

PERSPECTIVE-TAKING SKILLS OF 6-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN:
PRESCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND MOTHERS' AND
FATHERS' EDUCATION AND EMPATHETIC SKILLS¹

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Summary.—The purpose was to assess whether children's sex, duration of nursery school attendance, and mothers' and fathers' educational levels were associated with any statistically significant differences in perceptual, cognitive, and emotional perspective-taking skills. The relation between these skills and parents' empathetic skill was also of interest. 100 children aged 6 years (49 girls, 51 boys) and their parents participated in the research. Data were collected through a Personal Information Form, the Perspective-taking Test, and the Empathetic Skills Scale–Form B. Analysis suggested that sex, duration of nursery school attendance, and mothers' and fathers' educational levels did not affect perspective-taking skills. There was no significant correlation between the perspective-taking skills of children and the empathetic skills of their parents.

Rogers (1983) defined “being empathetic, or empathy, is to perceive the internal reference frame of a person correctly, to experience that person's emotional elements and their meaning as if they were one's own.” Empathy is an effective characteristic in interpersonal relations. Establishing empathetic relationships is considered a requirement for healthy interaction (Woolfolk, 1993; Özbay, 1994). According to Dökmen (2004), when individuals within a family understand a member experiencing hardship, and they display that understanding, the person is relieved and thus possible conflicts in the family can be prevented. Parents' expressions of their own feelings about a child's behaviour are primary in children's learning how to express their own feelings. Behavioural problems are fewer in children whose emotions are understood by their parents (Kalkınç, 2003). Thus the family is an important arena for learning perspective-taking.

Social modeling of empathy is another factor that is very important in a child's development (Köksal, 2000). By observing adults modeling kind behaviour toward themselves and others, children learn similar attitudes when reacting to other people (Barnett, 1990; Kalkınç, 2003). Therefore, the adults

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in the child's environment should be positive role models. As Rogers and Truax (1967) and Truax and Carkhuff (1967) suggested in their studies, empathetic skills of children develop provided that they grow up in a milieu where empathetic communication takes place. In Rogers and Truax (1967), data were collected from the parents when the children were five years old and from the children themselves when they were 31 years old. The results showed that children who spent more time with their fathers were more empathetic adults. In the study carried out by Trommsdorff (1991), whose sample comprised 5- to 6-yr.-old children and their mothers, a positive correlation was observed between the empathy of the mother and that of the child. Bernadett-Shapiro, Ehrensaft, and Shapiro (1996) examined whether there was a relation between a child's empathy and the role of the father. They concluded that there was a significant and positive correlation between the participation of the father in child care and the empathy of sons.

Taking the perspective of the other person is pivotal to empathy (Dökmen, 2004; Köksal Akyol & Körükçü, 2004). Perspective-taking involves taking the role of the other and experiencing that person's emotional situation. An individual with perspective-taking skills is able to feel the emotions of the other (Kurdek & Rodgon, 1975; Eisenberg, 1982; Köksal, 2000). According to Kurdek and Rodgon (1975), Eisenberg (1982), and Moore (1990), there are three types of perspective-taking skills. The first of these is a perceptual perspective-taking skill and implies the ability to understand what another person sees. The second is the cognitive perspective-taking skill, the ability to understand what another person thinks. The third is an emotional perspective-taking, the ability to understand how another person feels.

Hoffman (1979) studied empathy development and grouped it into four stages: distress reaction, person permanence, role-taking, and comprehensive empathy. Role-taking is the stage when children start realising that the feelings of other people are different from theirs (Davis, 1996). In other words, they learn that others have different perspectives. Shapiro (2000) reported that the age of six is the beginning of the phase of seeing the events from others' perspectives and reacting accordingly. After the age of six, children can put themselves in another's place and start understanding other people better. Köksal Akyol and Körükçü (2004) stated that 6-yr.-old children are more successful at perspective-taking than younger children. In her study dealing with the spatial perspective-taking skills of preschool children, Yılmaz (1994) concluded that the ability to take another's perspective into consideration progresses with age.

Since perspective-taking skills of children develop rapidly at 6 years, with education provided at this age, their perspective-taking and thus empathetic skills can be increased. In a study conducted among 6- to 7-yr.-old children, Kalliopuska and Titinen (1991) applied an empathy programme

involving singing to children, drawing pictures with music, role-playing, and storytelling; children's empathy increased considerably. Şener (1996) found progress in the perspective-taking skills of children who played games, while Kalliopuska (1991) observed that children attending music classes had higher empathetic skills than those who did not.

There are varied research findings on the relationship of sex to perspective-taking skills. According to Eisenberg (1982) and Gander and Gardiner (1981/1995), there are differences between sexes in the tendency to react empathetically, with females more empathetic than males. Differences may be due to sex roles, with boys taught that showing emotions is not acceptable, while girls are encouraged to express their feelings (Bryant, 1982; Davis, 1983; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Kalliopuska, 1983). Köksal Akyol and Oğuz (2007) found that children's sex and feeding of pets had no effect on the perspective-taking skills of 6-yr.-old children. Ulutaş (2005), in studying the emotional intelligence of children in the 6-yr.-old age group, found that empathy scores were not related to children's sex. Akın (2002) also found no influence of sex on perceptual, cognitive, or emotional perspective-taking skills.

The primary goal of the current study was to investigate the relationship between the empathetic skills of parents and their children's perceptual, cognitive, and emotional perspective-taking skills. As the relevant literature suggested, it was expected that the empathetic skills of parents would be positively correlated with children's perspective-taking skills. It was expected that children's sex and the duration of attendance of nursery school would affect their perspective-taking skills, with girls and those with more schooling having better skills.

METHOD

Participants

The sample was 6-yr.-old children attending nursery schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and their parents, all residents of Ankara, Turkey. The sample comprised 100 children randomly selected from among 6-yr.-old children attending Atatürk Nursery School, Dr. Ufuk Ege Nursery School, and Batıkent Nursery School, and their mothers ($n = 100$) and fathers ($n = 100$). All children lived with their biological mothers and fathers, who voluntarily participated in the study. At the beginning, the parents of 137 6-yr.-old children with two parents living in their homes were contacted by the above-mentioned schools. The number dropped to 100 because some parents did not reply to the Empathetic Skills Scale-Form B, and some of the returned forms were invalid. Demographic information is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

		<i>n</i>	%
Sex	Female	49	49
	Male	51	51
No. of siblings	Single child	42	42
	One brother/sister	50	50
	Two or more brothers/sisters	8	8
Order of birth	First child	66	66
	Middle child	27	27
	Last child	7	7
Duration of attendance at nursery school	One year	32	32
	Two years	31	31
	Three years	37	37
Education Level Mothers	High school graduate	32	32
	University graduate	68	68
Fathers	High school graduate	34	34
	University graduate	66	66

Measures

Perspective-taking.—To measure the three separate dimensions of perspective-taking skill, the Perspective-taking Test (Perceptual Perspective-taking Test, Cognitive Perspective-taking Test, and Emotional Perspective-taking Test) developed by Şener (1996) and tested for validity and reliability by Akin (2002) was used. Şener (1996) developed the test by making use of the study conducted by Kurdek and Rodgon (1975). Specialists confirmed that the test was appropriate for measuring the perceptual, cognitive, and emotional perspective-taking skills of children (Şener, 1996). Akin (2002) conducted a validity and reliability study, with 2-wk. test-retest. They found Cronbach coefficient alpha was .77, and test-retest reliability was $r = .60$ for Perceptual Perspective-taking; for Cognitive Perspective-taking $\alpha = .85$ and test-retest $r = .45$; for Emotional Perspective-taking $\alpha = .77$ and test-retest reliability was $r = .60$.

In the Perceptual Perspective-taking Test, two round cushions were used on which a picture of Mickey Mouse's face was printed. The researcher and the child sat facing each other at a desk of a suitable size for the child. The researcher held one of the cushions, and the child was given the other. The researcher held up the cushion with Mickey Mouse's face outward and turned the cushion around, and then gave the child a chance to experience that he/she could do the same, i.e., turn the cushion around so that Mickey Mouse faced different directions. The aim of doing so was to ensure that, when the cushion was held up and turned around, the child understood that Mickey Mouse was looking in different directions, and also that the perspec-

tives of the researcher and the child were different. First, the face of Mickey Mouse on the researcher's cushion was placed on the desk so that it was the opposite of the face of Mickey Mouse on the child's cushion. Then the child was given the following direction: "Turn your cushion so that I can see the Mickey Mouse on your cushion as I see mine." In this way, it was ensured that both Mickey Mouses faced the researcher. In the cases when the child failed, the researcher turned the cushions to the correct position. Later, the child was instructed: "Turn the cushions so that you can see them as I see them." As the child turned the cushions, the researcher first went to the child's side, then back to the other side, and repeated the instruction. In this way, the child was asked to turn the cushions to all the directions, thereby checking that he/she perceived Mickey Mouse from the perspective of people assumed to be sitting at the different sides of the desk. Each successful action in this test was awarded one point, towards a total score of four points.

In the Cognitive Perspective-taking Test, a method similar to the one used by Kurdek and Rodgon (1975) was applied. The instrument in that study, which included seven picture cards depicting a dog chasing a child, was recreated. To start, the seven cards were placed on the desk in the appropriate sequence, and the child was asked to tell the story in the picture cards. In the first round, the child was motivated to tell the story, interfering when deemed necessary, and it was ensured that the child paid particular attention to the key situations such as running away, chasing, getting close, and catching. Later, the fourth, fifth, and sixth cards were removed, and the child was asked what story a friend would tell about the four pictures left behind, with the following instruction: "Now, listen to me carefully. Imagine that a friend of yours came here. We show him/her these pictures, hide the other four, and then ask her/him to tell the story here. Now, you are your friend (pretend to be your friend), and you tell us this story." Here, the scoring was done as follows: the key words "running away, chasing, getting close, and catching" were in the picture cards that were removed. The child received zero points for using at least two of these words, one point for using more than two, and two points when none were used. Then the child was asked questions about the picture in the last card. When the child answered the question "Why is the child at the top of the tree?" using concepts related to the key words, she/he received zero points, but when a completely new reply was created, one point was assigned (Şener, 1996).

The Emotional Perspective-taking Test was developed by following a method used in emotional perspective-taking tests and tests for recognizing facial expressions. In this test, there were four picture cards describing happy, sad, scared, and angry facial expressions. The cards were placed on the desk in a mixed order and then the child was asked to define each emo-

tional situation. Later, short stories related to each facial expression were told, and the child was asked to show the facial expression that described the emotions of the characters in each story. Each successful reply was granted 1 point, which added up to 4 points total.

Empathetic Skills Scale-Form B (Dökmen, 1988).—This scale was used to measure the empathetic skill of parents. The Empathetic Skills Scale-Form B is a measure developed based on the gradual empathy classification, and it stresses the cognitive component of empathy. The scale included six separate psychological problems from daily life. There were 12 reactions for each problem. The subjects were asked to select 4 of these 12 reactions. The first of the six psychological problem situations was about housewives. The participants were asked to read this situation and mark four of the reactions that they would give a housewife in this situation. The housewife expressed her situation as follows: "Cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing, shopping, children . . . I run around the house on my own all day long; still, I cannot catch up with the daily chores. I don't even have five minutes to spare for myself. I feel imprisoned between the kitchen and the bathroom." The reactions that the participants could mark were: 1. "Have you ever thought of hiring someone to help you with the housework?" 2. "How long in a day does it take you to do all this?" 3. "Doesn't your husband help you at all?" 4. "As far as I understand, you find housework very hard." 5. "You are not the only one who does housework in the world; it is not right to make it an issue like this." 6. "You are right, this much work really distresses anyone." 7. "In my opinion, your problem is not that you cannot manage all the work, but there is too much work to do." 8. "If I were you, I would feel distressed, too." 9. "I think you feel desperate and lonely with this much work." 10. "I agree with you; actually, housework is easy to do." 11. "My mother (or another close person to you) is also distressed from doing housework continuously." 12. "I think having to do this much housework makes you angry." The other five psychologically problematic situations were about a young person, a friend, a boyfriend, a girlfriend and a student.

The choices marked for each situation were assigned scores specified in the answer key. For example, in the first situation for housewives, the scores for the reactions were as follows: first reaction, 3 points; second reaction, 8 points; third reaction, 3 points; fourth reaction, 9 points; fifth reaction, 2 points; sixth reaction, 7 points; seventh reaction, 4 points; eighth reaction, 6 points; ninth reaction, 10 points; eleventh reaction, 5 points; and twelfth reaction, 10 points. One of the 12 reactions submitted under each problem was meaningless and the form of the subject who selected this choice was invalidated. In the first situation for housewives, the meaningless item was the tenth reaction, so the scales of those who marked this item were considered invalid. The scores were also specified in the answer key for the

other situations. At the end, the scores received from each of the six situations were added and a total score was obtained. The total scores received from the scales ranged from 64 points to 219 points. The higher the total score, the better the empathetic skills.

Dökmen (1988) administered the Empathetic Skills Scale–Form B to 60 freshman students of Ankara University, Faculty of Education, and to 24 psychologists working in different institutions, with the aim of testing its reliability and validity. For test-retest reliability, the Empathetic Skills Scale–Form B was administered to 60 subjects with an interval of 2 wk. ($r = .83$, $p < .001$). In the validity study, there was a significant difference in empathy scores between the students and psychologists in favour of the latter ($t = 8.15$, $p < .001$). In another validity study, a relationship was found between the Empathetic Skills Scale–Form B and the Role Playing Test ($r = .78$, $p < .001$; Dökmen, 1990). As the Empathetic Skills Scale–Form B was developed for young people and adults, it was used to measure the empathetic skills of the parents only.

Procedure

Before starting the application, the necessary legal permissions were received from the Ministry of Education. School administrators' permission documents were submitted. In a meeting, the objective of the study was explained to the parents and their consent was obtained to involve their children in the research.

The authors met with nursery school managers and gave them information about the Perspective-taking Test to be administered to the children and the Empathetic Skills Scale Test–Form B to be administered to the parents. The teachers were met through the nursery school principals and were provided with information about the tests to be administered. Suitable days and times to administer the tests to the children and parents were determined together with the teachers. In order to be able to work with children in a comfortable environment, an appropriate setting free of distracting and stimulating elements was required. Prior to the application, the researcher introduced herself to all of the children and explained why she was there. Then, each child was taken into the testing room individually. Those children who did not want to participate were not forced to do so. The tests were explained to the child as games, and she/he was asked to introduce herself/himself, and similarly the researcher introduced herself again and explained why she came to the school so that the child felt comfortable. No breaks were given between the three tests so the child would not be distracted. First, the Perceptual Perspective-taking Test was administered. Following this, before the application of the Cognitive Perspective-taking Test, it was observed that some children took the cushions and their attention was

distracted. Therefore, they were told that the cushions were not needed any longer and that other games would be played. The last test was the Emotional Perspective-taking Test. The administration of the test was discontinued for children who got tired between the tests and did not want to stay (six children). The assessments for each child were made at the end of the test. The administration of the perceptual, cognitive, and emotional tests was accomplished over 12 wk., one or two days each week and one or two hours per session; 8 to 12 children were tested in a day. The tests were applied individually to the children and lasted about 10 to 15 minutes for each child. The parents who agreed to participate in the research were administered the Empathetic Skills Scale-Form B and the Personal Information Form in a meeting held at school, and the procedure lasted about 15 to 20 minutes.

It was originally planned that the tests would be administered to 137 6-yr.-old children and their parents. Yet, the number dropped to 100 children because some parents (7 mothers, 10 fathers) did not respond to the Empathetic Skills Scale-Form B, some completed forms were invalid (9 mothers, 11 fathers), and six children got bored during the testing and hence were not forced to do the tests.

Data Analysis

The analyses were made using the SPSS statistical software (Version 12) on children's and parents' scores as well as on demographics obtained from the Personal Information Form. Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to assess the relations between the children's perspective-taking skills and the parents' empathetic skills. Two-way analysis of variance was used to assess the effect of the duration of attendance at nursery school, children's sex, and their interaction on the children's perspective-taking scores.

RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 2, the Perceptual, Cognitive, and Emotional Perspective-taking Skills scores of boys and girls who attended nursery school for one year, two years, and three years were similar. There was no statistically significant main effect of duration of children's attendance at nursery school on Perceptual ($F_{2,94} = .94$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{2,94} = 2.68$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{2,94} = .17$; $p > .05$) scores on children's perspective-taking. In addition, children's sex had no statistically significant main effect on Perceptual ($F_{1,94} = .45$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,94} = 2.78$; $p > .05$), and Emotional ($F_{1,94} = .03$; $p > .05$) perspective-taking. An examination of Table 2 also suggests that there was no statistically significant interaction between the duration of children's attendance of nursery school and sex on Perceptual ($F_{2,94} = .44$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{2,94} = .37$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{2,94} = .11$; $p > .05$) perspective-taking of the children.

TABLE 2
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF PERCEPTUAL, COGNITIVE, AND EMOTIONAL
 PERSPECTIVE-TAKING TEST SCORES OF CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT DURATIONS
 OF ATTENDANCE AT NURSERY SCHOOL BY CHILD'S SEX

Duration and Sex	<i>n</i>	Perceptual		Cognitive		Emotional	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
One Year							
Girls	17	3.29	.91	2.64	.60	2.82	1.18
Boys	15	3.53	.91	2.26	.88	2.73	1.27
Two Years							
Girls	11	3.72	.64	2.72	.46	2.72	1.34
Boys	20	3.60	.75	2.35	.93	2.90	.96
Three Years							
Girls	21	3.23	1.13	2.14	.85	2.90	.76
Boys	36	3.50	.81	2.06	.92	2.93	.85

No statistically significant main effect of mothers' educational level was observed on Perceptual ($F_{1,96} = .10$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,96} = .30$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{1,96} = .54$; $p > .05$) perspective-taking scores (Table 3). Furthermore, children's sex had no statistically significant main effect on Perceptual ($F_{1,96} = .87$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,96} = .56$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{1,96} = .18$; $p > .05$) perspective-taking. Table 3 also suggests that there was no statistically significant interaction between the mothers' educational level and children's sex on Perceptual ($F_{1,96} = .00$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,96} = 1.94$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{1,96} = 1.41$; $p > .05$) measures of children's perspective-taking.

There was no statistically significant main effect of fathers' educational level on Perceptual ($F_{1,96} = 1.28$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,96} = 2.09$; $p > .05$), or

TABLE 3
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF PERCEPTUAL, COGNITIVE, AND EMOTIONAL
 PERSPECTIVE-TAKING TEST SCORES OF CHILDREN WITH EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF
 MOTHERS AND FATHERS BY CHILD'S SEX

Education and Sex	<i>n</i>	Perceptual		Cognitive		Emotional	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mother's Education							
High School Graduate							
Girls	12	3.33	.98	2.33	.77	3.16	.71
Boys	20	3.50	.94	2.45	.75	2.80	1.28
University Graduate							
Girls	37	3.37	.94	2.48	.73	2.72	1.12
Boys	31	3.58	.71	2.09	.97	2.90	.83
Father's Education							
High School Graduate							
Girls	16	3.18	1.04	2.68	.60	2.81	1.10
Boys	18	3.44	.92	2.33	.90	2.83	1.29
University Graduate							
Girls	33	3.45	.93	2.33	.77	2.84	1.03
Boys	33	3.60	.74	2.18	.91	2.87	.85

Emotional ($F_{1,96} = .03$; $p > .05$) scores on children's perspective-taking. Children's sex had no statistically significant main effect on Perceptual ($F_{1,96} = 1.16$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,96} = 2.09$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{1,96} = .01$; $p > .05$) perspective-taking, either. It can also be observed in Table 3 that there was no statistically significant interaction between the fathers' educational level and children's sex on Perceptual ($F_{1,96} = .07$; $p > .05$), Cognitive ($F_{1,96} = .33$; $p > .05$), or Emotional ($F_{1,96} = .00$; $p > .05$) measures of the children's perspective-taking.

As can be seen in Table 4, there was no statistically significant correlation between the empathetic skills scores of mothers and any perspective-taking scores of girls or boys, or between the empathetic skills scores of fathers and perspective-taking skills scores of girls or boys ($p > .05$).

TABLE 4
PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S PERCEPTUAL, COGNITIVE, AND EMOTIONAL PERSPECTIVE-TAKING SKILLS AND PARENTS' EMPATHETIC SKILLS SCORES

Perspective-taking Skill	Empathetic Skill	
	Mother	Father
Perceptual		
Girls	.19	-.13
Boys	.06	-.11
Cognitive		
Girls	-.12	-.10
Boys	-.16	-.00
Emotional		
Girls	.00	-.02
Boys	.11	.09

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that children's sex was not associated with perspective-taking scores. This supports result of other studies, such as Akın (2002), who investigated the effect of an educational drama program on the perspective-taking skills of 6-yr.-old children. Akın found that children's sex was not associated with significant differences in the children's perceptual, cognitive, or emotional insights. Ulutaş (2005) established that children's sex was not correlated with scores obtained on the Short Empathy Scale. Köksal Akyol and Oğuz (2007) also found that children's sex and perspective-taking skills were not correlated.

Findings revealed that mothers' and fathers' educational levels did not affect perspective-taking. Similarly, the results of the studies conducted by Ulutaş (2005) and Hasdemir (2007) indicated that the educational levels of mothers and fathers did not influence the perspective-taking skills of children.

The findings of this study suggested that there was no statistically significant relationship between the empathetic skills of mothers or fathers and the perceptual, cognitive, and emotional perspective-taking skills of girls and boys. Kalliopuska and Titinen (1991) asserted that the development of empathy starts in the early childhood period. Davis (1996) stated that children start realizing that other people's feelings are different from theirs as their ability to role play starts to improve at the age of two to three years. Many factors influence children's understanding of other people's feelings starting at these ages (Dökmen, 2004). According to Kalliopuska and Titinen (1991), the extent of the empathetic skills of the parents is highly influential in the development of children's empathetic skills. Feshbach (1990) established that children with lower empathetic skills might have parents with low skills. There are individual differences in children's reactions to other people's emotional situations, and this can be affected by parents and other individuals in the immediate surrounding (Köksal, 2000). Consistent with other research, in this study there were no such significant correlations; Kalliopuska (1984), examining the relation between children's and parents' empathy, also found that there was no relation between the empathy scores of parents and children. Garner, Carlson Jones, and Rennie (1997) found in their study that maternal empathy was not related to children's emotional role-taking.

In light of the research findings, some recommendations for future studies can be made. Studies comparing the perspective-taking skills of children who have received preschool education and those who have not can be planned. Experimental studies to assess the effects of education provided for developing perspective-taking skills of children can be conducted. Additionally, research examining the relation between the empathetic skills of older children and their parents can be performed.

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