

A Research on the Perspective Taking Skill and the Social Behaviour of Six-Year-Old Girls and Boys

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Abstract: This research has been conducted in order to compare the perspective taking skills and the social behaviour of girls and boys attending the nursery school and to determine whether there is a relationship between the perspective taking skill and social behaviour or not. One hundred and seventy-five children at the age of six and from three different nursery schools were included in the research, in which the Perspective Taking Test and the Behaviour Rating Scale were used. The results revealed that the perceptual and cognitive perspective taking skills differ according to gender; but in terms of cooperation and social relations, there is not a significant difference between girls and boys. It was also determined that while there is not a significant relationship between the dimensions of the perspective taking skill and social behaviour, there is a connection between the cognitive and emotional perspective taking skills and between cooperation and social relations.

Key words: Social behaviour, perspective-taking skills, behaviour rating scale, cognitive, perceptual, research

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is one of the important elements of communication. It has the property of facilitating the communication in human relations in daily life. Being understood by others and feeling that he is cared for make one feel good about himself. Empathy development starts forming in the childhood. The perspective taking skill, which is important in the process of empathising, is the ability to understand a situation from another person's point of view. A child's understanding the position of others is important in acquiring perspective taking skills. Perspective taking can be defined as the ability to comprehend others' thoughts, emotions and verbal and visual perspectives about the world simultaneously (Davis 1983; Qung *et al.*, 2002; Kasari *et al.*, 2003).

Perspective taking skills can be examined in the dimensions of cognitive perspective taking, perceptual perspective taking and emotional perspective taking. Cognitive perspective taking means being aware of what the other person is thinking. Perceptual perspective taking is realizing the other person's point of view and emotional perspective taking is being aware of the feelings that the other person is experiencing. The child starts to acquire the perspective taking skill in the early childhood years and it has an important place in the child's relationship with his environment (Stray and Roberts, 2004; Poole *et al.*, 2005; Oguz, 2006).

The environment the child lives in and the relationship he establishes with it has a certain quality and there is a direct relationship between this quality and the reflection of such relationships onto his life. The chances presented to the child by the environment that he lives in can be influential in his gaining the perspective taking skill. The foundations of personality are built in childhood. The habits gained in the early years of life affect the personality and behaviour in adulthood. In developing his own perceptions, thoughts and attitudes and in making evaluations about his own abilities and capacities, the role of the child's social life and interaction is as important as his personality structure (Strayer and Roberts, 2004; Eklund, 2006). Therefore, in order to meet his biological and social needs, the child endeavors to harmonize with the physical and social environment throughout his life. The first harmonization effort made by the child starts between his mother and himself as a baby as soon as he is born. Then, it continues at school with his friends and at further ages, in the social institutions. Social development is one of the most important processes in a child's development. Although this process starts right after the birth and continues all through a person's life, the kinds of behaviour which a person is affected by become evident particularly in the early childhood (Cakmakli, 1991; Akin, 2002).

Children in the preschool period learn to play together with both the children at the same age and those

who are younger or older and to obtain what they want without harming any other individuals when their wishes conflict with others'. Thus, while developing appropriate social behaviour, they acquire the perspective taking skill, which has an important role in establishing relationships with other people (Strayer and Roberts, 2004; Eklund, 2006). Accordingly, it can be asserted that the experience of children with individuals at different age groups will contribute to their socialization and development of communication skills. To this end, this study aimed at examining the perspective taking skills and the social behaviour of six-year-old girls and boys.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The research was carried out in kindergartens affiliated to the Ministry of Education, in the province of Ankara. One hundred and seventy-five children at the age of six and from three different kindergartens, namely from Yıldırım Beyazıt Kindergartens, Cumhuriyet Kindergartens and Çiğiltepe Kindergartens, were selected by the random sampling method and included in the research.

Procedure: In the research, the Perspective Taking Test, which was developed by Şener (1996) in order to assess the perspective taking skills of children and whose validity and reliability study was conducted by Akın (2002) and the Behaviour Rating Scale (Ozguven, 1992), developed by Özgüven in order to assess the social behaviour of children, was applied. The perspective taking skills of children were evaluated in perceptual, cognitive and emotional perspective taking dimensions, while their social behaviour was evaluated in cooperation and social relations dimensions. In the Perceptual Perspective Taking Test, two round foam rubber cushions with the face of the Mickey Mouse on them are used. In the Emotional Perspective Taking Test, the child is shown four picture cards describing happy, sad, scared and angry facial expressions and is asked to define each emotional situation; and in the Cognitive Perspective Taking Test, the child is shown a series of picture cards describing a child climbing an apple tree while being chased by a dog; and asked to create a story about the event.

At the application stage, appropriate days to apply the tests on children were chosen by the teacher and the process of application was carried out in a silent and comfortable environment where children's attention would not be distracted. The tests were applied individually on each child and presented as a game. Separate scores for the three dimensions were obtained

regarding the perspective taking skill. The increase in the scores received from each dimension indicates the increase in the perspective taking skill of the child in that dimension.

The Behaviour Rating Scale consists of 40 items, 20 of which are in the cooperation sub-scale and the other twenty items are in the social relations sub-scale. The items involve the behaviour of children that can be frequently observed in a daily nursery school programme. The evaluation of the behaviour of children regarding their cooperation and social relations is carried out by the teacher.

Analysis: The data relating to the research were tested through the One Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) and the Pearson Correlation test and the results have been presented in the tables in the findings section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ANOVA results regarding the perspective taking skills and the social behaviour of the children participated in the research are presented in Table 1 and 2; and the relationship between the perspective taking skills and the social behaviour dimensions are presented in Table 3.

When the average scores related to the perspective taking skill in Table 1 are examined, it is observed that the scores on the perceptual (mean=3.88) and the emotional (mean = 3.49) perspective taking skills of the boys are higher than those of the girls. On the cognitive perspective taking skill, on the other hand, the scores of the girls are higher (mean=2.46).

The results of the variance analysis revealed that gender causes a significant difference in the scores related to perceptual perspective taking skills [$F_{(1-173)} = 6.288, p < .05$] and cognitive perspective taking skills [$F_{(1-173)} = 6.707, p < .05$].

Empathy is the kind of behaviour that an individual starts to learn in the early childhood. Children are oriented towards taking roles or imagining the reaction that another person may show in a certain situation and play accordingly. This develops in parallel with the cognitive and perceptual development. Children attending kindergartens develop their skills for establishing communication and start to learn about others' emotions with the help of the programmes applied; and communication skills influence the perceptual and the cognitive perspective taking skills of the child. Hence, it can be asserted that the experience (drama studies, book reading, playing, etc.) that the child attending a kindergartens has gone through at school can support his cognitive and perceptual perspective taking skills

Table 1: Variance analysis results related to the perspective taking skills dimensions of the children based on gender

		Perspective taking skill					
		Perceptual		Emotional		Cognitive	
	n	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Girls	96	3.69	.59	3.47	.75	2.46	.66
Boys	79	3.88	.35	3.49	.75	2.13	1.00
Total	175	3.78	.51	3.48	.74	2.32	.85
Variance analysis results	df	Mean square	F	p	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	1	1.534	6.288	.013**	9.117	.016	.889
Within groups	173	.244			.702		
Total	174						

Table 2: Variance analysis results related to the social behaviour of the children based on gender

		Social behaviour					
		Cooperation		Social relations			
Gender	n	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Girls	96	83.82	12.62	83.98	15.71		
Boys	79	80.40	13.66	81.21	17.40		
Total	175	82.28	13.17	82.73	16.43		
Variance Analysis Results	df	Mean Square	F	p	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	1	506.252	2.949	0.088	333.577	1.236	0.268
Within Groups	173	171.659			269.863		
Total	174						

Table 3: The relationship between the perspective taking skills and the social behaviour of the children participated in the research

	Cooperation	Social relations	Perceptual	Emotional	Cognitive
	r	r	r	r	r
Cooperation	-	.734**	-.019	-0.074	0.071
Social Relations	.734**	-	-.049	-0.003	0.062
Perceptual	-.019	-.049	-	0.099	-0.092
Emotional	-.074	-.003	.099	-	-.164*
Cognitive	.071	.062	-.092	-.164*	-

(Oguz, 2006; Koksall, 1997). Moreover, the fact that girls have received a higher score from the cognitive perspective taking skill test suggests that girls are brought up to be more sensitive about being aware of others' thoughts.

When the average scores related to the social behaviour in Table 2 are examined, it is observed that the scores on both the cooperation (mean=83.82) and the social relations (mean=83.98) dimensions of the girls are higher than those of the boys. However, the variance analysis results indicate that the gender of children does not cause a significant difference in their average cooperation and social relations scores [cooperation $F_{(1,173)}=2.949$, $p>.05$, social relations $F_{(1,173)}=1.236$, $p>.05$].

Whereas, in a study conducted on children at the age of 5-6, Çimen and Baran^[13] found that the average social development scores of the girls are higher, in another study carried out by Strayer and Roberts^[4], it was established that gender did not have a significant influence on the results related to social behaviour.

As can be seen in Table 3, there is not a significant level of relationship between the scores received from the dimensions of the perspective taking skills and the dimensions of social behaviour ($p>.05$). Yet, regarding the social behaviour, there is a significant relationship at a level of .01 between the scores of cooperation and social

relations ($p<.01$). In the perspective taking skills, on the other hand, a relationship at a level of .05 was determined between the emotional and cognitive perspective taking skills of the children ($p<.05$).

Social behaviour such as cooperation, helping one another and being able to establish positive relations with peers result in more acceptance by the society. During their preschool life, children learn to be together with other adults with different attitudes and behaviour from the adults in their families. The child improves his social development by being together with more experienced individuals. The relations of children with their peers have an important role in early years. In the environment of playing games in preschool institutions, the child starts to become an individual by means of the relations in the group and learns to be a person who obeys the rules and who can share, cooperate and take responsibilities (Mize and Ladd, 1990; Verba, 1994).

Empathy plays an important role in the social development of the child. Understanding the experience and thoughts and feeling the emotional situation of others ensure that the child is more successful in social relations (Stray and Roberts, 2004). In the preschool period, however, the process of acquiring the perspective taking skill, which is the basis of empathy skills, still continues. In the light of the findings obtained, it is believed that

children's ability of establishing stronger social relations will improve as their emotional and cognitive perspective taking skills develop more.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at examining the social behaviour and the perspective taking skills of six-year-old girls and boys. The results of the research showed that while the gender of the children did not cause a significant difference in the scores obtained from cooperation and social relations scores, it did so in the scores obtained from the dimensions related to emotional and cognitive perspective taking skills. It was also determined that there was not a significant relationship between the perspective taking skill and the social behaviour, but a significant relationship between the cooperation and social relations scores existed.

The perspective taking skill is an important component of empathising and one starts to acquire it in the early years of his life. In order for a child to be empathetic in human relations in future, it is important to create a medium oriented to make him acquire the perspective taking skill in his early years. Therefore, through various activities introduced in educational institutes starting from the preschool years, the child should be provided with opportunities in which he can put himself in the place of another and understand the other's thoughts and feelings. In the preschool period, the social experience chances supplied for the child should be increased and various education mediums, in which the child can cooperate with his peers and which include mutual activities oriented towards helping one another and sharing, must be planned. Children must often be given the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts in their relations with their peers. The social behaviour of children must be supported, starting from the communication skill existing in the child and decreasing the negative conditions of his social environment to minimum.

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