Full Length Research Paper

An investigation of social skills in children with different perfectionism levels

Emel Arslan

Faculty of Ahmet Keleşoğlu Education, Selcuk University, Konya, Turkey. E-mail: emaslan@selcuk.edu.tr.

The purpose of this study is to analyze social skills in children with different perfectionism. The participants were 514 (254 females and 260 males) elementary school students. Data were collected from "multidimensional perfectionism scale" and "Matson evaluation of social skills with youngsters". In order to analyze data, t test were employed. In the study it was found that average positive social skill scores according to perfectionism levels did not significantly vary. Furthermore, it was found that average negative social behaviors scores according to perfectionism levels significantly varied and average negative social behavior scores of the children with high levels of perfectionism were higher than those of the children with low levels of perfectionism.

Key words: Social skill, perfectionism, children.

INTRODUCTION

Social skills have a significant role in establishing good relationships with other people, obeying social rules, undertaking responsibility, helping others and enjoying one's rights. Primary education enables the individuals to acquire basic competencies to solve the problems they encounter, to adapt to social values and to apply social rules (Çubukçu and Gültekin, 2006). Socialization means learning the beliefs and attitudes of the society a child belongs to and learning the behaviors a child is expected to show (Bayhan and Artan, 2004). Socialization means becoming a member of the society. As a result of the interaction with the environment, a child develops similar behaviors with the people around him/her (Kağitçibaşi, 1996). It is easier for individuals who have edequate social skills to establish relationships in different aspects of their lifes (Kabasakal and Çelik, 2010).

Social skills are one of the important factors of social and psychological development of a child. Acquiring and developing social skills are one of the important characteristics from the period of childhood. Since the children with high level of social skills have more techniques in solving daily interpersonal problems, they are more successful in their social relationships (Bacanli and Erdoğan, 2003). The children with social skills find more pleasure in activities they participate and can take their decisions on their own. However, the children who lack adequate social skills might be excluded by their friends (Çelik, 2007). Humans communicate with each other through the skills which are defined as social skills. In addition to maintaining social order, psychological health of the people and establishing healthy relationships with other people depend on their social skills (Yiğit, 2008).

Social skills are also defined as the ability of establishing healthy and effective communication with other people (Bacanli, 1999; Kabasakal and Çelik, 2010; Segrin, 2001). Initiating, maintaining and properly ending interpersonal relationships can be considered within the scope of social skills. Being raised in such a way to show the behaviors the society expects and requires from an individual is related with the social development of that individual. In addition, considering that the psychological health of an individual depends on establishing healthy relationships with other people, social skills are also beneficial for psychological health (Bacanli, 1999; Çubukçu and Gültekin, 2006; Yiğit, 2008). Social skills include a variety of verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as using body language in an effective way, initiating, developing and continuing the interpersonal relationships, assertiveness, expressing yourself, interpersonal conflict resolving, controlling the anger, problem solving, decision

---

This article was presented in 2nd International Conference on Education, Economy and Society, Paris, France.

making, speaking and listening skills (Bacanli, 1999).

The success of an individual in family, school and working life are also important factors for social skills (Deniz, 2002; Yüksel, 1997). Perfectionism is one of the personal traits affecting psychological and social life of an individual (Yatar-Yildiz, 2007). Hollender (1965) as one of the first researchers to make studies to copceptualize perfectionism suggested that perfectionism is a negative personality property learned in childhood. Dictionary definitions of perfectionism indicate that perfectionism reflects high standards or expectations about the performance in an individual's life (Sapmaz, 2006). Perfectionism refers to being unhappy about something which fails to have high standards or which is not perfect (Bencik, 2006). Perfectionists are the individuals who have aims that are not possible to reach or to complete and set unreasonable standarts (Mizrak, 2006). Perfectionists withdraw to try for their goals or aims, with the anxiety of not to be able to reach them. They also can not cooperate and give authority to someone, since they don't trust the others for doing the job perfectly so they do the entire job by themselves (Yatar-Yildiz, 2007).

Self-oriented perfectionism has been defined as the tendency to set excessively high standards and to engage in overly critical self-evaluations. In this kind of perfectionism there is a gap between the true self and the ideal one. Socially prescribed perfectionism refers to the tendency for an individual to meet the expectations and standards set by the other people. This dimension of perfectionism expresses the interpersonal side of relationship. Others-oriented perfectionism is related with blaming others, authority and narcissism. They give excessive importance to the other people's perfectionism and criticize them harshly (Hewitt and Flett, 1990; 1991).

In recent years, psychologists began to consider perfectionism as a multidimensional concept. Perfectionism might hinder success and cause many pathologic situations and this situation creates a problem. On the other hand, it plays a motivating role in achieving a success and might enable the individual to be more cautious, responsible and successful (Bencik, 2006). Perfectionist individuals have a thought of "I am not good enough and I should do better" (Hollender, 1965). Burns (1980) defines perfectionists as individuals measuring their self-value by their competence and productiveness. A perfectionist student can face negative emotional states and low efficacy feeling.

The aim of the present study is to analyze the effect of different perfectionism levels on social skills of children.

METHODS

Participants

The survey model was used in the current study. The participants were 514 (254 females and 260 males) elementary school students in Konya/Turkey. Participants participated in the research voluntarily.

Instruments

Matson evaluation of social skills with youngsters

In order to measure the social skill levels, the Matson evaluation of social skills with youngsters (MESSY) (Matson et al., 1983) and adapted into Turkish by Bacanli and Erdoğan (2003), was used. According to the results of factor analysis, unlike the original form – which consisted of 47 items – items were loaded in 2 factors. Factor I was negative social behaviors and Factor II was positive social behaviors. The reliability of the MESSY was determined by test-retest reliability and internal consistency. The test-retest procedure showed that the correlations on subscales were 70 ($p < .01$) for the negative social behaviors subscale and 74 ($p < .01$) for the positive social behaviors subscale.

As a result of the internal consistency of the scale alpha values were found to be 0.68, for positive social behaviors and 0.74, for negative social behaviors (Bacanli and Erdoğan, 2003).

Multidimensional perfectionism scale (MPS)

The MPS was developed by Frost et al. (1990) and the adaptations of the MPS to Turkish were performed by Özbay and Taşdemir (2003) for children. It consists of 35 items, each rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with the higher the score, the greater the tendency towards holding perfectionism. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90.

Data analysis

In statistical data analysis a t test was conducted for independent groups. SPSS 16.0 was used for data analysis.

RESULTS

The lowest score that the 514 children from the sample group received from perfectionism scale was 40 and the highest score was 169. Even though the multidimensional perfectionism scale score average of the sample group was 114.79, the standard deviation was 17.94. Table 1.

Mean ($\overline{X}$) – Standard deviation (S.d) = 96

Mean ($\overline{X}$) + Standard deviation (S.d) = 132

When the difference and sum of the average and standard deviation values of the scores that children received from "multidimensional perfectionism scale" were calculated, it was determined that the scores 96 and lower were "low", the scores between 97 and 132 were "normal", and the scores 132 and higher were "high". By this way, it was aimed to calculate the perfectionism scores of children which are below and above the average, and to evaluate the difference between the "multidimensional perfectionism scale scores" that children in the low and high groups received and the MESSY score. And the purpose of this evaluation was to determine which social skills that the group whose perfectionism scores were "low" and the group whose perfectionism scores were "high" mostly use.

Table 1. Averages and standard deviations of children' multidimensional perfectionism scale minimum and maximum scores.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	$\overline{X}$	S.d.
Perfectionism	514	40	169	114.79	17.94

Table 2. Scores of children' perfectionism

Scores of Perfectionism	N
Between 1 to 96 points lower	84
Between 97 to 132 points normally	345
Between 132 and higher points highly	85

Table 3. t test result about the social skills of children whose perfectionism scale score were below and above the average.

Dependent variables	Level of perfectionism	N	$\overline{X}$	S.s.	t	p
Negative social behaviors	Low	84	76.13	8.19	-3.802	0.000**
	High	85	81.41	9.79		
Positive social Behaviors	Low	84	69.52	7.80	-1.703	0.193
	High	85	71.27	9.49		

**p<.01

In order to determine the difference in the level of social skills that the students whose perfectionism scores were high and low use, whether the social skills scores of the group whose MESSY score was below the average and the scores of the group whose perfectionism score was above the average differentiate or not was checked with t test by considering the two values obtained by subtracting the standard deviation from the arithmetic average of the group, and adding the standard deviation to the arithmetic average of the group. Table 3 shows the results obtained from the t test. When Table 3 was analyzed, it was determined that the difference in the score averages of the "positive social behaviors" sub-dimension of children who are in the low and high group is not significant (t = -1.703, p>.05).

However, it was determined that the differences in the score average of the "negative social behaviors" sub-dimension of children who are in the low and high group are significant (t = -3.802, p<.01). When the averages were analyzed, it was seen that the children whose perfectionism are high have more negative social behavior.

DISCUSSION

In the study it was found that average positive social skill scores according to perfectionism levels did not signifi-

cantly vary. Furthermore, it was found that average negative social behaviors scores according to perfectionism levels significantly varied and average negative social behavior scores of the children with high levels of perfectionism were higher than those of the children with low levels of perfectionism. This result indicates that the children with high levels of perfectionism have more negative social behavior than the children who have low levels of perfectionism. Perfectionist individuals have certain thought patterns maintaining their perfectionism and these individuals strictly evaluate themselves.

One of the most common perception disorders in perfectionist individuals is "all or none" type of thinking. In this type of thinking, the individual tends to consider the events only as "right" or "wrong" without thinking that there are various levels between "right" and "wrong". This means having high standards (Bencik, 2006; Erözkan, 2009). The fact that the perfectionists tend to be excessively organized, want everything always to take place in the same manner and that they suspect from everything turn life into a distress and load (Bencik, 2006). Perfectionist people always see the negative aspects of the things they do and can not see the positive aspects. Therefore, the perfectionists have a low level of satisfaction. In addition, as they have highly strict self-evaluation criteria, they have low self-esteem (Erözkan, 2009).

A perfectionist student might encounter certain emo-

tions and situations when he/she fails to achieve the goals he/she sets (Dilmaç et al., 2009). Bencik (2006) analyzed the relationship between self concept and perfectionism and revealed that as perfectionism increased, self-esteem decreased. Furthermore, it was reported that, in addition to weakness in social relationships, low self-esteem is also related with emotional maturity (Koçak, 2008). Various factors might affect lack of social skills. The problems blocking acquiring or the performance of social skills such as anxiety, anger, depression and low self-esteem might affect behavioral performance of social skills. Cognitive processes affecting social skills include negative self-evaluations, excessively high performance standards, unrealistic expectations, misperceptions, wrong interpretations and irrational beliefs (Çivitçi and Çivitçi, 2009).

The aforementioned views and research about perfectionism and social skill indicate that an individual's high standards and expectations affect social skill and adaptation. The fact that the finding of the present study suggests that the children with high perfectionism have more negative social skills than those with low perfectionism might be considered as a result of the high standards and expectations of the children. The basis of the efforts for developing skills like self expression by the children, establishing relationships with their families and individuals around them, being accepted by their friends, gaining self-confidence and gaining social independency includes enabling the students to have social behaviors, supporting them when they behave appropriately and motivating them (Çubukçu and Gültekin, 2006). Based on the results of our study, the activities for developing social skills should include educations on cognitive properties and perfectionism for the benefit of the children.

Furthermore, the fact that the parents and teachers avoid to show supporting attitudes towards perfectionism behaviors of the children based on high standards might have a positive effect on the social skills of the children.

REFERENCES

Bacanli H (1999). Social skill education. Ankara: Nobel Yayin Dağitim.
Bacanli H, Erdoğan F (2003). Adaptation of the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY) to Turkish. Educ. Sci.: Theory & Practice, 3(2): 351-379.
Bencik S (2006). An investigation of the relationship between perfectionisim and self concept to gifted children. Unpublished master dissertation. Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey.
Burns DD (1980). The perfectionist's script for self-defeat. Psychology Today, 41: 34-51.
Çelik N (2007). The effects of social skills training on social adjustment of elementary school students. Unpublished master dissertation. Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, Turkey.

Çivitçi A, Çivitçi N (2009). Perceived social skills and irrational beliefs in primary school students. Elementary Education Online, 8(2): 415-424.
Çubukçu Z, Gültekin M (2006). Social skills that need to be gained by primary school student. Bilig, 37: 155-174.
Deniz. E. (2002). Investigation of decision making strategies and social skills levels of university students with respect to TA-dominant ego states and some personal characteristics. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey.
Dilmaç B, Aydoğan D, Koruklu N, Deniz ME (2009). The explication of primary school students' perfectionist properties with irrational beliefs. Elementary Education Online, 8(3): 720-728.
Erözkan A (2009). The predictors of depression in eighth grade primary school students. Elementary Education Online, 8(2): 334-345.
Hewitt PL, Flett GL (1990). Perfectionism and depression: a multidimensional analysis. J. Soc. Behavior Personality, 5: 423–438.
Hewitt PL, Flett GL (1991). Perfectionism in the self and social contexts: conceptualization, assessment, and association with psychopathology. J. Personality Soc. Psychol., 60(3): 456–470.
Hollender MH (1965). Perfectionism comprehensive. Psychiatry, 6 : 94-103.
Kabasakal Z, Çelik N (2010). The effects of social skills' training on elementary school students' social adjustment. Elementary Education Online, 9(1): 203-212.
Kağitçibaşi Ç (1996). Human and humans. İstanbul: Evrim Yayinlari.
Koçak E (2008). An examination of self-esteem, trait anger and types of expressions as the predictor of loneliness among adolescents. Unpublished master dissertation. Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey.
Mizrak ÖE (2006). Multidimensional perfectionism scale adaptation study on patients with anxiety disorder and/or depressive disorder. Unpublished master dissertation. Ankara Univesity, Ankara, Turkey
Matson JL, Rotatori AF, Helsel WJ (1983). Development of a rating scale to measure social skills in children: The Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY). Behavior Research and Therapy, 21(4): 35-340.
Özbay Y, Taşdemir MÖ (2002). Multidimentional perfectionism scale: Study of reliability and validity. VII. Psychological and Counseling National Advisory Congress, Malatya İnönü University.
San BP, Artan İ (2004). Child development and education. İstanbul: Morpa Yayinlari.
Sapmaz F (2006). The investigation of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and psychological symthoms at university students. Unpublished master dissertation, Sakarya, Turkey.
Segrin C (2001). Social skills and negative life events: testing the deficit stress generation hypothesis. Current Psychology, 20(1): 17-19.
Yatar YH (2007). Researching relationship between text anxiety parent attitude and perfectionism. Unpublished master dissertation, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey.
Yiğit R (2008). Comprative examination of level elementary junior high school students depression and social skills according to self esteem and some variables. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey.
Yüksel G (1997). Effect of social skill education on social skill levels of university students. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey.