children is effective in improving interpersonal skills, self-control, verbal explanations and listening skills among the sub-dimensions of social skills. In pre-school period, family is one of the most effective environments. Type of interaction of

the family members, particularly those of the mothers, their attitudes towards the children and the opportunities provided to the children affect social development and skills of the children (Yavuzer, 1994). In addition, communication skills of the mother also have important effects in social development process of the children. Günindi (2008) emphasized that as the emphatic skills of the mothers improved, their children's social adjustment and skills improved as well. It is observed that, in different development areas, the children whose parents participated in mother-father training programs have a better performance, academic achievement and social adjustment than the children who were cared at home and whose mothers did not receive training (Seçkin & Koç, 1997; Tezel Sahin & Ersoy, 1999; Kartal, 2005).

A review of the literature reveals similar study findings. Akkök and Sucuoğlu (1988) gave social skills support training to the mothers of three-year-old children, while Çağdaş (1997) gave communication skills training to the mothers of four/five-year-old-children. The researchers reported that there was a significant improvement in social skills of the children. It was also reported that the results of social skill programs with the participation of the families had positive effects on psycho-social behaviors, self-control skills, socialization and social skill levels of the children at different ages (Ekinci Vural, 2006; Zembat & Polat Unutkan, 2001; Çalışkan Çoban, 2007; Gürşimşek, Girgin, Harmanlı, & Ekinci, 2002). Previous studies revealed that the programs with the participation of the families were more effective and lasted longer in improvement of development areas of the children (Ömeroğlu & Can-Yaşar, 2002; Tezel Şahin & Ünver, 2005; Seçkin & Koç, 1997; Temel, 2001; Gürşimşek, 2003; Gürşimşek, Kefi, & Girgin, 2007; Kartal, 2007).

Another implication of the findings of the present study is that there is an improvement in social skill levels of the children whose mothers did not receive training but who were enrolled in pre-school organizations. One of the objectives of pre-school education is to support all development areas of a child. During the education provided at these organizations, the teachers include aims and targets in pre-school education program of the ministry of education in their plans and programs to support social development and skills of the children. The programs which are prepared in this manner support social skills of the children. Study results indicate that although there is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test average scores of experiment and control groups, social skill scores in the experiment group are higher. This indicates that pre-school education contributes to the social development of children and providing training to the mothers further strengthened this contribution. Çınar (1990) found that pre-school education affected social development of children.

Arabacı and Aksoy (2005) reported that participation program offered to the mothers in pre-school education contributed to informing the mothers about pre-school education. In his study which included five/six-year-old children and their families. Gürşimşek (2003) found that there was a positive relationship between participation level of the family into education process and the psycho-social development levels of the children observed by their teachers.

The researchers who investigated the effects of pre-school education on social development reported that initiative, independency, self-confidence, curiosity and interest to the environment of the children who received pre-school education improved while anti-social behaviors decreased (Dinç, 2002). Martin (2003) reported that starting social skills training in pre-school period would improve social skills and peer acceptance.

Education is of great importance for the development of the children. Family members, who have an important role in development and education of the children, should be informed about child development and education; their awareness in this matter should be raised; they should be trained in a program or at least, they

should be encouraged to interact with their children by participating in education experiences of their children (Üstünoglu, 1990).

In light of the findings of the present study, the following suggestions can be made:

- (1) Instead of child-centered programs, parent-centered programs can be developed and applied in pre-school education organizations;
- (2) Pre-school educators and school counselor teachers can be provided in-service trainings and courses on parent training and their theoretical and practical knowledge in these subjects can be improved;
- (3) With the cooperation of universities, ministry of education, private organizations and institutions, package programs to support social skills of the children which use different techniques and methods including the parents can be prepared and applied all over the country;
- (4) The present study is limited with the effects of training program provided to the mothers on the social skills of the children. More comprehensive training programs on different areas can be prepared and the effects of these programs on different development areas of the children can be tested in future studies.

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