

# A Study on Social Competence and Temperament of Pre-School Children's

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the social competence and temperament of 4-6 age group children attending pre-school education institutions, to identify whether their social competence levels vary by gender, and to show the relationship between the sub-dimensions of social competence and those of temperament. The study group consists of n=148 female children and n=180 male children in 4-6 age group receiving pre-school education. The data were collected via the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale-SCBE 30 and the Short Temperament Scale for Children. The data were analyzed via independent-samples t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings were evaluated at .05-.001 significance level. The research findings indicated that children's social competence levels significantly vary by gender ( $p<.05$ ), and there are positive and negative significant relationships between the sub-dimensions of social competence and those of temperament ( $p<.05$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The findings of the research were discussed in the light of some research and literature, some suggestions have been made.

**Keywords:** social competence, temperament, children, preschool education

## 1. Introduction

Social relations pre-school children have with adults and their peers and the ways they express their emotions depending on the environments they are in are among the most important components of social-emotional development. These social and emotional skills facilitate the child's adaptation to his family and social environment and affect his academic achievement and social competence (Denham, 1998; Rubin, Bokuwski, & Parker, 2006). Social competence refers to an individual's capability to start and maintain positive social communication with other individuals (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Katz et al., 1995; Rydell, Hagekull, & Bohlin, 1997). It is also defined as a person's capability to manage his behaviors and relations in the existing social environment in order to accomplish his social purposes (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). In the early childhood period, a socially competent child is expected to establish emotionally strong relations with his parents, have positive relations with adults and his peers, be included in playgroups by his peers, have self-confidence, be sharing, and cooperate and collaborate with others (Gresham & Reschly, 1987; Hartup, 1996; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002; Thompson, 2006).

Social competence is affected by relations with peers, siblings, parents, mass media, and a lot of factors such as anger, aggression, anxiety, and withdrawal. Temperament is another factor associated with social competence. There are two other important points to consider when hypothesizing a relationship between temperament and social competence. Firstly, because of the relative stability of temperament across situations, it can be speculated that a child's basic level of social competency will not vary significantly from context to context. Children socially competent in one situation will tend to competent in other situations, although certain styles of behavior may prove more effective in some situations than other styles. Of course, behaviors deemed as socially competent may differ because of contextual demands. Moreover, the temperament of infants and toddlers may be more closely related to social competence than the temperamental characteristics of older children and adults, due to the older person's greater self control over expressions of temperament (e.g., negative mood) and increasing awareness of behaviors deemed as socially appropriate. Secondly, it was recognized that however

much a child's distinctive temperamental characteristics establish a basis for uniqueness. Secondly, it was recognized that however much a child's distinctive temperamental characteristics establish a basis for uniqueness and individuality, the ultimate significance of temperament to the child will be determined by the ways in which these characteristics influence the child's interactions with other persons (Carson, 1984). As Damon (1983) observes, there is nothing objective or predetermined about the social effect of a particular temperamental characteristic, in one social context, for example, high levels of activity may be prized as "vigor", "lustiness", or "liveliness"; in other social contexts, they might be devalued as "restlessness", "hyperactivity", or "aggressiveness". How a disposition is received affects the *very* meaning of the disposition in both an individual and a social sense. Recent studies on temperament explain how it contributes to a child's development. Children's temperament consistently predicts their cognitive and social functionality (Berk, 2013). It is considered that temperament affects social development by determining the way the child perceives and reacts to his environment (Rothbart, Ahadi, & Hershey, 1994). Temperament refers to individual differences in the emotional, behavioral, and attentional processes, which can also be observed in the early periods of infancy. Temperament, which has a biological origin, is partially affected by environment as well (Rothbart & Bates, 1998). Every child has a nature that is genetically determined at birth. This nature affects his level of activity, emotions, and reactions. The child's level of activity, mood, capability to adapt, first reactions, the intensity of his reactions, duration of his attention, his biological rhythm (order), and sensitiveness are signs of his temperament. These personal differences, which are referred to as temperament, manifest themselves as of the first days and become more apparent in the course of time (Zuckerman & Frank, 1992; Culbertson, Newman, & Willis, 2003). Temperament in infancy has three dimensions: (a) *negative reactivity* referring to high-intensity reactions such as anger, whimpering, and whining, (b) *approach-withdrawal* referring to tendency to approach or avoid new situations and people, (c) *persistence* referring to capability to focus attention on a task for a long time and tendency to continue to work on a job until completing it. These dimensions of temperament are associated with many different areas of child development, social development and emotional development being in the first place (Azar, 1995). Dimensions of temperament effect children's social-emotional development. Some of recent studies show that the relations between social competency, problem solving skills and negative reactivity, emotiveness status of a child (Scmithz, Fulker, Emde, & Zahn-Waxler, 2001; Peterson ve Sanson, 1999). Additionally it is related to social behaviors. Sociable preschool age children have tendency of being social with their peers despite they have some conflicts with them (Chen...). Studies on this dimension of temperament have significant results (Kagan, 1998; Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002).

Kotler and McMahan (2002) investigated the relationship between the social competence, anxiety, and aggression levels of pre-school children. They concluded that children with higher social competence make more use of their remain passive characteristic in comparison to anxious children and are more tolerant in comparison to angry children. Şendil (2010) carried out a study to demonstrate whether the preference of 5-6 age group children by their peers, their gender, and their temperament characteristics lead to a difference in their social competence levels and behavioral problems (anger-aggression and anxiety-withdrawal). They found out that the children who are preferred by their peers more, who are more perseverant, and who are more friendly have higher social competence whereas the children who have higher reactivity have behavioral problems involving higher anger-aggression. They also determined that gender leads to no difference in social competence and behavioral problems such as anger-aggression or anxiety-withdrawal. Koçyiğit, Sezer and Yılmaz (2015) investigated the relationship between children's social competence, emotion regulation, and play skills. They concluded that there is a positive relationship between children's play skills and social competence and there is a negative relationship between their play skills and "anger-aggression" and "anxiety-withdrawal". They detected a significant negative relationship between children's play skills and the sub-dimension of the Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire titled "Variability-Negativity". Previous research shows that social competence and temperament are associated with a lot of factors. Researchers are gradually interested in temperamental changes of children. It is believed that psychological features of temperament are milestones of an adults's personality (Berk, 2013). The present study aims to 4-6 age group pre-school children's social competence and temperament.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

Relational survey model, which is a general survey model, was used in this study. Relational survey model is a research model that aims to determine the existence of covariance between two or more variables and/or the degree of such covariance. Relational survey model has two types: correlation and comparison. Correlational research model deals with whether the variables have covariance and the nature of such covariance while

comparative research model involves forming groups between minimum two variables based on the independent variable and investigating whether there is any difference between the groups based on the dependent variable (Karasar, 2009).

## 2.2 Participants

The study group consists of 4-6 age group 328 children attending pre-school education institutions. Of the study group, 148 (45.1%) are female, 180 (54.9%) are male and 85 (25.9%) are 4 years, 195 (59.5%) 5 years and 48 (14.6%) 6 years.

## 2.3 Measures

The Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale-SCBE-30, which was developed by LaFreniere and Dumas (1996), and the Short Temperament Scale for Children, which was developed by Prior, Sanson, and Oberklaid (1989), were used for data collection.

The Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale-SCBE-30: the scale, which was developed by LaFreniere and Dumas in 1996, was adapted into Turkish by Çorapçı et al. (2010), who also carried out its validity-reliability studies in the case of Turkey. The scale was developed for 3-6 age group children and consists of 30 questions. It has three sub-scales, each of which contains 10 items. The Social Competence sub-scale measures children's positive characteristics such as cooperation with their peers and seeking solutions for disagreements. The Anger-Aggression sub-scale measures externalization signs such as objecting to adults and displaying maladaptive and aggressive behaviors in relations with peers. Lastly, the Anxiety-Withdrawal sub-scale measures children's sadness and depressiveness as well as internalization signs such as in-group timidity. It is a likert-type scale (1=never, 2 or 3=sometimes, 4 or 5=often, 6=always) and can be filled in by the teachers or parents. The high scale scores indicate high anger, high social competence, and high withdrawal whereas the low scale scores indicate low anger, low social competence, and low withdrawal (Çorapçı, Aksan, Arslan-Yalçın, & Yağmurlu, 2010). In the present study, 20 teachers filled in the measuring tool for 328 children. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients of the measuring tool were found to be as follows; Social Competence (SC): .82, Anger-Aggression (AA): .84, Anxiety-Withdrawal (AW): .80.

The Short Temperament Scale for Children: the Short Temperament Scale for Children (Prior, Sanson, & Oberklaid, 1989) was developed to determine children's temperament characteristics. In this 30-item 6-point likert-type scale, the parent evaluates how often his child shows the behavior specified in each item. This scale consists of four sub-scales: Approach (e.g., "My child is shy towards the children he meets for the first time"), Persistence (e.g., "My child likes completing the task he has started before proceeding to a new job"), Rhythmicity (e.g., "My child would like to grab a bite to eat almost at the same time every day"), Reactivity (e.g., "When my child is sad or bored while dealing with something, he throws it, cries, or slams the door"). The Turkish version of the Short Temperament Scale for Children was prepared by Yağmurlu and Sanson (2009) through translation/back-translation and administered to the mothers of 58 Turkish children living in Australia. In this study, the internal consistency scores of the Turkish version of the scale were found to be as follows; approach: .80, reactivity: .77, persistence: .76, and rhythmicity: .48. In Yağmurlu and Altan (2010), the Short Temperature Scale for Children was administered to the mothers of Turkish children whose ages ranged from 46 months to 70 months (N=145). In this study, sample group was selected from the day care centers providing service to families with middle-upper socio-economic level in Istanbul. The scale was observed to have acceptable reliability with the following values; approach: .75, reactivity: .69, persistence: .75, and rhythmicity: .63. The measuring tool was filled in by parents in the present study. The approach sub-dimension was not included in the study as it could not measure the required skills well. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale were found to be as follows; reactivity: .65, persistence: .72, and rhythmicity: .60.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

After the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale was administered to the teachers and the Short Temperament Scale for Children was administered to the parents, 328 scale forms that were seen to have been filled in completely were subjected to evaluation. Parametric tests were employed because the data had normal distribution in the normality tests carried out for the evaluation of the obtained data. The data concerning social competence level and gender were analyzed via independent-samples t-test. The relationship between the children's social competence and temperament was analyzed through Pearson's correlation analysis. The results were evaluated at .05-.001 significance level.

### 3. Results

The findings are tabulated and presented in this section.

Table 1. The arithmetic mean scores in the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale

Sub-Scales	N	X
Social Competence(SC) sub-scale	328	46.69
Anger-Aggression (AA) sub-scale	328	37.71
Anxiety-Withdrawal (AW) sub-scale	328	26.57

The arithmetic mean scores in the sub-scales of the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale are as follows; “Social Competence (SC)” X=46.69, “Anger-Aggression (AA)” X=37.71, “Anxiety-Withdrawal (AW)” X=26.57.

Table 2. The t-test results of the sub-scales of the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale based on gender (n=328)

Variable	Gender	N	X	SS	sd	t	p
SC	Female	148	47.25	6.82	326	1.197	.232
	Male	180	46.23				
AA	Female	148	24.66	9.12	326	-11.808	.000
	Male	180	37.51				
AW	Female	148	32.41	10.771	326	10.068	.000
	Male	180	21.77				
Total	Female	148	32.41	14.09	326	-.773	.440
	Male	180	21.77				

As it can be seen in the Table 2, there are significant differences between the scores obtained by the female and male children in the Anger-Aggression and Anxiety-Withdrawal sub-scales of SCBE ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 3. The results of analysis of correlation between the Children’s Social Competence (SC), Anger-Aggression (AA), and Anxiety-Withdrawal (AW), Scores and Approach (AP), Persistence (PER), and Reactivity (REA) Scores

Sub Scales	SC	AA	AW	SCBE	AP	REA	STSC	TST
SC	1							
AA	-.039	1						
AW	-.211**	-.303**	1					
SCBE	.352**	.581**	.410**	1				
AP	.110*	-.337**	.156**	-.101	1			
PER	.224**	.015	-.131*	.034	-.040	1		
REA	-.153**	.364**	-.199**	.065	-.384**	-.040	1	
TST	.107	.049	-.126*	.001	.383**	.593**	.461**	1

\*\* $p < .01$  \* $p < .05$

While there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the children's social competence scores and approach ( $*p<.05$ ,  $r=.110$ ) and persistence ( $**p<.001$ ,  $r=.224$ ) scores, there is a significant negative relationship between their social competence scores and reactivity ( $**p<.001$ ,  $r=-.153$ ) scores. There is a significant negative relationship between the children's anger-aggression scores and approach scores ( $**p<.001$ ,  $r=-.337$ ), whereas there is a significant positive relationship between their anger-aggression scores and reactivity scores ( $**p<.001$ ,  $r=.364$ ). There is no relationship between the children's anger-aggression scores and persistence scores. The children's anxiety-withdrawal scores have a significant positive relationship with their approach scores ( $**p<.001$ ,  $r=.156$ ) and have a significant negative relationship with their persistence and reactivity scores ( $**p<.001$ ,  $r=-.131$ ,  $r=-.199$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

The scores of 4-6 aged children on subscales of Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale are parallel to Gür and her colleagues' (2015), Çorapçı and his/her colleagues' (2010) studies (Table 1).

The male children obtained significantly higher mean scores in the "Anger-Aggression" (AA) sub-scale in comparison to the female children whereas the female children obtained significantly higher mean scores in the "Anxiety-Withdrawal" (AW) sub-scale in comparison to the male children ( $p<.001$ ). Similar findings are reported in previous studies on anger-aggression and anxiety-withdrawal behaviors. Likewise, Estrem et al. (2003), Casas et al. (2006), Green (2009), Gür et al. (2015) and Çorbacı-Oruç (2014) studied bullying and aggression behaviors among 4-5 age group pre-school children and determined that the male children had higher aggression scores than the female children. Females adopt advocacy and spectator roles more than males. In their study investigating relational aggression and physical aggression among pre-school female and male children, Estrem et al. (2003) found out that the male children had higher aggression scores than the female children. Casas et al. (2006) also report that male children display more aggressive behaviors than female children. As stated by Bandura (1989), male children's exposure to adult violence or observing violence among adults (e.g., battering, kicking) may cause them to be angrier and more aggressive than female children. In addition, various TV shows, violent games and various posts on social media may have a negative impact on children's mental development and thus trigger violent behaviors among male children. Anxiety-withdrawal scores were also found to be in favor of the female children in the present study. Lee, Herbert and Manasis (2014), Gür et al. (2015), Özyürek and Demiray (2010), and Dong et al. (1994) determined that female children have higher anxiety-withdrawal scores than male children. Parents' attitudes may be the cause of this situation. The fact that the female children are under physical or psychological pressure and are exposed to over-protective attitudes and inconsistencies (Yavuzer, 1994; Geçtan, 1995) may be the reason for high anxiety-withdrawal levels of female children.

It is stated that the social and emotional relations children establish with adults and their peers are associated with their temperament (Denham et al., 2003; Garner & Spears, 2000; Mendez, Fantuzzo, & Cicchetti, 2002). Previous research shows that there is a relationship between temperament and social competence (Bates, 1989). Considering the relationship between social competence and temperament, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between the children's social competence scores and approach and persistence scores while a significant negative relationship was detected between their social competence and reactivity scores. The children who have lower negative reactivity and get less angry can control their feelings and behaviors better and have higher social skills (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). This study indicated a positive relationship the children's social competence and approach and persistence and a negative relationship between their social competence and reactivity. Similarly, Goldsmith et al. (2001), Raver et al. (2001), and Eisenberg et al. (1994) report that children's positive social relations lead to a positive difference in the main dimensions of temperament whereas their negative social relations lead to a negative difference in the main dimensions of temperament. In the present study, a significant negative relationship was found between the children's anger-aggression scores and approach scores while a significant positive relationship was detected between their anger-aggression and reactivity scores. No relationship was found between the children's anger-aggression scores and persistence scores. The approach-withdrawal dimension of temperament, which incorporates characteristics such as timidity and shyness, is closely associated with positive social behaviors. Approaching children display cooperative and sharing behaviors more than withdrawn children. Newness of the environment and people does not have much effect on the positive social behavior level of approaching children while withdrawn and shy children display these kinds of behaviors mostly in familiar environments and when they are asked to do (Yağmurlu, Köymen, & Sanson, 2005). It is reported that the children displaying negative behaviors have self-regulation and adaptation problems and are more reactive (Lengua, 2001; Ackerman et al., 1999). In this study, a significant positive relationship was found between the children's anxiety-withdrawal scores and approach scores whereas a

significant negative relationship was detected between their anxiety-withdrawal scores and persistence and reactivity scores. Temperament differences in the attentional processes have a determining influence on positive social behaviors. The children who can focus their attention for a longer period can find the clues in the social environment better and thus can perceive the situations requiring helping and sharing faster and more accurately. Besides positive social behaviors, unfavorable results in the social and emotional development areas are also associated with the child's temperament characteristics. For example, negative reactivity (e.g., getting angry easily) and difficulty in focusing attention are among temperament characteristics that are risk factors for behavioral problems such as aggression (Sanson, Hemphill, & Smart, 2002; Azar, 1995). Concentrating on withdrawn and popular children, Ollendick, Oswald and Francis (1989) concluded that aggressive children display more negative behaviors in comparison to popular and withdrawn children, and popular children exhibit more positive behaviors in comparison to withdrawn children. These studies support the findings of the present study.

In the light of the findings of the present study, researchers may carry out similar research on different sample groups. Curricula aimed at improving social competence may be prepared. Experimental studies may be conducted in this matter. The effects of educational programs on temperament should be studied as experimental studies. Children's social competency and temperamental status should be investigated by associating with some other variables. Longitudinal studies should be studied on social competency and temperament. The social competence and temperament of children from different cultures may be comparatively analyzed.

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