

Examination of the Social and Emotional Learning Skills of Adolescents in the 6th, 7th, and 8th Grades on the Basis of Certain Variables

By

Ender Durualp

Assistant Professor, School of Health, Department of Child Development,
Cankiri Karatekin University

Abstract

The objective of the research is to examine the social and emotional learning skills of the adolescents in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades on the basis of certain variables. The population of the research consists of the students attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classes in the secondary schools under the Ministry of National Education in the provincial center of Çankırı. The sampling is composed by 521 students attending İsmet İnönü Secondary School. The data were collected with the "Special Emotional Learning Skills Scale" developed by Kabakçı (2006). Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used in the data analysis. It was observed that 50.9% of the adolescents were female and 49.1% were male; 26.5% were in the 6th grade, 36.7% were in the 7th grade, and 36.9% were in the 8th grade, and the average age of the participants was 12.80±0.95. The analyses revealed that the adolescents who have a brother or a sister, whose academic success grading is "very good" and whose mother is a high school graduate have higher social and emotional learning grades on average ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords: social emotional learning skills, adolescent, socio-demographic variables

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. During this period, individuals go through a time of rapid growth, make academic and professional decisions, identity develops, orientation towards the future begins, and the expectations from families and school increase. From the perspective of the psycho-social development of adolescents, it is seen that they are required to adjust to the emotional problems they encounter. In a new development phase, adolescents are faced with physical, emotional, social, and educational problems (Gueldner & Merrell, 2011). These problems can be solved by an increase in their academic success and also by improving their social and emotional learning skills. Social and emotional learning affect children's and adolescents' non-academic social and emotional development, as well as their academic performance and life-long learning (Elias, 2006). Social emotional learning is a child's ability to express him/herself, control his/her emotions, and be at peace and in harmony with him/herself and the surroundings (Gander & Gardiner, 2007). Therefore, it is important to support children's and adolescents' social and academic development in addition to their academic development. Variables such as the child's personality, gender, maturity, age, intelligence, number of siblings, birth order, family size, socioeconomic-cultural status, language, participation in social activities, relations with friends, and parents' attitude to child rearing all influence his/her social emotional development. Hence, importance should be attached to the child's social emotional development in the family and at school (Fredericks, 2003; Ünver, 2004).

The ability to achieve proficiency in recognizing and managing emotions is critical for an individual's social success in family, school, and professional life. School is the most suitable environment after family where one can learn about the appropriate social behaviors. It is more common to meet academic, social, and emotional needs at school. In this regard, it is important to improve social emotional skills so that children can establish strong and positive peer relations, have more academic success, and strengthen

their relations with families (Denham & Brown, 2011; Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2006; Kress et al., 2004). According to Humpreys (1999), there are certain features that need to be taken into consideration for a child to feel strong from an emotional and behavioral perspective. These features are as follows: unconditional love, approving behavior, giving value, appraising the child's efforts, supporting his/her characteristics, effective listening, having understanding, sharing his/her feelings, creating opportunities suitable for the child's age so that s/he can assume responsibilities, letting the child express him/herself, and being kind to the child.

It is quite important that the social and emotional development of children be supported from the moment they start to socialize and establish communication with their surroundings. Thus, it will be easier for the child to make friends, share, control him/herself, and all these will have a positive effect on a wide range of areas from the child's academic success to his/her sense of self (Elias, 2006). The improvement in children's social emotional skills will decrease their aggressive behavior and increase their positive attitudes such as cooperation, reconciliation, and sharing. In fact, their social-cognitive skills improve. It is thought to be important to educate children at the age of 12-14, which are the early adolescent years, to help them understand, express, and manage their feelings so that they can succeed in applying their personal and social skills in every domain of life, have high motivation and an optimistic perspective, and be sensitive to themselves and their surroundings (Durlak et al., 2011; Gander & Gardiner, 2007). In light of this information, the objective of this research is to examine the social emotional learning skills of adolescents attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades from the perspective of birth order, number of siblings, pre-school attendance, academic success, the educational and professional status of parents, type of family, and income level.

2. Materials and Methods

The model of the research

This research was conducted in order to examine whether or not the social emotional learning skills of the adolescents attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades change based on certain variables.

The population and sampling of the research

The population of the research was composed by the adolescents attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades of the secondary schools under the Ministry of National Education in the provincial center of Çankırı. All of the adolescents attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades of the Çankırıİsmetİnönü High School with the highest number of students from all socio-economic levels were included in the research. The total number of students attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades in the 2011-2012 academic year was 7115, of which 3698 are male and 3417 are female (Anonymous, 2012). The number of the sampling in the research was determined using the sampling volume table, and the confidence level was found to be 95 %, which was sufficient (Bayram, 2009).

Of the adolescents who participated in the research, 50.9% were female (n=265) and 49.1% were male (n=256). The class distribution was as follows: 26.5% in the 6th grade (n=138), 36.7% in the 7th grade (n=191), and 36.9% in the 8th grade (n=192). The average age of the participants was 12.80±0.95.

Data Collection Tool

A "General Information Form" was used to determine the socio-demographic features of the adolescents and their families. The social emotional learning skills of the adolescents were determined using the "Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale", which was developed by Kabakçı (2006) and tested in terms of validity and reliability.

The questions in the General Information Form were about the age, gender, birth order, number of siblings, class, academic success, type of family, educational and professional status of parents, and as well as their income.

The Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale was developed by Kabakçı (2006) in order to determine the social emotional learning skills of adolescents. The validity and reliability of the scale were tested by determining the social emotional learning skills of adolescents attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades of nine secondary schools in five different central districts in Ankara (n=1434). The value of the scale KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) was 0.897, the Bartlett test was 7027.971, Cronbach's Alpha(α) reliability coefficient was 0.88, test-repeat-test reliability was 0.85. The factor load of the scale, which included 4 factors and 40 articles, changed between 0.33 and 0.60 and the variance was quite high. The scale consisted of the following sub-scales: communication skills (9 items), problem-solving skills (11 items), skills of overcoming the stress (10 items), and self-worth skills (10 items). The results show that the scale is valid and reliable. The grading was based on quadruple Likert scale with the options: "It completely fits me" (4), "It fits me a lot" (3), "It does not fit me much" (2), and "It does not fit me at all" (1). The grades were between 1 and 4. The scale gives a total grade and four sub-grades. The lowest grade possible from the scale is 40 and the highest grade is 160. All of the questions in the scale are affirmative and completed by the child him/herself. A high grade indicates proficiency in social emotional learning skills, whereas a low grade indicates that the individual concerned has a low self-perception (Kabakçı, 2006; Kabakçı and Korkut-Owen, 2010).

The ethical aspect of the research

Following the written permission of the Çankırı Directorate of the Ministry of National Education and the verbal approval of the school administrators and teachers concerned, the objective and method of the research was explained to the adolescents who were to participate in the research. Before the scale was applied, the adolescents were informed about the research in verbal and written form, their approval was taken, and the volunteers were included in the research.

Data collection method

After the required explanations were made, the adolescents who agreed to participate in the research were asked to complete in the Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale. The forms that were completed by the adolescents were checked before they were returned in order to prevent any data loss and ensure that any missing information is completed. The data of the research were collected during the counseling course, between November 12th and 30th in the 2012-2013 academic year.

The evaluation and analysis of data

Since the size of the group was more than 50, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in order to understand whether or not the social emotional learning skills and the grades they gave had a normal distribution. As no parametric conditions were met and there was no normal distribution ($p < 0.05$), the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis H tests were used. When the differences made sense, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to detect from which group the difference resulted (Bayram, 2009; Büyüköztürk, 2012).

3. Findings

The average grades of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students were 131.67 ± 14.94 , 126.51 ± 14.51 , and 126.39 ± 16.21 , respectively. The average grade in communications skills was 28.97 ± 4.35 . The average grade in problem-solving skills was 36.58 ± 5.49 . The average grade in the skills of overcoming stress was 26.49 ± 5.30 . The average grade in the skills of increasing self-worth was 35.80 ± 4.07 . The average grade in total skills was 127.83 ± 15.41 . It can be claimed that adolescents have high social emotional learning skills.

Examination of the Social and Emotional Learning Skills of Adolescents in the 6th, 7th, and 8th Grades on the Basis of Certain Variables

Table 1: Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis test results of the Total Grades of the Adolescents According to Certain Features

Features		n	%	Mean Rank	Significant difference	χ^2 , sd, p
Birth Order	First child	233	44.7	276.82		5.649,
	Middle child	107	20.6	236.72	-	2,
	Last child	181	34.7	254.99		0.059
Number of siblings	1	233	44.7	279.4		
	2	189	36.3	256	1-4	11.408,
	3	50	9.6	251.55	1-5	4,
	4 and more	24	4.6	195.25		0.022
	Single child	25	4.8	209.38		
Academic success	Weak	5	1	133	1-4	39.355,
	Mediocre	76	14.6	191.24	2-3	3,
	Good	232	44.5	247.44	2-4	0.000
	Very good	208	39.9	304.69	3-4	
				Sum of Ranks	U; p	
Pre-school attendance	With	292	56	262.12	76538	33108
	Without	229	44	259.58	59443	0.848

The grades of the adolescents' social emotional learning skills did not significantly differ depending on their birth rate ($\chi^2_{(sd=2, n=521)}=5.649, p>0.05$) and pre-school attendance ($U=33108, p>0.05$). Their grades significantly differed depending on the number of siblings ($\chi^2_{(sd=4, n=521)}=11.408, p<0.05$). Adolescents with one sibling had significantly better social emotional learning skills than the only children and the adolescents with four or more siblings. Adolescents whose academic success is very good had better social emotional learning skills than those with good, mediocre and weak academic success ($\chi^2_{(sd=3, n=521)}=39.355, p<0.05$). It was revealed that the number of siblings and academic success of adolescents were influential in improving social emotional learning skills (Table 1).

Table 2: Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis test results of the Total Grades of the Adolescents According to Certain Characteristics of Their Parents

Features		n	%	Mean Ranks	Significant difference	χ^2 , sd, p
Mother Educational Status	Illiterate	10	1.9	183.3		
	Literate	14	2.7	226.79	1-5	14.028,
	Primary school	188	36.1	258.2	3-5	5,
	Secondary school	110	21.1	232.27	4-5	0.015
	High school	134	25.7	293.79		
Father Educational Status	University	65	12.5	269.45		
	Literate	11	2.1	265.95		
	Primary school	74	14.2	230.51		7.048,
	Secondary school	116	22.3	243.75	-	4,
Mother Professional Status	High school	182	34.9	272.64		0.133
	University	138	26.5	276.1		
	Employed	130	25	260.31		0.389,
Father Professional Status	Unemployed	376	72.2	260.28	-	2,
	Retired	15	2.8	284.9		0.823
Family Type	Employed	472	90.6	261.52		0.111,
	Unemployed	10	1.9	246.4	-	2,
	Retired	39	7.5	258.42		0.946
Family Income	Nuclear	454	87.1	260.3		0.699,
	Extended	53	10.2	273.2	-	2,
Family Income	Separated	14	2.7	237.5		0.705
					Sum of Ranks	U; p
Family Income	Minimum below	89	17.1	244.99	21804.5	17799.5
	Minimum and above	432	82.9	264.3	114176.5	0.271

The analysis revealed that the social emotional learning grades of adolescents did not significantly differ depending on their fathers' educational status ($\chi^2_{(sd=4, n=521)}=7.048, p>0.05$), mothers' ($\chi^2_{(sd=2, n=521)}=0.389, p>0.05$) and fathers' ($\chi^2_{(sd=2, n=521)}=0.111, p>0.05$) professional status, family type ($\chi^2_{(sd=2, n=521)}=0.699, p>0.05$), and income ($U=17799.5, p>0.05$), but mothers' educational status ($\chi^2_{(sd=5, n=521)}=14.028, p<0.05$) makes a significant difference. Mothers' educational statuses have different effects on improving adolescents' social emotional learning skills. It was discovered that adolescents whose mothers are high school graduates had higher grades than those whose mothers are illiterate or primary and secondary school graduates (Table 2).

4. Discussion

The research revealed that the social emotional learning skills of the adolescents who participated in the study did not significantly differ depending on the birth order (Bender, 2006; Yurdakavuştu, 2012). However, birth order affects children's development. Families tend to pay closer attention to the first child. Therefore, the first children are willing to succeed, obey the rules, and are neat and tidy although they grow up with a higher dependence on other individuals. They generally turn out to be self-sufficient individuals who can solve their problems on their own. Middle children, however, try to be successful in freer and non-academic areas. They cannot reveal themselves under the sovereignty of the elder sibling and protection of the younger one (Ünver, 2004). Yiğit (2008) detected that the last children have a significantly higher average grade in negative social skills compared to other children.

Research has also shown that adolescents with one sibling have better social emotional learning skills than those with none, and four or more siblings ($p<0.05$). Only children have problems in playmaking and relations with friends. These roles prepare the child for the life and teach them how to share. Besides, as the number of children in a family increases, the number of opportunities decreases, and the development of children is adversely affected (Anonymous, 2011).

The adolescents whose academic success is very good have better social emotional learning skills than those whose academic success is good, mediocre and weak ($p<0.05$). There are various researches that address the relation between social emotional proficiency and academic success. These researches also support the fact that insufficient peer relations and lack of social skills lead children to develop a negative perception of school and cause them to refuse school and have less academic success (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Chen et al., 2008; Denham & Brown, 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Soylu, 2007; Zins & Elias, 2007). If children can develop fundamental cognitive, linguistic, and social skills in the early period, their learning life might become easier later on (Johnson & Blumenthal, 2004). Therefore, the relation between academic success and developmental areas can be said to be bilateral. As high academic success affects the development of fundamental cognitive, social and linguistic skills, the development level of cognitive, social and linguistic skills might affect academic success, as well (Zins et al., 2004). Social emotional learning establishes a link between academic knowledge and the fundamental skills required to succeed at school, in the family, society, and life. As a matter of fact, it is said that academic knowledge and social emotional learning must go hand in hand to reach achieve education standards (CASEL, 2003).

The social emotional learning skills of adolescents did not significantly differ depending on their pre-school attendance. However, it is known that pre-school education has positive effects on children's social, emotional, linguistic, physical, and psychomotor development. Pre-school education optimally supports children's developmental areas, increases their adaptation and success, and reduces the impact of negative environmental conditions. Pre-school education has a significant effect on children's preparation for adolescence. Children who are prepared to enter adolescence can more easily accept the adolescence-related changes and adapt to this period. (Oktay, 2007; Ünver, 2004).

Research has shown that fathers' educational status, parents' professional status, their family type and income do not make a difference in adolescents' social emotional learning skills. However, it was

detected that adolescents whose mothers are high school graduates have better social emotional skills than those who are illiterate, or graduates of primary and secondary school ($p < 0.05$). The behaviors of the mother, who spends more time and takes care of the child more than the father, directly affect the child's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. Type of family is an important variable in children's social and emotional learning. Factors such as the parents' personalities, educational status, professions, socio-cultural status, and attitude towards children all affect children. It has been discovered that the social skills of the children who are raised in families with a low socio-economic level are adversely affected. As the educational level increases, it is seen that the social skill levels of parents and children increase, as well. It has been revealed that the children of the parents with higher social proficiency can more easily gain social skills. Furthermore, the family type (nuclear or extended) leads to a difference in such skills (Özabacı, 2006). In the study of Yurdakavuştu (2012), it has been revealed that the children whose parents are high school graduates have higher emotional intelligence points than those whose parents have never attended school, but the social skill grades did not differ depending on their parents' educational status. Soylu (2007) has revealed in his research that the adolescents whose parents are university graduates have rather low learning skills. Gürsoy (2002) has detected in his study that the aggressiveness grades of the children with unemployed mothers are higher than those with working mothers. The child's birth order, number of siblings, and parent's educational status did not cause a significant difference. At this point, it is important that the time spent with children supports and improves their developmental areas.

It is stated that low socio-economic level adversely affects children's social emotional learning skills, and the development depends on children's and young people's social environment conditions (Betlow, 2005; Ünver, 2004). The researches have also indicated that the social skill grades of the children of the families with higher economic income are better than those with medium and low income (Yiğit, 2008; Yurdakavuştu, 2012). Generally, it is observed that parents with high socio-economic status more frequently have opinions, attitudes, and behaviors that can affect the child's development in a positive way (Hortaçsu, 2003). Again, in this context, families with high socio-economic income can be more sensitive to the child's needs. Kabakçı (2006) has detected that adolescents' social emotional learning skills do not differ depending on their socio-economic income. The familial stress caused by low socio-economic income has an effect on children's academic success (Erdil, 2010).

5. Result and Conclusions

This research has revealed that adolescents who have a sibling, whose academic success is very good and mothers are graduates of high school have better social emotional learning skills. Adolescents need social emotional skills that make their interpersonal relations easier, regulate their relations with families and help them know and express themselves and develop positive relations. Since it is necessary to develop social emotional skills in order to become an effective member of the society, it is important to examine and evaluate children's and adolescents' social emotional learning skills. It is also important to detect children who are at risk in social and emotional aspects and have special needs. The social, academic, and emotional status of children can be detected and trainings can be delivered in this respect. Longitudinal studies in which children's social emotional skills are examined from the perspective of diverse variables can be conducted. Parents can be informed about the importance of social emotional learning skills and also on how to improve such skills and become role-models.

References

Anonymous. (2011). *Family and child*. Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education.

Anonymous. (2012). *Nationaleducationstatisticsformaleducation 2011-2012*. http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/istatistik/meb_istatistikleri_orgun_egitim_2011_2012.pdf, Retrieved on: 13.11.2012.

- Ashdown, D.M. & Bernard, M.E. (2012). Can explicit instruction in social and emotional learning skills benefit the social-emotional development, well-being, and academic achievement of young children? *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 397-405.
- Bayram, N. (2009). *Social science data analysis with SPSS* (2nd ed.). Bursa: Ezgi Publisher.
- Bender, T.M. (2006). Relations between emotional quotient and creativity in the students of painting education department. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, İzmir: Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Education Sciences.
- Betlow, M. (2005). The effect of social skills intervention on the emotional intelligence of children with limited social skills. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New Jersey: Seton Hall University.
- Büyüköztürk, Ş. (2012). *Data analysis handbook for social sciences* (16th ed.). Ankara: Pegem Academy Bookstore.
- Chen, X., Chang, L., Liu, H. & He, Y. (2008). Effects of the peer group on the development of social functioning and academic achievement: A longitudinal study in Chinese children. *Child Development*, 79(2), 235-251.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2003). *Safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs*. Chicago, IL: Author.
- Denham, S.A. & Brown, C. (2010). Plays nice with others: Social-emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education and Development*, 21(5), 652-680.
- Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.D. & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Elias, M.J. (2006). *The connection between academic and social-emotional learning*. CA: Corwin Press. http://www.corwin.com/upm-data/8299_Ch_1.pdf, Retrieved on: 07.01.2013.
- Erdil, Z. (2010). Relationship of academic achievement and early intervention programs for children who are at socio-economical risk. *Hacettepe University Faculty of Health Sciences Nursing Journal*, 17, 72-78.
- Fredericks, L. (2003). *Making the case for social and emotional learning and service-learning*. Colorado: Education Commission of the States' Publications.
- Gander, M.J. & Gardiner, H.W. (2007). *Child and adolescent development* (6th ed.), (Trans: A. Dönmez, H. N. Çelen & B. Onur). Ankara: İmge Bookstore.
- Gueldner, B. & Merrell, K. (2011). Evaluation of a social-emotional learning program in conjunction with the exploratory application of performance feedback incorporating motivational interviewing techniques. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 21(1), 1-27.
- Gürsoy, F. (2002). Examination of the aggression of children whose mothers are working and non-working mother. *Journal of Child Development and Education*, 1(6-7), 7-15.
- Hortaçsu, N. (2003). *Childhood relationships*. İstanbul: İmge Bookstore.
- Humphreys, T. (1999). *Key of children's education: Self confidence* (2nd ed.), (Trans: T. Anapa). İstanbul: Epsilon Publishing.
- Johnson, D.L. & Blumenthal, J. (2004). The parent child development centers and school achievement: A follow-up. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 25(2), 195-210.
- Kabakçı, Ö.F. (2006). Secondary degree of primary school student's social-emotional learning skills. Unpublished Master Thesis, Ankara: Hacettepe University, Institute of Social Sciences.

Examination of the Social and Emotional Learning Skills of Adolescents in the 6th, 7th, and 8th Grades on the Basis of Certain Variables

- Kabakçı, Ö.F. ve Korkut-Owen, F. (2010). A study of development of social emotional learning skills scale. *EducationandScience*, 35(157), 152-166.
- Kress, J.S., Norris, J.A., Schoenholz, D.A., Elias, M.J. & Seigle, P. (2004). Bringing to gether educational standards and social and emotional learning: Making the case for educators. *AmericanJournal of Education*, 111(1), 68-89.
- Oktaç, A. (2007). *The magic years of life: Preschool period* (6th ed.). İstanbul: Epsilon Publications.
- Özabacı, N. (2006). A study of the relationship between children's social skills and those of their parents. *Firat University Journal of Social Science*, 16(1), 163-179.
- Payton, J., Weissberg, R.P., Durlak, J.A., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., Schellinger, K.B. & Pachan, M. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergartentoeighth-gradestudents: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Soylu, A. (2007). *Firat University students' social emotional learning skills*. Unpublished Master Thesis, Elazığ: Firat University, Institute of Social Sciences.
- Ünver, G. (2004). *Development. Development and learning* (Ed. A. Ulusoy), (3rd ed.), 1-17, Ankara: Anı Publications.
- Yiğit, R. (2008). *Comparative Analysis of secondary school students' depression and social skills in terms of self-esteem and some variables*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Konya; Selçuk University, Institute of Social Sciences
- Yurdakavuştu, Y. (2012). *Emotional intelligence and social skill level on primary school students*. Unpublished Master Thesis, İzmir: Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Education Sciences.
- Zins, J.E. & Elias, M. (2007). *Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students*. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17(2-3), 233-255.
- Zins, J.E., Bloodworth, M.R., Weissberg, R.P. & Walberg, H.J. (2004). *The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. In building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* 3-22, Teachers College Press. <http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/T3053c01.pdf>, Retrieved on: 07.01.2013.