Gender differences in social skills of Iranian preschool children

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Abstract:

We conducted descriptive and cross-sectional research, to measuring the social skills based on gender differences in preschool children in Tehran. 350 preschool children 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. The result showed from the viewpoint of the teachers that there existed no significant difference in social skills between boys and girls (p. value=0.12); in spite of the viewpoint of the parents, the social skills were generally higher in girls (p. value=0.017). Moreover, the cooperation index was higher in girls (p. value=0.002); whereas, there was no significant difference in self-control assertion between girls and boys from the viewpoint of the parents.

Keywords

Social Skills, Preschool Children, Gender
Introduction

Social skills include the ability to establish reciprocal relationship with others in a particular social context in a way that is acceptable and valuable to the conventions of the society (Dirks et al., 2007). Early childhood period is a vital one in the social and emotional evolution. During the era before school the children begin to realize the difference between negative and positive emotions. Moreover, they learn how to control their own emotions and how to establish relationships with others (Kramer et al., 2010). Social skills are essentially tied to all the aspects of children's life, and they influence their compatibility and conformity (Waanders et al., 2007).

Emotional and social merits do not appear spontaneously, rather are influenced by early acquisition on the part of the child from the environment (Joseph and Strain, 2003). The children need help in order to adapt themselves to the environment after birth. The family members provide the child with such psychic and physical needs (Çimen and Koçyiğit, 2010). Children learn the social laws initially in the family and through interacting with the family members (Margetts, 2005).

In other words, entering a new social environment such as school leaves a deep impression on the children's realization and comprehension of laws. Initiation into school means entering of the child to a new and complex social environment which is a window to the world. Preschool centers could be the first place in which the children experience separation from the family and they are positioned in a social environment outside home for the first time (Çimen and Koçyiğit, 2010).

One of the social responsibilities of preschool children is to acquire the ability of establishing reciprocal and successful relationships with their peers. Children learn how to behave and judge by interacting with others (Kharrāzi and Delgoshāee, 2010). Contact with their peers brings about transformation in the social experiences of the children and helps them to recognize themselves. In addition, they learn behaviors like observing others' turns, getting into partnership, cooperating, paying attention to others' ideas, being a pioneer in works, and controlling anger (Secer et al., 2010, Gresham et al., 2010). Children with higher levels of social skill have more positive interactions with their peers and show more educational skills in elementary school (Berry and O'Connor, 2010, Arnold et al., 2012).

In the conducted researches, individuals who have weak social skills are exposed to the following negative consequences: rejection by their peers (Keane and Calkins, 2004), developing of psychological disorders, quitting school (Matson and Wilkins, 2009), being dropped out of school, aggressive and antisocial behaviors (Fox et al., 2007), seeking isolation, crime, and weak academic competence (Gresham et al., 2006).

However some children have poor social skills in comparison to their peers (Keane and Calkins, 2004), and this issue engenders psychological problems like establishing unsuccessful relationships with their peers, weak academic competence (Panacek and Dunlap, 2003), not taking part
in secondary activities, seeking isolation and social isolation (Chang et al., 2007, Hyatt and Filler, 2007), rejection by peers, anxiety, depression, and anger in childhood and ensuing years (Segrin and Flora, 2000, Sim et al., 2006).

Children's social competences are deeply influenced by culture and environment, and different cultures do not consider such social skills to be of the same significance (Margetts, 2005, Abdi, 2010). Thus, various cultures, social skills are different in boys and girls (Anme et al., 2010). It seems that cultural-educational methods tend to pay more attention to boys as compared with girls in Iran, and this may lead to diversity in the applied educational frameworks between boys and girls (Abdi, 2010). Consequently, it is essential to investigate the social skills in Preschool children in Iran.

Methodology:

Multistage sampling was used sampling in order to chose a representative sample. In this manner, firstly nineteen districts of Tehran were divided into five categories, and then two districts from each category and totally ten districts were selected randomly as samples. Thus districts 1,3,4,5,6,7,9,11,16,19 were selected. As the list of the students names are available in electronic form based on gender segregation and kind of school, number of needed sample in each district was calculated based on number of students in each districts and gender. The list of Preschools in each district was provided; several Preschool centers were chosen randomly from each district; and of each one some classes and ultimately of each class the needed number of students was selected randomly, the questionnaires were distributed to be filled. The least needed time for establishing relationship between the teacher and student for familiarity was three months; hence, going to Preschool and sampling three months after the commencement of academic year. 350 questionnaires were given to the mothers and 350 other were handed to the teachers. The questionnaires were filled and delivered to the researcher at the Preschool center in order to save time and money. The time for filling each questionnaire was 15 minutes.

For ethical considerations, the research protocol was approved by the Medical Research Ethics Committee of Tehran University of Medical Sciences. Written informed consent was obtained from all mothers and teachers prior to participate in. Confidentiality was guaranteed to mothers and fathers.

The tools of accumulating data composed of two parts: a paper for accumulating demographic data and Social Skills Rating Systems (SSRS) questionnaire of Gresham and Elliott which is specific to Preschool children (parent form and teacher form). Rating System has been furnished for Preschool, elementary school, and high school. It consists of three forms specific to parents, teachers, and students. Forms specific to parents and teacher for Preschool have been applied in this research. Parent form consists of 39 articles and that of the teachers includes 30 articles. This system has subtests about cooperation, assertion, and self-control. The score of social skills given by mothers and teachers is reckoned by adding up the subtests and calculating the average. Cooperation includes behaviors like sharing paraphernalia and following instructions and guidance. Self-control comprises those behaviors
that necessitate rational reaction on the part of the student in burdensome situations like being ridiculed. Moreover, it embraces those behaviors that doing them seems necessary in ordinary situations like observing turns. Assertion encompasses initiatory behaviors like gaining information of others, introducing one to others, and responding properly to others' behaviors. Each article had the following three-mark options: Never, Sometimes, Most of the Time. For rating this system each option was given a code ranging from 0 to 2 (Never=0, Sometimes=1, and Most of the Time=2). Then we proceeded to encode the systems and subsystems. In this manner, we must add up the marks of all the options in order to reckon the score of the system and subsystems.

Authenticity and durability of this system was approved by Shahim in 2001 at Shiraz. The retest durability for 35 children within 4-5 weeks interval for social skills was 70% in parents form and 71% in teachers form. Correlation coefficient between teachers form and parents form was 18% (p<0.05). Correlation coefficient between different subtests for social skills in parents form ranged from 26% to 52% and in teachers form ranged from 38% to 66%. The data were entrusted to the computer (using SPSS 15 software). Their processing and analysis were done by utilizing descriptive statistics (frequency distribution tables, numerical charts and indexes) and deductive statistics (independent t test).

Results:

The t test of independent groups was used for exploring the relationship between social skills and gender from the viewpoint of the teachers. Prior to that, the presupposition of variances homogeneity of the two groups was scrutinized by Levin test. The results showed that the presupposition holds true for cooperation and not so for assertion, self-control, and social skill. Conclusively, the result of the test, accompanied by Welch's corrected grades of flexibility, was taken as the base in assertion, self-control, and social skill.

The results indicate that there exists not a substantial difference between boys and girls in the social skills of cooperation, assertion, and self-control from the viewpoint of the teachers. The two groups are identical in this respect.

The t test of independent groups was used for exploring the relationship between social skills and gender from the viewpoint of the teachers. Prior to that, the presupposition of variances homogeneity of the two groups was scrutinized by Levin test. The results displayed that the presupposition holds true for all the variables.

The results indicate that there is a considerable difference between girls and boys in cooperation from the viewpoint of the parents (t= -3.18, p<0.05); therefore, the girls' level of cooperation is higher than that of the boys from the viewpoint of parents though there is not a noticeable difference between girls and boys in assertion and self-control. The two groups are similar. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of parents there is a substantial difference (t= -2.40, p<0.05) between
girls and boys in social skills (general). Consequently the girls' level of social skills is significantly higher than that of the boys.

**Discussion:**

The present research was conducted in order to evaluate the differences between the two genders in social skills based on Gresham and Elliott's scale of Preschool children's social skills through teachers and parents' rating. The results illustrated that the girls' mark in social skills was higher in comparison to that of the boys from the viewpoint of the parents; whereas, there was not a substantial difference between girls and boys in social skills from the viewpoint of the teachers.

This result is in line with Gresham and Elliott's founding in 1990. Moreover, it is in accord with the research of Veenstra et al., 2007, the research of Martin and Fabes, 2001, and the research of Meier, 2000. On the contrary, there is a substantial difference between the two genders in social skills: Persson, 2005 and Gouley et al., 2008. According to studies done in Iran, Nourani (1998) realized that the mark of social skills is higher in girls as compared with boys; however, Shahim (2004) did not perceive such a difference. The results of Abdi's research in 2010 indicated that girls achieve higher marks in social skills in contrast with boys. Since the present study has been done on Preschool children in Tehran, one must be circumspect in extending its results to the children of other cities. Considering the history of the research, the impact of problematic behaviors and weak social skills on academic competence, and other psychological problems, inclusion of assessing social skills in children sifting program before entering school is recommended. And taking into account the founding of the present paper about Preschool boys' weakness in social skills, some programs for teaching these skills to boys be designed and implemented before entering school.
References


Table 1. Average and Standard Deviation distribution of Preschool children’s social skills based on gender from teachers’ viewpoint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p. value</th>
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<th>Girl</th>
<th>Boy</th>
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<tr>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>71.62</td>
<td>68.69</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.37</td>
<td>18.22</td>
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<td>0.15</td>
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<td>68.89</td>
<td>65.25</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Assertion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25.89</td>
<td>21.48</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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<td>0.18</td>
<td>-1.34</td>
<td>70.67</td>
<td>67.24</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
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<td>25.95</td>
<td>21.80</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
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<td>70.39</td>
<td>67.06</td>
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<td>Social Skills</td>
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<td>22.04</td>
<td>18.01</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Average and Standard Deviation distribution of Preschool children's social skills based on gender from parents' viewpoint

<table>
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<td>0.002</td>
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<td>0.36</td>
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<td>20.50</td>
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