

## AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 48-60 MONTHS OLD PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S TEACHER-CHILD RELATIONS AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT TO THE SCHOOL

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the 48-60 month old children's teacher-child relationship and social adjustment to the school. The universe of the study is composed of 48-60 months old children and their teachers in the nursery classes of primary schools in Doğubayazıt district of Ağrı, Turkey in 2014-2015 academic year. At least 264 subjects were identified from the universe through simple random selection method and 272 children were contacted. The children were attending preschool education in 35 different classes. The sample of the study is composed of 35 teachers and 272 children in their classes. The data was collected through "Child Background Information Questionnaire", "Teacher-Child Relationships Scale", and "School-Social Behavior Scale". In terms of sub-dimension scores of school-social behavior scale a statistically significant difference was observed in genders of children, ability to use Turkish, and parents' education level. Moreover, in terms of negative behaviors in school sub-dimension and genders of children, a statistically significant difference was found. Additionally, it has been observed that as the teacher-child relations scale scores increased the level of social adjustment to school also increased while the negative behaviors in school decreased.*

**Keywords:** Teacher-child relations, social adjustment, school adjustment

### INTRODUCTION

In the preschool period, the children's social and emotional developments are supported; they get the chance of gaining basic social skills such as asking for permission, playing in cooperation with peers, sharing, and apologizing; they often face problem situations and search for ways to solve these problems (Can-Yaşar, 2011).

The preschool education has very important contributions towards personal development. The child explores his/her skills by means the games and activities conducted; and learns to share, to listen to others, and to communicate. The children get to know the life out of their houses and learn social rules from their experiences of school life during their preschool education (Katranç, 2014). The education in the preschool period enhances the children's emotional development and perceptive power; and helps their social adjustment and development of social skills (Kandır and Alpan, 2008).

The preschool education improves and diversifies the communicative skills of a child. The preschool education institutions provide the children the various facilities for improving their skills for effective use of the ways to express their emotions and thoughts. The preschool education provides opportunities for the development of a child's social skills. Socialization is a process that starts with birth and the children learn certain social skills from their parents and other adults until they start preschool education. However, many children explore that some of the social knowledge and skills adopted at home are not adopted at school or they should behave in a different way at school. Along with learning the behaviors that are

adopted at school a child also learns ways of effective communicative with adults other than parents and their peers (Gürkan, 2009).

Upon starting school, the children face new expectations such as regularly attending school, paying attention to the materials presented in the classroom by their teachers, participating in the education activities organized, and complying with the rules in school. While some of the students show these positive behaviors other may be in different attitudes (İşpir, 2002). Enabling a balanced adjustment of an individual to his/her environment is one of the basic aims of the preschool education. The basis of this adjustment needs to be established in the preschool period (Sözer, 2008). Preparing the child for the primary school is one of the main purposes of preschool education. It has been observed that children who received preschool education are more well-adjusted to the primary school compared to the ones who did not (Katrancı, 2014).

The fact that social adjustment gained in the preschool period positively affects the children's success in their later education, and in all social classes education is a strong means to the transition from one social group to another has been one of the reasons why preschool education to gained importance and became widespread (Gürkan, 2009).

While the first years of life are so important in terms of growth and development, the education provided by parents has turned to be insufficient for a child to gain the equipment appropriate to his/her development (Katrancı, 2014). Therefore, there is a need for preschool education services which are seriously handled, scientifically guided, as well as directed through a systematic organization to leave no room for coincidence (Gültekin-Akduman, 2011). However qualified the environmental conditions of a child are, getting prepared for primary school in an appropriate place with peers and expert educators provides better results. Nevertheless, as a result of the economic and social structure of our country, parents cannot meet their children's material and moral needs (Yavuzer, 2012).

Research on preschool institution experiences and children's social efficiency as well as their academic success revealed that children attending to institutions with high-quality standards has been more proficient individuals in social and academic fields and this has been continued in their later ages (Micozkadıoğlu and Kazak-Berument, 2011). However, the help of preschool education in terms of children's social developments is possible through a good teacher along with a good curriculum (Çağdaş, 2002). The teacher is one of the most important factors in preschool education. The teacher is a factor that plays a role in preschool education's achievement to its aims and determining the qualification of preschool education institutions (Koçyiğit, 2011). Preschool education has an important place in; enabling the children with behaviors and habits which comply with the expectations of the society when their social developments are considered; enabling them to express their emotions and thoughts freely; and having self-control, having entrepreneurial spirit, having the ability to work in collaboration with other as well as establishing positive social relationships. The most important role in the adjustment of children to the school belongs to the teacher (Öztürk, 2008; Polat, 2010).

In order for schools to fulfill the duties and responsibilities expected of them, to become effective and productive, there is a need for good, healthy and continuous human relations. The good relations of students with teachers from whom the students are affected most is important in terms of the effectiveness of education (Çınkır, 2004). Teachers have a role in the education system and the operation of this system. It is a commonly accepted fact that in the successful and on purpose realization of the education there is an effect of teacher's personal and professional qualifications (Çelikkaleli and İnandı, 2012; Tunçeli, 2013). With

the healthy, safe, and happy teacher-child relationship the best environment for children's gaining the knowledge, skills and aimed behaviors.

Nowadays especially because of parents' workload some teachers may spend time with children more than their parents. Except for their relatives, the children's first attachment experiences are towards their preschool teachers. For a child who left his/her parents school and teacher are mysterious. A child has only the knowledge based on what s/he heard from others until s/he starts the school. But upon starting school the first teacher-child relationship starts in which many communications and relations will be experienced in terms of academic and social perspectives (Kıldan, 2011).

In the first years of life a child's being in a warm relationship, facilitates the child's loving others and establishing long-terms relationships in his/her life. The preschool period is a critical period in terms of a child's emotional development and the preschool education contributes to the formation of emotional confidence. The mutual love and respect based environment in preschool institutions facilitates a child's gaining of the basic sense of confidence (Gürkan, 2009).

The quality of the teacher-child relation is the determinant of the changes in the behavioral adjustment of the child starting from the kindergarten till 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The clash with the kindergarten teacher is the signal of the degrading pro-social behavior and enhancing aggressive behavior towards peers. The "safe" and "developed" teacher-child relationship in kindergarten is closely related to the formation of the appropriate behavior in the class and facing fewer problems in the classes of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students (Pianta and Stuhlman cited in Kıldan, 2011).

The studies revealed that getting preschool education positively affects the level of school adjustment in the following years (Topcu, 2012; Yeşil, 2008). However, it has been found out that there is no study on the effect of teacher-child relationship in preschool education on children's level of social adjustment to the school in our country.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of teacher-child relationship in the preschool period on social adjustment to the school. With this purpose in mind, this study will search for answers to the following questions;

- 1) Is there a significant relationship between the scores of the School-Social Behavior Scale and a child's: a) Gender, b) Parent's level of education, c) Number of siblings, d) The ability to use Turkish
- 2) Is there a correlational relationship between the scores of Teacher-Child Relationships Scale and School-Social Behavior Scale?

## **METHOD**

This study is designed as a descriptive research. The universe of the study is composed of 48-60 months old children attending preschool education and their teachers in Doğubayazıt district of Ağrı, Turkey in 2014-2015 academic year. Through simple random sampling method at least 264 subjects were identified and 272 children were contacted. These children are attending to 35 different classes. The sample of the study is composed of 35 teachers and 272 children in their classes. The teachers filled the "Child Background Information Questionnaire", "Teacher-Child Relationships Scale", and "School-Social Behavior Scale" during the data collection.

The Cronbach-Alpha coefficient of the Teacher-Child Relationships Scale adapted to Turkish by Kıldan (2008) was found as .90, Spearman Brown Split Half Correlation was found as .86, total item correlation was calculated as between .35 and .69, and the factor loadings were between .42 and .75. In the adaptation study by Yukay-Yüksel (2009) of the School-Social Behavior Scale developed by Kenneth W. Merrell in 1993; the scale was found to have a strong reliability. After the item-total and item-remainder analyses, it was revealed that the correlation coefficients for “Social Efficacy Scale” was found between  $r=.88$  and  $r=.44$ , while it was found between  $r=.92$  and  $r=.42$  for “Negative Social Behaviors Scale”. Internal consistency of the scale is calculated in separation for two scales and each subscale of these two scales. The results were found as statistical significant in  $p<.001$  level. Cronbach  $\alpha$ , Spearman Brown and Guttman Split-Half reliability coefficients were found as changing between  $r=.98$  and  $r=.91$ .

The data collected in this study were analyzed through SPSS 20 package program. As the variables are not normally distributed, in the investigation of the differences between groups Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis-H tests were utilized. Since the unit numbers are more than 20 standardized z values are given for Mann Whitney U Test. In case of finding significant differences in the Kruskal Wallis-H Test, Post-Hoc Multiple Comparison Test is used in determining the differing groups. In the analysis of the variables which are not normally distributed Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient was utilized. In the interpretation of the results the significance level was determined as 0,01 and 0,05; in case of  $p<0,01$  or  $p<0,05$  a significant relationship could be mentioned whereas in case of  $p>0,05$  it was indicated as being no significant relationship.

## FINDINGS

### Results of the Scores of School-Social Behavior Scale

The relationship between the scores of the School-Social Behavior Scale and gender, number of siblings an ability to use Turkish variables was investigated. Mann Whitney U Test is utilized for gender variable. On the other hand, Kruskal Wallis H Test is utilized for parents’ level of education, number of siblings, and ability to use Turkish variables. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1-4.

**Table 1. Mann Whitney U Test results of School-Social Behavior Scale scores in terms of child’s gender**

Child’s gender	Mann Whitney U Test						
	The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale				The scores of negative social behavior in school sub-scale		
	N	Mean	z	p	Mean	z	p
Boy	131	120,07			151,04		
Girl	141	151,76	-3,321	<b>*0,001</b>	122,99	-2,946	<b>**0,003</b>
Total	272						

**\*\*p<0,01**

There is a statistically significant difference in terms of social efficacy in school scale about children’s gender ( $p<0,01$ ). The boy children’s social efficacy in school sub-scale scores are significantly lower than the girls.

**Table 2. Kruskal Wallis H Test results of School-Social Behavior Scale scores in terms of number of siblings**

Number of siblings including the child	Kruskal Wallis H Test						
	The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale				The scores of negative social behavior in school sub-scale		
	N	Mean	H	P	Mean	H	p
1-2 siblings	65	99,18			91,11		
3-4 siblings	70	92,51	4,872	0,087	90	0,058	0,972
5+ siblings	46	77,14			92,37		
Total	181						

In terms of the scores of School-Social Behavior Scale’s both sub-scales there is no statistically significant relationship about the number of siblings (p>0,05).

**Table 3. Kruskal Wallis H Test results in terms of school-social behavior scale scores and the ability to use Turkish**

The ability to use Turkish when the children started the school	Kruskal Wallis H Test						
	The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale				The scores of negative social behavior in school sub-scale		
	N	Mean	H	P	Mean	H	p
The child could not use the language at all (1)	33	83,61			148,92		
The child did not have good command of the language; but, s/he could use it (2)	89	111,49	40,188	<b>**0,001</b>	147,88		
The child could use the language effectively in consistent with his/her developmental stages (3)	149	162,24			126,04	5,375	0,068
Total	271		Paired comparisons: 1- 3 2-3				

**\*\*p<0,01**

There is a statistically significant difference in terms of social efficacy in school sub-scale scores and the ability to use Turkish when a child started preschool education (p<0,01). The social efficacy in school sub-scale scores of children who could not use the language at all and the ones who did not have a good command of the language are significantly lower than the scores of children who could use the language in consistent with their developmental stages. There is no statistically significant difference between the scores of negative social behavior in school sub-scale and ability to use Turkish (p>0,05).

**Table 4. Kruskal Wallis H Test results in terms of the relation between school-social behavior scale scores and parents' level of education**

Parents' level of education		Kruskal Wallis H Test							
		The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale				The scores of negative social behavior in school sub-scale			
		n	Mean	H	P	Mean	H	P	
Mother's level of education	Illiterate (1)	99	114,09			143,6			
	Literate-Primary school graduate (2)	98	145,98			138,84			
	Secondary school graduate (3)	26	142,06	14,695	<b>*0,005</b>	138,56	5,941	0,204	
	High school graduate (4)	39	154,87			108,76			
	University graduate (5)	10	179,35			146,15			
Total		272	Paired comparisons: 1- 2						
Father's Level of Education	Illiterate (1)	27	98,72			131,89			
	Literate- Primary school graduate (2)	134	130,07			147,09			
	Secondary school graduate (3)	33	145,48	14,865	<b>*0,005</b>	141,41	7,083	0,132	
	High school graduate (4)	54	148,21			118,41			
	University graduate (5)	24	176,17			116,54			
Total		272	Paired Comparisons: 1-5						

**\*p<0.05**

There is a statistically significant difference in terms of social efficacy in school sub-scale about mother's level of education ( $p<0,05$ ). The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale were significantly lower in children whose mothers are illiterate compared to the children whose mothers are literate/primary school graduate. There is a statistically significant difference in terms of social efficacy in school sub-scale about father's level of education ( $p<0,05$ ). The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale were significantly lower in children whose fathers are illiterate compared to the children whose fathers are university graduate. There is no statistically significant difference between the scores of negative social behavior school sub-scale and parents' level of education ( $p>0,05$ ).



## Findings and Interpretation about the Relationship between Teacher-Student Relationships and Social Adjustment to the School

**Table 5. The results of correlation test between the scores of Teacher-Student Relationships Scale and the scores of the sub-scales of School-Social Behavior Scale**

	Social adjustment to the school	
	The scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale	The scores of negative social behavior in school sub-scale
The scores of teacher-student relationships scale	<b>r</b> <b>0,649</b>	<b>-0,521</b>
	<b>p</b> 0,001	0,001
	<b>n</b> 272	272

There is a statistically significant relationship between the scores of teacher-child relationships scale and Social Efficacy in School sub-dimension of School Social Behavior Scale, though it is not strong, it is a positive relationship ( $r=0,649$ ). As the scores of teacher-child relationship increase, the social efficacy in school sub-dimension's scores also increase. There is a statistically significant relationship between the scores of teacher-child relationships scale and Negative Social Behavior in School sub-scale of School-Social Behavior Scale; this relationship is negative and not strong ( $r= -0,521$ ). As the teacher-child relationships scores increase the school social behavior sub-scale scores decrease.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There is a statistically significant difference in terms of social adjustment to the school and gender, the ability to use Turkish and parents' level of education ( $p>0,05$ ).

Males' scores of social efficacy in school sub-dimension is significantly lower compared to the females ( $p<0,01$ ). On the other hand, females' scores of negative social behavior in school is significantly lower than males ( $p<0,01$ ). The child-care attitudes of the society differ according to the gender of children. It may be asserted that the fact that these differing attitudes of the society and the response the attitude that males and females face in case of a negative behavior may be the reason behind these results. The female children were attributed the well-adjusted and cooperative person roles, and when they show these behaviors it is appreciated more. The fact that female children's positive behaviors reinforced more than male children's may be the reason behind female children's showing more positive social behaviors than male children. In our society, the aggressive behaviors, use of force, and use of slang and impolite expressions of male children are tolerated more. However, when female children behave in this way they face embarrassment in society. These results are in congruent with the literature. In a study conducted by Blankemeyer et al. (2002), the social efficacy and school adjustment levels of children differed in favor of female children and male children were observed to be more aggressive in school compared to females. In their study Aktaş-Özkafacı (2012) and Tatlı (2014) found out that the social skills and efficacies of female and male children significantly differed in favor of female children. Kotil (2010), Kandır and Orcan (2011), Ayvalı (2012), and Dirlık (2014) revealed that female children's social adjustment levels were higher compared to male children. Seven (2007), and Taner-Derman and Başal (2013) concluded in their study that male children exhibit more social behavior problems compared to females. The study conducted by Özbey and Alisinanoğlu (2009) revealed that problematic behaviors in male children are more frequent than females. Ural et al. (2015) concluded that male children exhibit more anger and aggression. Karaca et

al. (2011) revealed in their study that male children exhibit more physical aggression compared to females. Başaran et al. (2014) concluded that it is mostly male children who experienced school adjustment problems. It can be asserted that female children's social adjustment levels in school are higher than males'.

Social efficacy sub-scale scores of the children who could not use Turkish at all or the ones who could use the language but did not have good command of the language when they start school is significantly lower when compared to the scores of children who could use the language effectively in consistent with their developmental stages ( $p < 0,01$ ). On the other hand, in terms of negative social behavior sub-scale scores' relationship with the ability to use language; there is no significant difference ( $p > 0,05$ ). The limited ability to use language is accepted as an indicator of communication skills which is one of the social skills. In this case, an individual's positive social behaviors in school will be limited compared to others. An individual who cannot use the language cannot also show the following behaviors; greeting, starting a speech and sustaining, thanking, and asking for help. Moreover, even if the children do not possess the ability to use language they may participate in their peers' games; cooperate and collaborate; and communicate. This situation may lead to the children's perceiving themselves as a member of the group, and show similar characteristics with their peers in terms of negative social behaviors in school. Senemoğlu (1989) indicated that language development has an important effect on a child's cognitive, emotional, social, developments as well as it has an important place in the socialization. Language is a strong tie between a child and society. A child's healthy completion of his/her language development enables him/her to become more successful in his/her future life (Kol, 2011). In their study Özyürek and Ceylan (2014), indicated that a limited vocabulary knowledge poses problems in a child's gaining social skills. According to Yazıcı (2011) humans express their thoughts and emotions in the language that they are most proficient, children express their thoughts and opinions in their native language best. Yazıcı (2011) added that some precautions need to be taken for children living in a bilingual and bicultural environment.

The social efficacy in school sub-scale scores of children whose mothers are illiterate is significantly lower than those whose mothers are literate-primary school graduates ( $p < 0,05$ ). The social efficacy in school sub-scale scores of children whose fathers are illiterate is significantly lower than those whose fathers are university graduates ( $p < 0,05$ ). In terms of negative social behavior in school sub-scale, there is no statistically significant difference among parents' level of education ( $p > 0,05$ ). Findings about both mothers' and fathers' level of education lead to think that illiterate parents are less sufficient in helping their child gain social skills. High level of education, especially university education, is a factor that develops person's social skills and interpersonal relations. Therefore, the high level of parents' social skills may lead them to become models for their children in terms of social skills. This may be reflected in the children's social behaviors in school. The illiterate parents' being more unconscious in supporting their children's social skills, having limited time to spend time and take care of their children as a result of working longer hours in unqualified jobs may have resulted in children's showing limited positive social behaviors in school. Again their job may cause stress in these parents. It is indicated in Gutermunth-Anthony et al. (2005) that the stress level of parents affects children's social efficacy in the classroom. Similar to the present study Günindi (2008) also concluded that as the education level of parents increase children's social adjustments and skills increase as well. The low education level of parents may be considered to cause parents' remaining insufficient in helping their children gain social skills and children's showing negative behaviors mostly. But whatever their education level are parents use different discipline methods. Parents behaviors to discipline the children may have resulted in the children's showing negative social behavior near the adults. This



may be the reason why the children's negative social behaviors in school did not differ while their parents' level of education was different. In a study by Ünsal (2010), children's mean scores of Preschool Behavior Problems Survey Questionnaire did not reveal significant differences in terms of mothers' level of education. In another study Şen (2009) children's relational aggression behavior did not reveal significant differences in terms of parent's level of education. Yaşar-Ekici (2014) concluded that there is not a relationship between preschool children's problem behaviors and fathers' level of education.

When the two sub-scales are investigated in terms of school adjustment; there is no statistically significant difference in terms of the number of siblings ( $p>0,05$ ). Having a sibling, and participation of a new individual to the family is an important event that affects a child's life. Children with siblings can be thought as being more sharing and cooperative and accordingly they show more well-adjusted social behaviors. However, children who do not have a sibling, or have a small number of siblings may experience sharing and cooperation in social environments such as playgrounds. This may have caused the children with siblings and the ones without siblings to show similar social behaviors in school. Children who have siblings may be expected to show negative social behaviors at home and in school since they perceive their siblings as rivals. However, parents' behaviors such as fulfilling the child's needs and showing enough interest though there is a new child may prevent the possible negative social behaviors. Similar to our study Bilek (2011) found that there is no significant relationship between the number of siblings and social skills in the school environment. Tatlı (2014) determined that children with or without siblings have similar social skills. Vaizoğlu (2008) found that the number of siblings does not result in significant difference in social behavior scores of children. Günalp (2007) revealed that there is no significant relationship between the number of siblings and social adjustment, social maladjustment, and limited social adjustment. Alisanoğlu and Kesicioğlu (2010) found that there is no significant relationship between the number of siblings and behavior problems. Ünsal (2010) found no significant relationship between the number of siblings and mean scores of Preschool Behavior Problems Survey Questionnaire. According to Şen's (2009) study, there is no significant relationship between the number of siblings and children's open/physical aggression. Yaşar-Ekici (2014) found out that there is no significant relationship between the number of siblings and problem behaviors of preschool children.

There is a statistically significant relationship between teacher-child relationships scale and social efficacy in school sub-scale scores ( $r=0,649$ ). As the scores of teacher-child relationships scale increase the scores of social efficacy in school sub-scale also increase. There is a statistically significant relationship between negative social behaviors in school sub-scale scores and teacher-child relationships scale scores ( $r= -0,521$ ). As the scores of teacher-child relationships scale increase, the scores of negative social behaviors in school sub-scale decrease. As the scores of teacher-child relationships sub-scale increase, children's social adjustment to school levels increases as well. Positive relationships with teacher may lead the children to adopt the teacher's values and the rules easier. Children who have a positive relationship with their teachers may have a tendency towards showing their adoption of the rules they encounter in school. This situation may have caused them to show more positive behaviors, and prevented the negative social behaviors. AT the same time children's having a high level of social adjustment to school, may result in the teachers' showing more positive attitude towards these children and establishing more positive relationships with them. The study by Blankemeyer et al. (2002) revealed that there is a positive relationship between both female and male children's positive relationships with their teachers and their adjustment to school. Tatlı (2014) concluded that as the relationship between the teacher and children, the social skills of children also increase. Demirkaya (2013) found out that as

children's social skills increase their relationships with teachers get closer. The findings of Demirkaya's (2014) study revealed that there is a positive relationship between the problematic behaviors and conflicting teacher-student relationship and the problematic behaviors are a strong predictor for teacher-student relationship. Again similar to these findings Runions et al (2014) determined that the aggressive behaviors of kindergarten children are related to conflicting teacher-child relationship. Gülay-Ogelman et al. (2015) revealed that as the preschool teachers get closer to 5-6 years old children, children's social behaviors with an aim of helping others significantly increase; as the conflict between teacher and children increase children's social behaviors with an aim of helping others decreased.

The quality of teacher-child relationship has an effect on children's social behaviors in school. There is a need for a more qualified teacher-child relationship for increasing the positive social behaviors of children in school and decreasing their negative social behaviors. Therefore, communication and classroom management courses can be increased in the teacher training curricula. In-service training programs for teachers about teacher-child relationships can be organized. In this study, the effect of teacher-child relationship on social adjustment in school is investigated. Besides this, the effect of teacher-child relationship on children's life out of school can also be investigated. Children's ability to use Turkish is determined according to teachers' reports. The relationship between children's language development levels and social adjustment to the school can be investigated. Administering the scales used in this study; the change at the end of a year and relationship between teacher-child relationship and school-social adjustment can be investigated.

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