Examination of 5-6 Years Old Children's Social Problem Solving Skills with According to Social Status

Hülya Gülay Ogelman*[a], Nazife Koyutürk Koçer[b] & Alev Önder[c]

* Corresponding author
E-mail: ogelman@sinop.edu.tr

a. Faculty of Education, Sinop University, Sinop, Turkey

b. İsa Yusuf Alptekin Primary School, Ministry of National Education, İstanbul, Turkey

c. Bahçeşehir University, İzmir, Turkey.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine social problem solving skills of 5-6 years old children with according to social status. The study sample consists of 132 children aged 5-6 with normal development and who attend preschool education in a school in İstanbul under the Ministry of National Education (MEB). In this study, conducted through the relational screening method, data were collected with the personal information form, Preference Based Sociometry Technique and the WALLY Social Problem Solving Scale. The Personal Information Form was filled in by the teachers separately for each child. The Preference Based Sociometry Technique and WALLY Social Problem Solving Scale were carried out on the children individually by one of the researchers. Because study data had a normal distribution, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, one of the parametric techniques, Simple Linear Regression technique, One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) and Bonferroni techniques were used. According to the study results, there is a positive relationship between social problem solving levels, being like by peers and social preference levels. It is evident that social problem solving significantly predicts being liked by peers, being disliked by peers and social preference levels. There is no significant relationship between social problem solving and social impact; social problem solving does not predict social impact. In addition, it is evident that social status (popularity, rejection, being excluded, being controversial) of young children significantly differs according to social problem solving levels.

KEYWORDS

Social status; social problem solving; peer relationships; preschool period

INTRODUCTION

After a child starts school, he or she learns how to integrate personal interests and needs with the interests and needs of others. They need to learn how to obey rules and at the same time fulfill their duties appropriately while they try to work with other people who have the same duties and also when they try to force their imagination. Failure experienced at this stage can lead the children to develop a feeling of unfruitfulness and inadequacy in their relationships with their peers (Koyutürk-Koçer & Gültekin-Akduman, 2021).

Children start discovering themselves and the environment together with crucial and rapid improvements in social development during preschool period. This social network, which is established with mothers, expands with the inclusion of other family members, peers and the preschool teacher (Gülay, 2012). Unsuccessful peer relationships that are established during preschool years cause negative outcomes in all future developmental stages including feeling of guilt, maladaptive behaviors and low school performance (Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost & Wainwright, 2005). Children who are accepted by their peers and who establish supportive friendships are socially, emotionally and academically successful (Rubin, Bukowski & Laursen, 2009).

Peer acceptance starts in early childhood. Children start structuring their peer groups based on popularity either by being liked and accepted by other children or by actively being ignored or rejected (Hay, Payne & Chadwick, 2004). While short term effects of positive peer approaches are academic success and school adaptation; long term effects are observed in personality development and psychological health (Gülay-Ogelman, 2018). Children who are disliked, in other words, rejected by their peers tend to display problematic behaviors that hinder social participation such as immaturity, hyperactivity, impulsivity and aberrancy (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). These children are liable to be peer victimized (Schwartz et al., 1999) and as a result display depressive symptoms during adolescence (Lansford et al., 2007). In addition, it is stated that children who are disliked by their peers are in the highly risk group concerning their social and psychological developments and can encounter alcohol addiction, employment and marriage problems in the future (Bowers, 1997). Children who are accepted and preferred by their peers are less likely to be victimized and show more positive mental, social and emotional adjustment (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003).

Social status refers to how much a child is liked in a peer group. Social status consists of two dimensions. These are social impact and social preference (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Social impact refers to the direct or indirect change in individual's behaviors based on the attitudes and behaviors of their surroundings. In other words, it is the effect on individual behaviors resulting by the conscious or unconscious pressures of other people or groups (Dumlu, 2019). Social preference reveals how much peers like a child (Kosir & Pecjak, 2005). Research underlines that peer preferences decrease the incidence of peer victimization and put forward that unpopular children have a higher risk for rejection, bullying and victimization (DeRosier & Thomas, 2003).

There are various factors that affect whether you are liked or disliked by your peers. These factors can be listed as social skills such as being well-adjusted, friendly, responsible, attractive, having positive social behaviors, play skills, sense of decency, popularity, being collaborative and being helpful along with academic success, sense of humor, having a positive mood, communication skills, social problem solving skills, cognitive competency, linguistic competency, sense of empathy, obeying to rules (Polenski, 2001; Slaughter et al., 2002). Social problem solving is one of the factors that affect being liked or disliked by peers.

Social problem solving is defined as the self-regulated cognitive-behavioral process in which an individual or group tries to identify or discover effective solutions for specific daily problems. Social problem solving is perceived as a conscious, rational and purposeful activity that requires effort (D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). In addition to being recognized as the fundamentals of social emotional competencies (Denham et al., 2014), social problem solving refers to analyzing states, identifying objectives and determining social strategies (Nakamichi, Nakamichi & Nakazawa, 2021).

Children gain the confidence and competence required for communicating, problem solving and coping with emotions as they improve their social and emotional skills (Parlakian, 2003). Social problem solving skills are stemmed simultaneously when children socialize at preschool educational institutions (Yoleri, 2014). Children have the opportunity to see that problems encountered in daily life can be solved; they believe that these problems can be solved and their self-confidences are increased in preschool educational institutions (Ünal & Aral, 2014). For this reason, it is crucial to support problem solving skills of children during preschool years.

While social problem solving studies in preschool years are recent in Türkiye, current studies are focusing on the relationships between social problem solving and various variables such as demographic information (Akbaş, 2005; Bozkurt-Yükçü & Demircioğlu, 2017; Temiz, 2019), social skills (Balaban, 2018; Deniz, 2019; Dinçer et al., 2019), peer relationships (Özmen, 2013; Beydoğan, 2019), viewpoint-taking skills (Bal & Temel, 2014), emotional understanding skills (Yılmaz & Tepeli, 2013; Yılmaz, 2012), parent-child relationship (Karakoç, 2022), parent attitudes (Çiftçi, 2018) and behavioral problems (Kesicioğlu, 2015). No researches on social status or social problem solving were found. It is assumed that identifying the relationship, whose effect can be observed in the future unless supported during preschool years, between social status and social problem solving skills of children is crucial and can contribute to the field.

The purpose of the study is to examine social problem solving skills of 5-6 years old children with according to social status. The sub-purposes of the study are:

- Is there a statistically significant relationship between social problem solving skills of 5-6 year old children and their being liked by peers, being disliked by peers, social preference and social impact levels?

- Do social problem solving skills of 5-6 year old children statistically and significantly predict their being liked by peers, being disliked by peers, social preference and social impact levels?
- Does social status of 5-6 year old children (popularity, rejection, being excluded, being controversial) significantly and statistically differ according to their problem solving levels?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through the relational screening model, which is among the general survey models. The relational survey model is defined as a statistical model preferred so as to identify the pattern or the tendency for covariance between two or more variables (Creswell, 2017).

Sample group

The convenience sampling method was carried out in this research. The convenience sampling method enables the researcher to choose conditions that are close and easily accessible (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The study sample consists of 132, 65 girl (49.2%) and 67 boy (50.8%), 5-6 years old children with normal development and who attend preschool education in a school in İstanbul under MEB. While 13 children (9.8%) are 48-60 months, 119 (90.2%) children are 60 months old and over. All of the children live with their family. Demographic information concerning the parents of children is given on Table 1.

Data collection instruments

Data were collected with the Personal Information Form, Preference Based Sociometry Technique and the WALLY Social Problem Solving Scale.

Personal Information Form

Questions related to the age, gender, parents' educational status, parents' professions concerning the children were included in the form developed by the researchers.

Preference Based Sociometry Technique

In this socio-metric approach technique, based on peer preference, each child is asked to state the names of 3 friends in their classroom who they like and dislike the most. The names stated are scored from 3 to 1 depending on the 1., 2. and 3. order they are stated. The 1. student stated in the like list is marked 3 points, the second most liked student is marked 2 points and the third most liked student is marked 1 point; the 1. student stated in the dislike list is marked -3 points, second most disliked student is marked -2 points and the third most disliked student is marked -1 point. At the end of the implementation, like list scores are calculated so as to reveal being liked by peers scores; the dislike list scores are calculated so as to reveal the being disliked by peers scores. The being liked and disliked scores are calculated when identifying social impact. Being disliked scores are subtracted from being liked scores to determine social preference. Scores concerning "being liked by peers, being disliked by peers, social impact and social preference" for each child are standardized. Social status (popularity, rejection, being excluded,

being controversial) is identified according to social impact and social preference scores (Gülay-Ogelman, 2018).

Table 1. *Demographic information concerning the parents of children*

Variable	f	%
Age of mother		
20-30	27	22.5
31-40	84	70.0
41 years and over	9	7.5
Total	120	100.0
Age of father		
20-30	14	11.7
31-40	77	64.2
41 years and over	28	23.3
Total	120	100.0
Educational status of mother		
Illiterate	1	0.8
Literate	4	3.3
Primary school degree	21	17.5
Secondary school degree	15	12.5
High school degree	50	41.7
University degree	29	24.2
Total	120	100.0
Educational status of father		
Literate	2	1.7
Primary school degree	26	21.7
Secondary school degree	25	20.8
High school degree	38	31.7
University degree	29	24.2
Total	120	100.0
Profession of mother		
Housewife	94	78.3
Civil servant	14	11.7
Worker	4	3.3
Self-employed	8	6.7
Total	120	100.0
Profession of father		
Civil servant	20	16.7
Worker	52	43.3
Self-employed	46	38.3
Retired	2	1.7
Total	120	100.0

WALLY Social Problem Solving Scale

The Wally Social Problem Solving Scale, which is used to evaluate social problem solving skills of children, was developed through the combination of Preschool Problem Solving Test developed by Spivack and Shure (1985) and the Child Social Problem Solving Scale developed by Rubin and Krasnor (1986). The Turkish version of the test for 3-5 years old children was adapted by Kayılı and Arı (2015). The test, consisting of two different forms prepared for girl and boy children, embodies 15 pictures emphasizing conflict or problem in interpersonal relationships. The 15 pictures describing presumptive states are asked to the children. These presumptive states refer to 11 different themes (being rejected, making mistakes, unfair treatment, victimization, prohibition, isolation, being deceived, disappointment, facing dilemma, being disapproved by adults, coping with the problem of being attacked). The lowest score of the test is zero, the highest score is 15. The scale is conducted individually through child interviews. The KMO value of the test for 3-5 years old children version was observed as .814. The KR-20 reliability coefficient of the test for the five years old group was calculated as .81 (Kayılı & Arı, 2015).The KR-20 reliability coefficient of the test for this study was calculated as .81.

Data collection process

Required permissions concerning the evaluation instruments were obtained before the data collection process. Preschool teachers were informed about the purpose and evaluation instruments of the study. The Personal Information Form was filled in by the teachers separately for each child. The Preference Based Sociometry Technique and WALLY Social Problem Solving Scale were carried out on the children individually on different dates by one of the researchers in a classroom spared for the implementation. The data collection process took five months.

Data analysis

The SPSS 21.0 software was used in analyzing the study data. The Kurtosis and Skewness values were examined to test the normality of data distribution. The kurtosis value of the WALLY Social Problem Solving Scale was observed to range between -.974 and skewness value was -.509; kurtosis value was .369 skewness value was .774 for the being liked by peers scores; kurtosis value was .629, skewness value was -.884 for the being disliked by peers scores; kurtosis value was -.256, skewness value was .448 for social preference scores; kurtosis value was .819, skewness value was .013 for social impact scores. Normal distribution is approved when the Kurtosis and Skewness values range between -1.5 and +1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Based on this information it is evident that social problem solving, being liked by peers, being disliked by peers, social preference and impact scores have a normal distribution. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, Simple Linear Regression Analysis and One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) were carried out. The Bonferroni technique, one of the Post-Hoc analysis techniques, was conducted so as to identify between which groups the differences among social statuses occurred.

FINDINGS

Table 2 presents analyses results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient concerning the relationship between social problem-solving skills and being liked by peers, being disliked by peers, social impact and social preference.

Table 2. *Correlation Analysis Results Regarding the Relationships Between Social Problem Solving Skills of 5-6 Years Old Children and Being Liked By Peers, Being Disliked by Peers, Social Preference and Social Impact Levels*

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r
Social Problem Solving Skills	11.143	3.37	.406*
Being Liked by Peers	-.039	1.95	
Social Problem Solving Skills	11.90	3.37	-.216**
Being Disliked by Peers	-.044	1.79	
Social Problem Solving Skills	11.143	3.37	.477*
Social Preference	.0041	2.47	
Social Problem Solving Skills	11.143	3.37	.144
Social Impact	-.083	2.81	

*p < .01, ** p<.05

According to Table 2, it is evident that there is a positive and medium level relationship between social problem solving skills of preschool children and their levels of being liked by peers (r=.406, p<.01) and social preference (r=.477, p<.01); and a negative (r= -.216, p<.05) and low level relationship between being disliked by peers level. According to this result, being liked by peers level/social problem solving skills increase/decrease as social problem solving skills/being liked by peers level increases/decreases. Social preference/social problem solving skills increase/decrease as social problem solving skills/social preference level increases/decreases. Being disliked by peers/social problem-solving skills increase/decrease as social problem-solving skills/being disliked by peers increases/decreases. A significant relationship is not observed between social problem solving skills and social impact in the same table (p>.01).

Table 3 presents the findings concerning the predictor effect of social problem solving skills on being liked by peers, being disliked by peers, social preference and social impact levels.

Table 3. *Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results Concerning the Predictor Effect of Social Problem Solving Skills on Being Liked By Peers, Being Disliked by Peers, Social Preference and Social Impact Levels of 5-6 Years Old Children*

Variables	R	R^2	*F*	Std. Er.	β	t	p
Social Problem Solving Being Liked by Peers Level	.406	.165	25.730	.046	.406	5.073	.001*
Social Problem Solving Being Disliked by Peers Level	-.216	.046	6.335	.046	-.216	-2.517	.013**
Social Problem Solving Social Preference	.477	.227	38.223	.057	.477	6.182	.001*
Social Problem Solving Social Impact	.144	.021	2.739	.072	.144	1.655	.100

*p < .01, **p<.05

According to Table 3, it is evident that social problem solving significantly predicts being liked by peers (R= .406, R^2 = .165, *F*=25.730, p<.01), being disliked by peers (R= -.216, R^2 = .046, *F*=6.335, p<.05) and social preference (R= .477, R^2 = .227, *F*=38.223, p<.01) levels. According to this result, it can be stated that social problem solving accounts for 17% of being liked by peers, 5% of being disliked by peers and 23% of social preference. In addition, social problem solving does not significantly predict social impact.

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics concerning the social status of 5-6 years old children.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics Concerning Social Problem-Solving Scores of 5-6 Years Old Children's Social Statuses*

Social Status	N	$\overline{X}$	SD
Popular	23	13.78	1.78
Rejected	45	9.02	2.96
Excluded	25	10.80	3.08
Controversial	39	12.26	3.21
Total	132	11.14	3.38

Table 5 presents findings on the One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA), concerning whether or not 5-6 years old children's social problem solving skills differ according to social status, and the Bonferroni technique that underlines the differences among groups.

Table 5. One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) results concerning problem solving skills scores of 5-6 years old children based on social status

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Social Problem Solving	Between Groups	413.938	3	137.979	16.439	.001*
	Within Groups	1074.327	128	8.393		
	Total	1488.265	131			

*p < .01

According to Table 5, it is evident that social problem solving skills of 5-6 years old children differ (p<.01) according to their social status. Results of the Post-Hoc Bonferroni analysis technique, conducted to determine between which groups the difference occurs, are given on Table 6.

Tablo 6. *Post-Hoc Bonferroni test results concerning social problem solving skill scores of 5-6 years old children based on social status*

Social Status (I)	Social Status (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	p
Popularity	Rejection	4.76*	.001*
	Exclusion	-2.98*	.003**
	Controversial	1.53	.283
Rejection	Popularity	-4.76*	.001*
	Exclusion	-1.78	.091
	Controversial	-3.23*	.001*
Exclusion	Popularity	-2.98*	.003**
	Rejection	1.78	.091
	Controversial	-1.46	.311
Controversial	Popularity	-1.53	.283
	Rejection	3.23*	.001*
	Exclusion	1.46	.311

*p < .01, **p<.05

It is evident on Table 6 that according to the Bonferroni test, conducted to determine how social problem solving differs based on social status, there is a significant difference between popular and rejected children ($\overline{X}$ = 13.78) along with excluded ($\overline{X}$ = 10.80) children, in favor of popular children. There is a significant difference between rejected children ($\overline{X}$ = 9.02) and controversial children ($\overline{X}$ = 12.26) in favor of controversial children.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings of this study, which aims at determining the relationships between social problem solving and social statuses of 5-6 years old children, there is a relationship

between social problem solving skills and being liked by peers, being disliked by peers and social preference levels. According to this result, being liked by peers level/social problem solving skills increase/decrease as social problem solving skills/being liked by peers level increases/decreases. Social preference/social problem solving skills increase/decrease as social problem solving skills/social preference level increases/decreases. Being disliked by peers/social problem solving skills increase/decrease as social problem solving skills/being disliked by peers level decreases/increases. In addition, there is no significant relationship between social problem solving skills and social impact. It is evident that social problem solving significantly predicts the level of being liked by peers, being disliked by peers and social preference level. Social problem solving predicts social preference the most and being disliked by peers the least. Social problem solving does not significantly predict social impact. It is observed that there are differences between social problem solving score averages according to social status. It is underlined that children who are popular among peer groups have the highest social problem solving skills and rejected children have the lowest social problem solving skills.

There are researches in the literature that are in line with the study findings. For example, as a result of the studies conducted by Tozduman-Yaralı & Özkan (2016) to determine the relationship between interpersonal problem solving skills of children attending preschool institutions and social efficiency, anger, violence and anxiety-introversion behaviors, it was observed that anger and violence decreases as problem solving skills increase. According to the results of the study conducted by Mayeux and Cillessen (2003), who aimed at examining the development of early childhood social problem solving skills according to variables such as determination, change and social efficiency, it is evident that, when compared with other children, children who are liked by their peers generate more effective solutions for problems. Özmen (2013) examined peer relationships based on interpersonal problem solving skills and underlined that peer relationships differ according to interpersonal problem solving skills. Increase in interpersonal problem solving skills decreased shyness and helped solving problems more effectively. In addition, it was also evident that children display social behaviors and generate positive peer relationships.

According to Kesicioğlu's (2015) study on preschool children's interpersonal problem solving skills, children with low problem solving skills are not sharing and participative in activities and these behaviors lead to outcomes such as being excluded from group activities. Peterson's (2001) study on 3-5 years old 43 children underlines a positive relationship between social problem solving and peer acceptance. Erwin (1994) carried out a study on 26 preschool students and determined the most popular and most rejected 4 students in the classroom; thus observed that popular children generate the most effective solutions for social dilemmas that occur during peer interactions. Paswan, Sanjeev and Bansal (2014) conducted a study on 500 children and observed that there is a relationship between peer acceptance and rejection and social problem solving skills. It is stated that children who are liked by their peers have a devoted and flexible viewpoint for problems and generate positive strategies. Asher and Renshaw (1981)

state that non-popular children can resort to non-social resolutions that consist of violence. Brochin and Wasik (1992) underline that children who are liked and disliked by their peers differ according to their social problem solving skills.

Researchers (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2006; Stormshak & Welsh, 2005) state that there is evidence of relationship between social efficiency and social status of preschool children. In a related study, Warden and Mackinnon (2003) underline that compared with peers who are bullies and victims, popular children are more emphatic and prosocial and generate solutions that have more positive results on social problems. According to a study conducted by Wang and colleagues (2021) on 16 children aged 5-6, it is stated that there is a relationship between peer preferences and problem behaviors of the children. Also, Meece and Mize (2009) emphasize that social cognitive factors can relate to peer relationships and peer acceptance, and that peer relationships can be affected by social-cognitive processes and cognitive representations. It is evident that the findings of this study are in line with similar studies.

It is also underlined that a relationship is not observed between social problem solving skills and social impact. This finding emphasizes that there can be variables other than social problem solving that are effective on social impact. For example, Baird and Grace (2021) state that parent-child attachment style, social skills and language competency can affect peer relationships. According to Chin's (2014) study on 5-6 years old 47 children, relied on children are preferred more by peers than children who are not relied on. Godleski and colleagues (2014) underline that regulating emotions can affect the level of peer rejection and physical peer victimization. Austin and Draper (1984) emphasize that social impact is in relation with academic achievement. It is evident that there are various variables which are effective in being disliked or not preferred by peers during preschool years.

According to the study findings, it is clear that social problem solving skills of young children are interrelated with three peer relationship variables being liked by peers, being disliked by peers and social preference in the peer group and also predict all three variables. Children who generate positive and structural strategies for social problems can establish effective peer relationships and thus, are liked by and are preferred more by their peers. Social problem solving skills is a variable that can shape peer relationships during preschool years. Thus, it can be asserted that social problem solving skills are crucial according to peer relationships.

Limitations and Suggestions

There are various limitations of this study. For example, the study is limited to 5-6 years old children with normal development and who attend preschool education. It is also a study based on teacher and student opinions. Various suggestions can be presented to future studies on this subject according to the limitations and findings of the study. Future studies on the subject can be carried out with more comprehensive samples of different age groups. Parent opinions, observations and other different data resources can be resorted to. Study results underline that social problem solving significantly predicts the level of being liked by peers. The level of being

liked by peers and the relationship with social problem solving should be taken into consideration in future studies. In addition, educational programs based on social problem solving skills of children can be planned and parents can be included in these programs. Social status and social problem solving skills of preschool aged children can be examined according to various variables (age, socioeconomic status, years of preschool experience, family variables, number of siblings etc.). Long term studies that focus on social status and social problem solving skills of children starting from preschool years can be conducted. Scales consisting of various dimensions can be developed to examine social status and social problem solving in preschool years.

Teachers can identify peer relationships of children through techniques like sociometry by observing the students throughout the year. Planning should be made especially to support children who encounter insufficiency in peer relationships. Social problem solving skills of children can be improved by including social problem solving activities in the planning. Parents of children who are not preferred by peers can be interviewed and teachers can give suggestions so as to support the children's social skills, and they can also get support from families. By considering the fact that preschool years are crucial in establishing social problem solving skills, teachers can plan seminar programs to inform parents on how to support their children during these years.

<div align="center">**REFERENCES**</div>

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