

ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION SKILL AND INTERPERSONAL PROBLEM SOLVING IN PRESCHOOL TRAINEES

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The purpose in this study was to investigate the communication skill and interpersonal problem solving skill of preschool teacher trainees. The participants were 453 (420 female and 33 male) preschool teacher trainees. Data were collected using the Interpersonal Problem Solving Inventory (Çam & Tmkaya, 2007), and the Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (Korkut, 1996). It was found that there was a negative relationship between communication skill and approaching problems in a negative way and lack of self confidence, and a positive relationship between communication skill, constructive problem solving, and an insistent-persevering approach. It was also found that constructive problem solving, lack of self-confidence, and an insistent-persevering approach explain communication skill.

Keywords: communication skill, interpersonal problem solving, preschool teacher trainees.

A situation becomes a problem for an individual when this situation disturbs him/her, when this situation is perceived as a problem, or when the individual faces an obstacle in achieving an objective (Bingham, 1998; Morgan, 1999). It is important to improve problem-solving skills of children starting from the preschool period to ensure that they adapt to real life. Appropriate problems give children the opportunity to find solutions using their own styles. Learning is

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best achieved by practice during play which helps children to acquire analytical thinking and the skills to produce solutions. When children do not acquire problem-solving skills, they may adopt violent solutions that they see when they watch television or videos. Learning problem-solving skills at an early age will lay a sound basis for children and for the world (Zembat & Polat Unutkan, 2003). The preschool teacher plays a major role in the development of children during preschool years (Ceylan, Yıldız-Bıçakçı, Gürsoy, & Aral, 2009). Teachers are one of the main sources for improving the problem-solving skills of children. Teachers play an important role in showing children that they (the children) have the ability and ways and means to deal with problems that arise in their environment (Bingham, 1998).

The methods used by teachers to interpret events and situations and the problem-solving styles of the teachers have a significant impact on the cognitive schema of children (Aydoğan & Ömeroğlu, 2004; Kurtyılmaz, 2005). Children discover and improve their abilities thanks to opportunities that enable them to solve problems. Problem solving expedites the personal development of a child and accelerates improvement of the child's abilities, sense of self-esteem, and self-confidence (Bingham, 1998). Children learn how to make use of internal and external sources to solve problems. Appropriate problem solving is achieved by effective communication, which is the common feature of all problem-solving approaches (McWhirter & Voltan-Acar, 2000). The situations and problems individuals encounter take place in social contexts. Therefore, the problems they have to solve emerge in interpersonal communication networks, and problem solving requires an effective use of communication skills (Kurtyılmaz). Communication is the basis of personal relationships. The mutual understanding of needs and figuring out the message by both sender and recipient contributes to communication. The feeling of students that they are accepted by their teachers and friends is the most essential prerequisite of communication in an educational setting. This prerequisite is even more important when considering the development and personal traits of preschool children. Children develop the language they use by imitating the adults. In this context, adults, and especially teachers, have an important role (Çağlar & Kurtuluş, 2003).

When school life begins, the parental role of hero is transferred to the teacher who becomes the role model for the children and who has a more significant influence in this critical development period. For this reason, the school environment and teachers contribute to the development of attitude and values of the students and also affect their behaviors (Kurtyılmaz, 2005). It has been found that students who have a high level of social support from their teachers have high self-esteem (Arslan, 2009). Preschool is an important period in children's development (Aral & Bütün Ayhan, 2008; Aral, Kandır, & Can-Yaşar, 2002; Haktanır & Aktaş, 1994; Kandır, 2001; Şimşek-Bekir & Temel; 2006). The

purpose in this study was to analyze the communication skill and interpersonal problem-solving skills of preschool teacher trainees who will work in the preschool service.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The survey model was adopted for the current study and the sample was chosen randomly from Selçuk University (Konya, Turkey) in 2008. The participants were 453 preschool teacher trainees (420 female, 33 male) who took part voluntarily in the research. The mean age of the participants was 19.71 years with a standard deviation of 1.74.

INSTRUMENTS

Interpersonal Problem-Solving Inventory (IPSI) This inventory was developed by Çam and Tümkaya (2007) as a tool for measuring problem-solving approaches and skills among university students between the ages of 18 and 30. The inventory consists of 5 subscales and a total of 50 items. The range of response scores for the items is between 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). High scores obtained for each subscale indicate that for this characteristic of interpersonal problem solving use of this method is high. The correlation value calculated with total scores of the subscales varied between .22 and .74. Internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the subscale scores of the inventory were: Approaching Problems in a Negative Way = .91, Constructive Problem Solving = .88, Lack of Self-Confidence = .67, Unwillingness to Take Responsibility = .74, and Insistent-Persevering Approach = .70. Test-retest correlation values were calculated as a result of double application of the inventory to 60 students at four week intervals. Test-retest correlation values for the subscales were found to be .89, .82, .69, .76, and .70 respectively (Çam & Tümkaya).

Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES) The CSES was developed by Korkut (1996). This scale, which consists of 25 statements, was developed to evaluate communication skills of adolescents. It is a 5-item Likert-type scale which examines the general attitude of an individual in relationships. High scores received from the scale indicate that the individuals consider themselves to be successful in communication. Test-retest correlation of the scale after three weeks was found to be .69. Internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .80 (Korkut, 1996, 1997).

Data Analysis The Pearson correlation coefficient technique was used to determine the relationships among the subscales of interpersonal problem solving and communication skill. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether or not interpersonal problem solving skill predicts communication skill.

RESULTS

The relationships among communication skill and the 5 subscales of interpersonal problem solving were analyzed by using the Pearson correlation analysis technique and the results are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS AMONG COMMUNICATION SKILL AND SUBSCALES OF
INTERPERSONAL PROBLEM SOLVING

| | Approaching problems in a negative way | Constructive problem solving | Lack of self- confidence | Insistent- persevering approach | Unwillingness to take responsibility |
|---------------------|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Communication skill | -.22** | .42** | -.33** | .43** | -.17** |

** $p < .01$

Table 1 shows that communication skill is positively related to Constructive Problem Solving and Insistent-Persevering Approach, and negatively related to Approaching Problems in a Negative Way and Lack of Self-Confidence and Unwillingness to Take Responsibility. A multiple regression analysis was performed to predict communication skill by interpersonal problem solving and the results are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2
THE PREDICTION OF COMMUNICATION SKILL BY INTERPERSONAL PROBLEM SOLVING

| | <i>R</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>F</i> | β | <i>t</i> |
|---|----------|-----------------------|----------|---------|----------|
| Communication skill | .54 | .30 | 38.44** | | |
| Approaching problems in a negative way | | | | -.06 | -1.33 |
| Constructive problem solving | | | | .19 | 3.64** |
| Lack of self-confidence | | | | -.24 | -5.26** |
| Insistent-persevering approach | | | | .29 | 5.79** |
| Unwillingness to take responsibility | | | | .00 | -.01 |

** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows that communication skill is significantly explained by the subdimensions of interpersonal problem solving ($R = .54$, $R^2 = .30$, $F_{(5/452)} = 38.44$, $p < .001$). Five subdimensions of interpersonal problem solving significantly explained 30% of the total variance in communication skill. According to results of a t test that was intended to determine which subdimensions predict communication skill, it was found that Constructive Problem Solving ($t = 3.64$, $\beta = .19$), Lack of Self-Confidence ($t = -5.26$, $\beta = -.24$), and Insistent-Persevering Approach ($t = 5.79$, $\beta = .29$) were significant predictors of communication skill.

DISCUSSION

Results of the study indicated that there was a positive relationship between communication skills and constructive problem solving and an insistent-preserving approach; while there was a negative relationship between approaching problems in a negative way and lack of self-confidence and unwillingness to take responsibility. These results indicate that as effective interpersonal problem-solving skills, such as constructive problem solving and an insistent-persevering approach increased, communication skills increased as well. On the other hand, as approaching problems in a negative way and lack of self-confidence and unwillingness to take responsibility increased, communication skills decreased. Çam and Tümkaya (2008) also found a positive relationship between communication skill and constructive problem solving and between communication skill and insistent-persevering approach. According to multiple regression analysis of subdimensions of interpersonal problem-solving skill and communication skills, lack of self-confidence explains communication skill in a negative and significant way. Lack of self-confidence includes the lack of confidence in problem solving (Çam & Tümkaya, 2007) and whether an individual perceives himself/herself as competent in problem solving is of importance (Arslan, 2005). Results of studies on problem solving have shown that approaches to the problem-solving style and skills of individuals display variations. It has been found that individuals who perceive themselves as competent in problem solving are more extraverted, positive, and have a more positive self-perception in interpersonal relationships (D'Zurilla, Chang, & Sanna, 2003; D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1999; Hamarta, 2009; Şahin, Şahin, & Heppner, 1993). The findings of these studies support the results of our study.

Constructive problem-solving and an insistent-persevering approach explain communication skill in a positive and significant way. Constructive problem solving is related to emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in case of a problem in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, an insistent-persevering approach indicates the insistent endeavor of an individual in his/her interpersonal relationships (Çam & Tümkaya, 2007). The individuals in an interaction influence each other. Therefore, it is necessary for each person to pay attention to the other's problems and use a constructive way of problem-solving, to be supportive, accepting, and to initiate and maintain good communication. Individuals who are successful in communication generally have self-confidence and are respectful and open to sharing and cooperation. Individuals who lack confidence, are fearful, and fail to empathize experience problems in communication (Bilen, 2004). Results of some studies have indicated that having effective problem-solving skills improved communication skills (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001) and reduced aggressive behaviors (Kurtyilmaz, 2005). In

addition, it has been found that a social problem-solving education program had a positive effect especially on social interaction abilities (Anlıak & Dinçer, 2005; Beelmann, Pflingsten, & Lösel, 1994).

When results of our study were evaluated, we concluded that having positive interpersonal problem-solving skills had a positive effect on the communication skills of the preschool teacher trainees in our sample, and that having negative interpersonal problem-solving skills had a negative effect on their communication skills. According to these results, to enable the preschool teacher trainees who will teach in preschool institutions at an important period in children's development to have effective and positive interpersonal problem-solving and communication skills, the education of preschool teachers should include the teaching of problem-solving and communication skills. Considering that teachers having effective and positive communication and problem-solving skills will help their students to learn these skills it is important for the trainee teachers to receive this kind of education.

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