

# Investigation of Communication Abilities of Roma and Non-Roma Mothers and School Readiness Levels of their Children

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## Abstract

*This study examines the effects of Roma and non-Roma mothers' communication skills on their five-to six-year-old children's school readiness levels. The research is based on causative comparative scanning model. 30 Roma and 30 non-Roma mothers and their five-to six-year-old children who do not attend preschool and live in Konya city centre are included in the study. Communication Skills Assessment Scale and Metropolitan School Readiness Test are used, while the data were assessed by Mann Whitney U-Test as well as Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Test. Study results indicate that regarding communication skills of Roma and non-Roma mothers have a significant difference. It is also observed that in terms of children's vocabulary, sentences, general knowledge, matching, tracing, numbers, reading readiness and general school readiness, there are significant differences based on one's being Roma or non-Roma. Furthermore, it is determined that the total relationship between communication skills of both Roma and non-Roma mothers and their children's school readiness levels is high, significant and positive.*

**Keywords:** Roma, school readiness, communication skills, preschool period

## 1. Introduction

Covering many critical periods of children until they start school, preschool period is a period when development speed is very high. Supporting children in this period provides positive contribution to their development and their school success (Demiral, 1989; Erkan & Kırca, 2010). Including cognitive, socio-emotional and language progress of children, early development has an important influence on the school success and readiness for school (Hair et al. 2006; Carscadden et al. 2010). During this period, it is important for the adults, in particular, mothers to know how they should spend time with their children in the most efficient and effective way, instead of focusing on the amount of time they spend with their children (Erdoğan, Şimşek Bekir & Erdoğan Aras, 2005).

In the early period, mothers are the closest persons with regard to training of children and fulfillment of their requirements (Gordon, 1993). It is known that healthy communication between mothers and their children has positive effects on child development (Kreppner, 1996). In particular, during the early years, mother should know development features, requirements and abilities of the child and act sensitively with regard to this (Kandır, 2004). This is possible only if mothers communicate with their children clearly and effectively. Relationships between the mother and father must be healthy, so that efficient and clear communication can be ensured in the family. Warm and healthy relations between the mother and father will have reflections on relations with their children and such relations will play an important role in developing positive attitudes and behaviors towards the children. Amenable relations between the mother and father help the parents to develop consistent, accepting and loving attitudes towards their children. Healthy and efficient communication can be established if mothers and fathers approach their children with love, compassion and care (Çağdaş, 2002). According to the research of Diaz (1989), support and care of mother and father is an important factor in academic success of children. In addition, it is stated that rigor, inconsistency and incompatibility of the father and mother is an important risk factor in low school success.

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The situation of “starting the school as ready to learn” is combined with two different concepts (being ready to learn and being ready for school) with a single purpose. Being ready to learn is considered as “development level of the person that the person is ready to cope with learning through special materials” and the concept of school readiness is based on the view of being ready to learn in accordance with physical, mental and social development standard which enables the children to fulfill the requirements of school and internalize curriculum program of the school (Kagan, 1990). School readiness can be defined as the child’s compliance with the school and environment and being ready to read-write when the child starts primary education (Cinkılıç, 2009).

The education given to child during preschool term is an important process in preparing the child for basic education. Today, preschool education organizations are found unsatisfactory in providing education to children in preschool period on their own. First of all, mothers, fathers, other adults related to child, as well as future mothers and fathers should be informed of early child development. In this frame, it becomes necessary to analyze school maturities of children, as well as communication abilities of mothers in Roma families, who have a very important function. From this view, it is intended to determine whether or not communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers have effect on school readiness levels of children at the age of five-six, and to deliver solution recommendations in line with the results.

## 2. Method

Model of this study is relational screening among general screening models. The research covers Roma and non-Roma mothers and their children of five-six ages who don’t attend any preschool education organization living at BosnaHersek quarter in Selçuklu, as well as YeniMahalle in Karatay, Konya. The study is based on voluntariness. In line with the information received from mukhtars (local authority), 30 non-Roma mothers with similar qualifications were included in the study, in addition to 30 Roma mothers. Upon consent of their parents, children of the same mothers were included in the study as well, who were at the age of 5-6 and who did not attend any preschool education organization (60 children: 30 Roma children and 30 non-Roma children). 64.7% of Roma mothers included in the research was illiterate, while 36.6% of them were mothers at and below the age of 25. On the other hand, 96.7% of non-Roma mothers were primary school graduate and all of them were at and above the age of 26. Concerning Roma children, 16% of them were female and 14% of them were male. Concerning non-Roma children, 14% of them were female and 16% of them were male, while all of the children in both of the groups did not receive preschool education.

In the research, Personal Information Form, Scale for Evaluation of Communication Abilities, and Metropolitan School Readiness Test were used. Scale for Evaluation of Communication Abilities is a 5 point likert scale and it consists of 25 expressions. Test repetition reliability factor of the scale is .76, while alfa value is .80 (Korkut, 1996). Scale for Evaluation of Communication Abilities was implemented with mothers on individual and face-to-face basis, in a silent environment.

Metropolitan School Readiness Test was adapted to Turkish by Oktay in 1980, in order to measure the features that will enable new starters (to school) become ready for the first grade, and to measure the success of the same. Metropolitan School Readiness Test consists of six aspects including sub-aspects of understanding of words (19 articles), understanding of sentences (14 articles), general information (14 articles), matching (19 articles), numbers (24 articles) and copying (10 articles). Interrelations of sub-aspects of the test, as well as their relations with general readiness and reading readiness were analyzed and obtained correlation factors varied between 0.17 and 0.94. Concerning the application, each of the sub-tests consists of images that the child can mark or copy according to the instruction given by the researcher verbally. The test is applied individually and the application takes approximately 20 minutes

for each child. “1” point is given for each right answer (Oktay, 1983). Tests were applied individually and in a silent environment, in order to ensure that mothers and children are not affected by each other. “Kolmogorov-Smirnov (k-s) Test” was used to analyze whether or not the data comply with normal distribution. Considering the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (k-s) Test, it was identified that school readiness points of children and communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers did not show normal distribution. As obtained data did not show normal distribution, Mann Whitney U-test was used to analyze school readiness levels of children and communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers for two unrelated samples among non-parametric statistics. On the other hand, “Pearson Correlation Factor Test” was used for the analysis of relationship between communication abilities of mothers and school readiness of children (Büyüköztürk, 2008).

### 3. Findings and Discussions

Findings, which are provided below, are obtained with the study that was carried out in order to determine the effects of communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers on school readiness levels of children at the age of five-six.

Considering the Table 1, it is seen that averages of communication ability points of Roma mothers ( $\bar{X}$  =40.23) was lower than averages of communication ability points of non Roma mothers ( $\bar{X}$  =78.83). This demonstrates a significant difference between communication ability point averages of Roma and non-Roma mothers at ( $p<.01$ ) level. In their study, Asoodeh et al. (2011) tried to determine successful family communication from the perspective of happy couples. Following the research, it was concluded that successful couples could solve their problems, that they had a mutual approach with regard to financial matters and expenditures, that they spend their free time with their families, that they maintain a good friendship with each other and that they respect each other.

**Table 1. Results of Mann Whitney U-Test with regard to communication ability points of Roma and non-Roma mothers**

	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	Line average	Line total	U	P
Mother's communication ability	Roma mother	30	40.23	4.54	15.50	465.00	.000	.000*
	non-Roma mother	30	78.83	9.56	45.50	1365.00		

*Significance is searched at the level of  $p<.05$ .*

Communication abilities are generally low for families of which socio-economic level is low, because of following factors: they live in rural areas or suburbs of cities, their education level is low, they have many children, and, in particular in different social groups, the mother is under stress due to several reasons such as poverty, conflicts in the family etc. (Erden&Akman, 2004). In the light of this information, communication abilities of mothers are affected by socio-economic level, education status and life conditions. Therefore, it is believed that bad life conditions of Romamothers affected this result.

Considering Table 2, it is identified that point averages of school readiness sub-aspects of non-Roma children were higher than point averages of Roma children. It is identified that being Roma or not creates significant difference ( $p<0.01$ ) with regard to school readiness point averages.

Roma encounter serious problems with regard to access to basic services, in particular, education of children (Costarelli, 1993). According to various researches, development of cognitive abilities of children is affected by house and learning environment, gender, number of brothers/sisters, education status of mother, sensitivity of mother, ethnical group, socio-economic and socio-cultural status of the

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family, and availability of preschool education for the child (Oktay, 1983;Yazıcı, 2002; Bagby, Rudd &Woods, 2005; Downer &Pianta, 2006; Görmez, 2007; Cinkılıç, 2009).

**Table 2.Results of Mann Whitney U-Test with regard to School Readiness Points of Roma and non-Roma children**

Sub Aspects of School Readiness	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	Line Average	Line Total	U	P
Words	Roma child	30	7.46	3.54	17.25	517.50	52.50	.000
	non-Roma child	30	14.60	1.94	43.75	1312.50		
Matching	Roma child	30	5.36	2.34	17.77	533.00	68.00	.000
	non Roma child	30	13.10	3.54	43.23	1297.00		
Sentences	Roma child	30	3.70	1.55	16.63	499.00	34.00	.000
	non Roma child	30	8.56	1.92	44.37	1331.00		
General information	Roma child	30	4.13	2.40	16.67	500.00	35.00	.000
	non Roma child	30	9.86	1.88	44.33	1330.00		
Reading	Roma child	30	20.66	8.01	16.30	489.00	24.00	.000
	non Roma child	30	46.13	8.40	44.70	1341.00		
Copying	Roma child	30	3.00	3.30	15.50	465.00	.000	.000
	non Roma child	30	6.86	3.51	45.50	1365.00		
Numbers	Roma child	30	25.56	12.35	21.87	656.00	191.0	.000
	non Roma child	30	65.53	13.80	39.13	1174.00		
Overall school readiness	Roma child	30	7.46	3.54	16.30	489.00	24.00	.000
	non Roma child	30	7.46	1.94	44.70	1341.00		

According to the research results, the environment required to prepare children for school cannot be created because of reasons such as low education and socioeconomic levels, failing to attach appropriate importance to education by Roma families etc. As school readiness points of non-Roma children are higher than those of Roma children, it can be explained by the fact that non-Roma children can better gain from physical, mental, emotional, social and environmental items compared to Roma children.

**Table 3. Results of Pearson Correlation Significance Test with Regard to the Relation between school readiness of children and communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers**

School readiness levels of children		
Communication abilities of Roma mothers	Pearson correlation	.024
	P	.901
	N	30
Communication abilities of non-Roma mothers	Pearson correlation	.120
	P	.529
	N	30
Communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers	Pearson correlation	.934
	P	.000
	N	60

Considering Table 3, it is observed that there is not any significant relation between school readiness levels of children and communication abilities of Roma ( $r=.024$ ,  $p>.01$ ) and non-Roma mothers ( $r=.120$ ,

$p > .01$ ). On the other hand, it is observed that the relation between school readiness levels of children and total communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers was of high level, positive and significant ( $r = .934$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Accordingly, it can be said that improvement of positive communication abilities of mothers can positively contribute to school readiness levels of children.

Connell and Prinz (2002) investigated the effect of family-child interaction and attendance to child care center on school readiness and social ability development of preschool children of minority families and families with low income. The research revealed that there is a positive relation between communication and cognitive ability of the child and education level of the mother. In addition, it is also revealed that cognitive and communication abilities of the child positively influence if child care is provided in early years. It is emphasized that school readiness levels of children with low income and African-American children were under risk with regard to cognitive and social development. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) examined definitions of various family behaviors such as nutrition, education and language use, as well as how researchers explained them. Researchers considered ethnic and racial variants in various behaviors. According to the research, most striking were differences in the use of language. They stated that Black and Hispanic mothers spoke less to their children during the day and they probably read less as well, compared to white mothers. In addition, they highlighted certain differences in their relations with children with regard to rigour.

Runcan, Constantineanu, Ielics and Popa (2012) analyzed the role of communication in family-child interaction. According to the research, parents who received high points on family-child interaction variant preferred talking to their children instead of advising, they avoided saying things that may hurt their children, they listened to their children carefully, encouraged their children to talk, express their emotions and opinions and they avoided talking loudly.

As it can be understood from findings of the research, several factors are efficient on school readiness levels of children and communication abilities of mothers. Main factors are low education level of mother, poverty, problems arising from traditional culture, mothers' having insufficient knowledge regarding child development and education, mothers' not having knowledge on how to communicate with their children, or mothers' lacking of healthy communication abilities.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Following the research, it was identified that communication ability points of non-Roma mothers were significantly higher than those of Roma mothers. Significant differences were determined in favor of non-Roma children with regard to words, matching, sentences, general information, reading readiness, copying, numbers and overall school readiness. On the other hand, the relation between school readiness levels of children and communication abilities of Roma and non-Roma mothers was at high level, positive and relevant.

According to these findings, it is thought that following recommendations can contribute to creating equal opportunities in education, that the process according with which school would be easier for children through support that will be provided to disadvantageous Roma mothers and their children in the preschool term, and that it would positively contribute to academic success of children.

It is recommended to:

- First of all, to provide reading & writing and vocational courses to Roma mothers
- Educate Roma mothers in mother-child communication and development fields of children with regard to the preschool term
- Prepare, implement and maintain special involvement programs related to preparedness to school, for Roma children and mothers

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- To encourage teachers and managers working at schools located in Roma quarters to provide supportive courses on Roma culture which will ensure that children attend school.

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