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Investigating the choice of friendship 5-6 year olds make based on certain variables

Hulya Gulay Ogelman ^{a*}, Zarife Secer ^b

^a Assist.Prof., Pamukkale University Faculty of Education, Department of Preschool Education, Denizli, 20020, Turkey

^b Assist.Prof., Selcuk University, Faculty of Vocational Education, Department of Preschool Education, Konya, 42080, Turkey

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the choice of friendship 5-6 year olds attending preschool make based on variables of their choice of playmates, aggression, prosocial behaviour, and victimisation. For the study, teachers completed the Prosocial Behaviour and Aggression sub-scales of the Child Behaviour Scale and the Peer Victimization Scale, based on their eight-month general observation of the children. The Picture Sociometry Scale was applied to children individually by the researchers. The Linear Regression Analysis technique was used to establish the predictive effect aggression, prosocial behaviour, victimisation, and choice of playmates had on the choice of friends.

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies have set forth what peer relations during the early years of life add to a child's development (Dunn, 2004; Ladd, 2005). 3-4 year old children that develop good peer relations and are able to establish good friendships continue to do so during kindergarten, and in some cases during primary school (Dunn et al., 2003). In recent years, the number of studies conducted about the peer relations during preschool in Turkey has increased. However, the number is still insufficient. These type of studies should be increased as preschool peer relations have an important effect on the short and long-term development of children.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the choice of friendship 5-6 year olds attending preschool make based on variables of their choice of playmates, aggression, prosocial behaviour, and victimisation. Answers will be sought to the following questions in accordance with this purpose:

* Hulya Gulay Ogelman. Tel.: +0-258-296-11-24
E-mail address: hgulay@pau.edu.tr

- Is there a relationship between the choice of playmates, aggression, prosocial behaviour, victimisation 5-6 year olds and their choice of friendship ?
- Do the choice of playmates, aggression, prosocial behaviour, victimisation 5-6 year olds predict their choice of friendship?

2. Method

Relational survey method was used in this study.

2. 1. Participants

One hundred and one 5-6 year old children participated in this study. The population of the study comprised of 5-6 year old children, attending the kindergarten class of primary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, located in city center of Konya. Sample group of the research was selected by using random sampling method. The participants were selected from 5 kindergarten classes at 5 primary schools. Forty three (42.6 %) of the children were girls, whereas 53 (42.6 %) were boys. The average age of the children was 5 years, 2 months, 8 days (minimum, 4 years, 7 months, 10 days; maximum, 6 years, 9 months). All the children included in the study had normal development characteristic.

2.2.Measures

2.2.1.The Child Behaviour Scale: This scale is a measurement tool, developed by Ladd and Profilet in 1996, to evaluate the peer relations of preschool children according to the information provided by teachers. The scale consists of 6 subscales and 44 items. The subscales are aggression with peers, prosocial behaviour with peers, asocial behaviour with peers, anxiety-fear, exclusion by peers, hyperactivity-distractibility. Aggression with peers, prosocial behaviour with peers subscales of the Child Behaviour Scale were used in this research. Scale items are scored as “Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Always.” The internal consistency coefficient for the original version’s subscale “Aggression with Peers” was .92, the internal consistency coefficient for the subscale “Prosocial Behaviour with Peers” was .88 (Ladd & Profilet, 1996). The internal consistency coefficient for the subscale “Aggression with Peers” was .85, the internal consistency coefficient for the subscale “Prosocial Behaviour with Peers” was .87 for this study (Gülay, 2008).

2.2.2. Picture Sociometry Scale: It was developed by Asher, Singleton, Tinsley and Hymel in 1979. A child in the class is presented a photograph of each child in that group one by one and is asked how much he/she likes the peer in the Picture. The child puts the picture in one of the three box on the basis of his/her preference. The first box has a smiling face meaning “I like very much”. The second box has a neutral (unexpressional) face meaning “I like little”. The third box has a sad face meaning “I don’t like at all” (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, & Hymel, 1979). The three more questions were added to the Picture Sociometry Scale in this study. Thus the original scale was changed to the four- items scale. In 2008, Gülay (2008) carried out linguistic equivalence, reliability, and validity studies for the scale. The internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version was .72. The internal consistency coefficient for the scale was .76 for this study.

2.2.3.The Peer Victimization Scale: This scale is a measurement tool, developed by Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd in 2002, for children aged between 5 and 6. The teachers completed the scale. The scale includes four items, each of which focuses on one of the four types of peer aggression (physical, indirect, direct, and general). Each item was scored as “Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Always.” The internal consistency coefficient for the original scale was .91 (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). In 2008, Gülay (2008) carried out linguistic equivalence, reliability, and

validity studies for the scale. The internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version was .72. The internal consistency coefficient for the scale was .75 for this study.

2.3.Procedure

Aggression with peers and Prosocial behaviour with peers subscales and The Peer Victimization Scale were completed separately for each child by preschool teachers. Teachers have marked the measurements according to their general observations of the children on a period of approximately 7 months. Before the application, researchers informed the teachers and the children about the scales and the objective of the research. Picture Sociometry Scale, was conducted on the children individually by the researchers. The scale was applied in an empty room allocated in the school. The duration of the Picture Sociometry Scale was 15 minutes.

2.4.Data Analysis

A SPSS 13.0 package programme was used to analyse data obtained from the research. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient and Basic Linear Regression Technique were used to analyse data. Basic Linear Regression Analysis was used to put forth the predictor effect their choice of playmates, choice of playmates, prosocial behaviour, aggression and victimisation had on the choice of friendship of children.

3.Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistic, means, standard deviations, and correlations matrix

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. The choice of friendship	2.82	1.40	--				
2. The choice of playmates	1.50	.71	.33*	--			
3. Prosocial behaviour	9.85	4.96	.28*	.05	--		
4. Aggression	2.03	2.44	-.42*	-.09	-.54*	--	
5. Victimization	1.62	1.62	-.34*	-.02	-.44*	-.60*	--

Note: n = 101 * p < .001

Table 1 illustrates a positive and strong significant relationship between the score that the choice of friendship from The Picture Sociometry Scale and the scores that the choice of playmates from The Picture Sociometry Scale, prosocial behaviour sub-scale scores from the and The Child Behaviour Scale. Also there are negative and strong significant relationship between the score that the choice of friendship from The Picture Sociometry Scale and children's aggression and victimisation scores from the and The Child Behaviour Scale (p < 0.001). In other words, it can be said that as the choice of friendship level increased, the children's the choice of playmates, prosocial behaviour levels increased. Also, the choice of friendship level decreased, the children's aggression and victimization levels increased.

Table 2. The results of the basic linear regression analysis between certain variables (the choice of playmates, prosocial behaviour, aggression and victimisation) and the choice of friendship

Variables	β	t
The choice of playmates The choice of friendship R = .33 R ² = .11 F(1,99) = 11.645**	.33	3.413**
Prosocial behaviour The choice of friendship R = .28 R ² = .08 F(1,99) = 8.500*	.28	2.916*

Aggression		
The choice of friendship	-42	-4.565**
R = .42 R ² = .18 F(1,99) = 20.837**		
Victimisation		
The choice of friendship	-.34	-3.603**
R = .34 R ² = .12 F(1,99) = 12.982**		

Note: n = 101 * p < .05, ** p < .001

Table 2 illustrates that the choice of playmates, prosocial behaviour, aggression, and victimisation variables separately significantly predicted the children's the choice of friendship. The level of significance was 0.05 and 0.001 for each basic linear regression analysis conducted in this study. The choice of playmates accounted for 11 % (p < 0.001) of the children's the choice of friendship. Their prosocial behaviour level accounted for 08 % (p < 0.05) of the children's the choice of friendship. Their aggression level accounted for 18 % (p < 0.001) of the children's the choice of friendship. Their victimisation level accounted for 12 % (p < 0.001) of the children's the choice of friendship. Study results concluded that the variable that most predicts the choice of friendship is aggression; closely followed by victimisation, the choice of playmates, and prosocial behaviour.

4. Discussion

The results of the study concluded that the aggression, victimisation, and prosocial behaviour 5-6 year olds show towards their peers, and their peers' choice of playmate is a factor that affects them from being chosen as their friends. In other words, children that are not aggressive towards their peers, that are not victimised by their peers, and that display prosocial behaviour towards their peers have the chance of being chosen by their peers as friends. Positive behaviour is one of important indicators in terms of peer relations.

There are other studies that support the results of this study. In this study, the authors investigated the characteristics that predict best friend status in young children. One hundred and twenty-four preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade children identified their "best friend" and up to four "other friends" in their class. Teachers completed a questionnaire about each friendship to determine positive and negative features of the relationships. First, the authors used individual characteristics to predict if a child had a best friend. The variables age, gender, and peer acceptance predicted that a child would have a best friend. Second, positive friendship features positively predicted best friendships in analyses of all friendship pairs. Best friendships are meaningful relationships to children even at this young age and offer children more positive experiences than do other friendships (Sebanck, Kearns, Hernandez, & Galvin, 2007, p. 81). According to Parker and Asher (1993), peer acceptance and social status, are both important indicators in friendship relations. Aggressive children tend to have less friends (Snyder, Horsch, & Childs, 1997).

There are numerous limitations in our study. The study was limited to 101 children. Future studies should use a number of sample groups. This study was limited to choice of playmates, prosocial behaviour, aggression, and victimisation as factors affecting a child's choice of friendship. Future studies should analyse different variables that affect a child's choice of friendship (gender, age, family variables, language, etc.). A relational survey method was used for this study. However, future studies should be longitudinal studies. Data of this study was collected based on views of teachers and peers. Future studies can benefit from different techniques such as views of parents, and observations.

In line with study results, in preschool education institutions it is necessary for teachers to observe the friendship relations of children and social patterns in kindergarten class regularly and in the best way possible. As a results, issues related to peer relations of children can be identified in the early stages and resolved. Training programmes regarding social skills and communication skills should be established and exercised where necessary. Teachers should provide parents with information and guidance on children's peer relations.

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