

A Survey on the Effect of Kindergarten on Social Skills of Preschool Children in Tehran

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Abstract: Objectives: This study examined the social skills of preschool children in Tehran and the impact of kindergarten on the social skills. Methods: We conducted descriptive and cross-sectional research, to measuring the social skills in preschool children in Tehran and the impact of kindergarten on the social skills. 350 preschool child participated in this study, (175 girls and boys). The Preschool social skills questionnaire of Gresham and Elliot has been applied in two forms of parent and teacher. 350 mothers and 350 teachers answered the questionnaire. Results: The result showed from the viewpoint of the teachers and mothers that there was no significant difference between kindergarten and social skills ($p > 0/05$) and Their social skills was moderate. Conclusion: Considering that the social skills of preschool children and kindergarten had no connection, So it is better that assessment children's social skills during their entry in to kindergarten and enhance social skills if they had a poor social skills.

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1. Introduction

The early childhood years are a critical period for social-emotional development. In pre-school years, children often begin to distinguish between positive and negative emotions. They also learn how to regulate their emotions and communicate with other people [1]. Social skills are basically associated with all aspects of children's lives and have an effect on their compatibility [2]. Personality development, avoiding violence, learning the proper way of communication, dealing with people and in general, interpersonal communication skills are essential for living in the present world [3]. In this regard, the approach of life skills is offered for years by the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

These skills are classified into three main categories of social, cognitive and coping-emotional skills [4]. Social development is an important aspect of growth and paying attention to this aspect of growth is inevitable due to the inherent nature of social life in human and his need for contact with others [5]. Social skills are behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others [6] and they are necessary to coordinate individuals with the community. The socialization process in which norms, attitudes, motivations and behaviors of

individuals are formed to help them treat effectively in the society starts in childhood and continues throughout life [7]. The emotional and social competence of children is influenced by their early learning from the environment [8]. Children need help to adapt to their environment after birth, and the family members meet their physical and psychological needs [9]. Children learn basic social rules primarily through interaction with parents and family members [10]. As it is important to have a positive interaction with family members in the early years of life, communicating with peers in the following years is also very important [9], so entering a new social environment such as a kindergarten is deeply effective in a better understanding of laws by children. Kindergarten can be the first place where separates children from their parents for the first time in a social setting outside the home [9]. One of the purposes of the education or perhaps the most important one is to provide the social development of children, whose foundation is laid during pre-school years [9]. One of the social responsibilities of young children is learning the skills of building a successful mutual relationship with peers. Through interaction with others, children learn how to behave and how to judge [11]. Peer relationship changes the children's

social experiences and helps them develop self-awareness and learn behaviors such as waiting their turn in a queue, respecting others' opinions, anger management as well as participation, cooperation, and pioneering at works [12, 13]. On the other hand, the teacher plays a critical role in children's social interactions. A high quality teacher-child relationship will encourage children to develop social skills. When children are emotionally imbalanced teacher can be a source of security and can soothe them when they are upset. Children will be guided by teachers in case of bad behaviors. This supportive relationship helps children to regulate their emotions and encourage children to make positive social changes in their relationships with teachers and peers. Conflicts and contradictions between children and teachers in pre-school years will negatively affect the social behavior, especially in the first grade [14, 16]. Some children have weak social skills compared to their peers [17], which leads to psychological problems such as failed relationships with peers [18], poor school performance [19], non-participation in extracurricular activities, social withdrawal and isolation [20, 21], peer rejection, anxiety, depression and anger in childhood and older ages [22, 24]. Research results indicate that people with poor social skills are more likely exposed to negative consequences such as peer rejection [17], emotional disturbances, dropping out of school [24], aggressive anti-social behavior [25], isolation, crime and poor school performance [26]. So social skills of preschool children must be designed according to their needs, age and environmental conditions and an opportunity must be provided for children to internalize the learned social skills and transfer it to real life. This makes them useful to themselves and others [9] because according to the studies, the training given to children before they enter school results in successful Social Skills [27, 28]. In addition, children's social skills are influenced deeply by the culture and environment. Social skills of children are not equally important in different cultures [10, 29]. Numerous studies have been conducted worldwide on the social skills of preschool children. In 2011, in a research conducted by Camras and Tan, the social skills of Chinese preschool children were studied. The results showed a moderate level of social skills in these children. In another study conducted by [30], a moderate level of social skills was reported for preschool children with autism. In 2006, Vahdani Nia and Garmaroudi reported a poor level of social skills for middle and secondary school students in Iran. Given the importance of social skills, few studies were conducted in Iran on preschool children. Considering the importance of social skills for children in the information society of the third

millennium, the researcher studies the social skills of Iranian preschool children from mothers and teachers' point of view and the role of kindergarten on children's social skills.

2. Methodology

A cross-sectional descriptive type of study was used for this research. In order to obtain samples as the representatives of research population, the multi-stage sampling technique was used. Thus, 19 municipal districts of Tehran city were divided into five categories regarding their geographical location (North, South, Central, East and West). Then, two districts from each category and totally ten districts were randomly selected. As a result, districts 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 16, 19 were selected. After referring to the Census Bureau of Ministry of Education and receiving the computerized list of students by their sex and type of school, the required sample size was assigned to each district. Then, the pre-school centers in each district were listed and a number of pre-school centers were randomly selected in each district. Finally, in each school, a number of classrooms and in each classroom a number of students were randomly selected. Then after obtaining written consent from the mothers and teachers of these students, they were given a questionnaire to fill out. The data collection tools included both the demographic information questionnaire and the questionnaire of Social Skills Rating System for pre-school children by Gresham and Elliott (parent and teacher forms). This scale is prepared for pre-school, elementary and secondary students and has separate questionnaire booklets for teachers, parents and students, among which the teachers and parents sheets for pre-school level were used in this study. The Parents' and teachers' questionnaire included 39 and 30 items, respectively. This scale included sub-tests on cooperation, decisiveness and self-restraint. The mean score for social skills was obtained through teachers and mothers using these sub-tests. Each statement was rated on a three-point scale ("Never", "Sometimes" and "Often") and each item was given a score (never = 0, sometimes = 1, often = 2). Then, the scale and sub-scales were scored so that the total score of statements should be summed up to result in the total score of scale and sub-scales.

3. Results

The results of this study showed that the social skills in the preschool children living in Tehran was at a moderate level from viewpoint of their mothers and teachers (Tables 2 and 3). According to Table 1, the results of t-test showed that there is no significant relationship between the general social skills and its different aspects and the kindergarten experience ($p > 0/05$).

Table 1 - The mean, standard deviation and probability values for comparing the social skills in preschool children with and without experience of going to kindergarten

Aspects of social skills	Statistics	Kindergarten experience		t-test	p-value
		No	Yes		
Cooperation	Mean	63/54	65/31	0/111	0/279
	Standard deviation	16/42	13/81		
Decisiveness	Mean	72/48	70/99	-0/999	0/359
	Standard deviation	16/53	13/89		
Self-restraint	Mean	53/20	54/77	0/685	0/494
	Standard deviation	21/61	21/24		
General social skills	Mean	63/07	63/69	0/437	0/662
	Standard deviation	14/08	12/28		

Table 2 - Distribution of levels of social skills in preschool children living in Tehran in 2011 from parents' point of view

Aspects of social skills	Weak		Moderate		Strong	
	%	Prevalence	%	Prevalence	%	Prevalence
Cooperation	15/7	54	66/9	230	17/4	60
Decisiveness	16/3	56	67/9	233	15/8	54
Self-restraint	15/1	52	74/5	257	10/4	36
General social skills	14/2	49	70/9	244	14/8	51

According to Table 2, most of parents believe their children in a moderate level of social skills. It is notable that the number of parents

assessing their children strong in cooperation and general social skills is more than those who reported their children weak in these aspects.

Table 3 - Distribution of level of social skills in preschool children living in Tehran in 2011 from teachers' point of view

Aspects of social skills	Weak		Moderate		Strong	
	%	Prevalence	%	Prevalence	%	Prevalence
Cooperation	15/9	59	64/1	237	20/0	74
Decisiveness	13/8	51	65/7	243	20/5	76
Self-restraint	14/1	52	66/8	247	19/2	71
General social skills	15/7	58	64/9	240	19/5	72

Table 3 shows that most teachers believe the children in a moderate level of social skills.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The present research was conducted to study the social skills of preschool children in Tehran and the effect of kindergarten on their social skills. Results showed that, according to the Social Skills Rating Scale of Gresham and Elliott, these children's social skills are moderate and kindergarten has no significant effect on the social skills of children. The current study is not consistent with the studies conducted by Clements et al. (2004), Heckman (2000), Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), Loeb et al. (2004) and Magnuson and Ruhm et al. (2004). All of these studies imply the advantages of going to kindergarten which leads to a better school behavior,

decrease of abuse and crime and increase of social skills in following school years. Given that kindergarten provides the setting for interaction with peers, it is helpful for children especially the poor children. According to Erikson, children in preschool years better understand the feelings and thoughts of others and their communication skills are increased which provides them with learning experiences and as a result, increases cooperation, taking responsibility, self-restraint and decisiveness in them. They boost their social skills through relationship with peers. On the other hand, this study is not consistent with the studies conducted by Belsky (2002), Han et al. (2001), NICHD ECCRN, Duncan (2003) and Loeb (2007) showing that kindergarten has a negative effect and increases the aggressive and disruptive behaviors in children. This

is likely due to the long separation of children from parents or going to kindergarten at an early age, before the age of two, which according to Erikson child is in need of a single caregiver to build trust.

There are several reasons why no relationship is showed between kindergarten and the social skills of preschool children in the present research, amongst which the problems of Iran's kindergartens are worthy of mentioning. Some of these problems include lack of a codified educational content, in which the creativity of teacher is considered, lack of qualified and trained personnel who are interested in working with children, lack of information and advertising for the importance of pre-school education, lack of government support for kindergartens and parents, seasonal activity of kindergartens, lack of job security for the teachers, lack of knowledge of kindergarten managers on the management systems, Lack of short-term and long-term training programs for each age group, lack of resources and books, believing the pre-school education as unnecessary by parents, lack of quality monitoring by the Welfare Organization and failure in providing the appropriate and practical solutions. It is therefore necessary that a systematic program be implemented by the competent authorities such as Welfare Organization for improvement of education in kindergartens in order to boost the children's social skills and prepare them for entering into society.

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