



THE REASONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN TO LIKE AND DISLIKE PLAYING WITH THEIR FRIENDS

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to reveal the reasons for young children to like and dislike playing with their friends. There were two groups in the study. The first group included 147 preschool children who were in the age group of 5-6 years and were living in Turkey. The second group included 60 preschool children who were in the age group of 5-6 years and were living in the North Cyprus. Interview method was used as data collection tool. In the sociometry technique-based method, the researcher asked the children four questions in a quiet room outside the classroom. According to the results, young children attach importance to social skills, mutual sharing, spending time outside plays and relationships based on kindness and love in their peer relationships and they dislike rude, bullying and disorderly behaviors. While the children in the study groups expressed their playmate choices, they stated more criteria as their reasons to dislike than their reasons to like, which is noteworthy in terms of revealing problems young children faced in their peer relationships.

Keywords: Friendships, young children, play

INTRODUCTION

Preschool period is one of time periods when a child's life begins to take shape and holistic growth of all developmental areas matters. The children in this stage continues their life by internalizing the experiences (although reflections of these experiences may vary in the course of time) in their social-emotional relationships with other individuals in their life. In this period, their bonds with their peers and their emotional experiences play a key role in preparing them to the next stage of their life (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Green, Cillessen, Recheis, Patterson, & Hughes, 2008; Özdoğan, 2009; Sakız & Yetkin Özdemir, 2014). Hay, Caplan & Nash (2009) state that peer relationships emerge in the first weeks of life when infants realize each other and respond to their cry. At the end of the first year, children begin to communicate with their peers, share things with them, conflict with them, and shape early friendships.

Also, peer is an element which is frequently mentioned as a playmate during preschool period. Peer and play constitute important steps for development, especially in the age range of 2-6 years (Gülay Ogelman, 2018). In their study, Göncü (2019) found that children's bonds with their peers developed by interacting with each other in plays and problem solving.

Positive peer relationships in preschool period have a distinct function for children to enhance their emotional intelligence level, establish positive relationships with their peers, reduce negative behaviors, and develop empathy skills (Şen & Özbey, 2017). Also, a positive increase in the development of children's motor-cognitive skills is associated with behavioral regulation skills of their peers (Rojas, Yoshikawa, Morris, Kamboukos, Dawson-Mcclure, & Brotman, 2020).



In her study examining peer relationships and peer victimization based on different variables, Sali (2014) observed that negative peer relationships increased with increasing peer victimization and prosocial behaviors increased with decreasing peer victimization. Positive peer relationships not only facilitate peer acceptance but also reduce peer victimization; whereas, negative peer relationships increase peer rejection and peer victimization, which may result in a vicious cycle in the course of time. When children who are rejected by their peers are exposed to relational peer victimization, they may display depressive and anxious behaviors compared to those exposed to physical peer victimization. It is possible to state that children, who are exposed to such situations, can become disadvantaged in terms of prosocial behaviors such as obeying the authority and rules and showing empathy (Martin-Anton, Monjas, García Bacete, & Jiménez-Lagares, 2016; Metin-Aslan, 2018). Accordingly, the importance of guidance of preschool education teachers and parents appears.

In the study by Göl-Güven (2017), it was determined that an adult's arranging a peer group environment via plays and activities supporting collaboration and participation led children to make a positive progress in their conflict transformation skills. In addition, children's reconciliatory attitudes, adult-oriented solution seeking behaviors, attitudes of obeying rules, and skills of offering suggestions increased; whereas, their aggressive and abstaining attitudes decreased.

Parten (1932) divides children's plays into categories ranging from non-social to social plays and states that as children grow up, they spend more time in social plays compared to non-social plays (Cited by Eggum-Wilkens Fabes, Castle, Zhang, Hanish, & Martin, 2014, p. 345).

Considering the effect of peers in the children's socialization, one of the essential elements in socialization through plays is undoubtedly peer interaction. Social relations established by the children with peers during this period affect their social and emotional adaptation during adulthood period (Gülay, 2009, p. 85). The children begin to face with different social experiences in play groups with peers during this period (Gülay, 2008, p. 27) and learn their future roles by means of these experiences.

Close relations that are established among children through plays strengthen their sense of trust (Beyazkürk, Anlık, & Dinçer, 2007, p.15). The researchers (Ahmetoğlu, Acar, & Aral, 2016, p.37; Göktaş, 2019, p.184) have expressed that positive peer relationships improved through plays have a positive effect on many skills such as self-regulation, creativity, cognitive, language and social skills.

As is seen, friendship relationships and play are two crucial concepts for preschool children. In Turkey, the number of studies on young children's peer relationships has gradually increased along with diversification of measurement tools. However, the number of studies revealing dynamics concerning peer relationships and play in accordance with children's views is limited. It is thought that this study would be guiding for future related studies since it determines the reasons for young children to like and dislike playing with their friends.

The purpose of the study is to reveal the reasons for young children to like and dislike playing with their friends. In this context, two questions were asked to young children: "What are the names of top three friends you like playing with in the classroom? Why do you like playing with them?" and "What are the names of top three friends you dislike playing with in the classroom? Why do you dislike playing with them?". The answers of the following questions were sought based on the children's answers:

- How is the distribution of the reasons for the young children to choose their friend in the first rank they like playing with?
- How is the distribution of the reasons for the young children to choose their friend in the second rank they like playing with?
- How is the distribution of the reasons for the young children to choose their friend in the third rank they like playing with?



- How is the distribution of the reasons for the young children to choose their friend in the first rank they dislike playing with?
- How is the distribution of the reasons for the young children to choose their friend in the second rank they dislike playing with?
- How is the distribution of the reasons for the young children to choose their friend in the third rank they dislike playing with?

METHODS

This is a qualitative study conducted to determine the reasons for preschool children to like and dislike playing with their friends.

Participants

The participants were divided into two groups in the study. The first group included 147 preschool children (77 (52.4%) girls, (70 (47.6%) boys) who were in the age group of 5-6 years and were living in Turkey. The second group included 60 preschool children (33 (55%) boys, (27 (45%) boys) who were in the age group of 5-6 years and were living in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. All the children had a normal development.

The participants were selected based on simple random sampling method. Two schools were chosen by lot method from each public preschool education institution in Vezirkopru district of Samsun and in Nicosia.

Measurement

Interview method was used as data collection tool. There are two sociometric approaches that present the social position of preschool children: Nomination-based sociometric measurement and grading-based sociometric measurement. In this study, the nomination-based sociometric measurement technique was utilized. In the nomination-based sociometric measurement, the child chooses among her/his peers in accordance with specific criteria. Used for preschool children; the nomination-based sociometric measurement was introduced by McCandless & Marshall in 1957 (McCandless & Marshall, 1957. Cited by Gülay Ogelman, 2019). During the application, choices can be made according to criteria such as my best friend (friends) / my least favorite friend (friends) and friend (friends) I like/dislike playing with. For example, each child can give the names of three or more friends that she/he likes or dislikes playing with. Each child's acceptance (those indicated to like playing with her/him) and rejection (those indicated to dislike playing with her/him) scores are calculated. (Gottman, 1977. Cited by Gülay Ogelman, 2019). In this technique, positive choice scores (Liking-L) and negative choice scores (Disliking-D) are determined for each child and the two scores are standardized within the group. Then, the Social Preference (SP) and Social Impact (SI) scores are determined. The social preference formula is most liked-most disliked, while the social impact formula is most liked+most disliked. The social preference and social impact scores are also standardized. Finally, the scores acquired are divided into five categories according to the following intervals:

For popular children: Social preference > 1 , most liked > 0 and most disliked < 0 ,

For rejected children: Social preference < -1 , most liked < 0 and most disliked > 0 ,

For excluded children: Social impact < -1 , most liked < 0 and most disliked < 0 ,

For disputable children: Social impact > 1 , most liked > 0 and most disliked > 0 ,

For average children: All the remaining group members (Coie, & Dodge, 1983; Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982).

In the sociometry technique-based method, the researcher asked the children four questions in a quiet room outside the classroom: "What are the names of top three friends that you like playing with in the classroom? Why do you like playing with them?" and "What are the names of top three friends you



dislike playing with in the classroom? Why do you dislike playing with them?”. The researcher recorded their answers during the application.

In the study the sociometry scores obtained by the children regarding the four questions were not included. The study discussed the reasons for children to like and dislike playing with their peers whose names they had given.

In order to reveal the reliability of the sociometry technique, the test-retest analysis was conducted. Of the children in the two study groups, 30 were chosen by lot. Sociometry was applied to the children chosen twice in 15 days. According to the result of the Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient technique, the correlation between the two measurements was found to be 0.81 ($p < 0.01$).

Analysis

Frequency and percentage distributions related to determine the reasons for the young children to like and dislike playing with their peers were calculated.

RESULTS

Table 1. Distribution of the reasons for the young children to like their friends in the first rank, in their response to the question “What are the names of top three friends you like playing with in the classroom?”

Preschool Children in Turkey			Preschool Children in North Cyprus		
Reasons of liking their peers in the first rank	f	%	Reasons of liking their peers in the first rank	f	%
We play very well.	87	59.2	We play very well.	23	38.3
She/he shares her/his toys.	12	8.2	She/he is my friend.	20	33.4
She/he is my friend.	11	7.5	I don’t know.	7	11.7
It is because she/he is quiet.	8	5.4	She/he is my buddy.	2	3.3
It is because she/he tidies up the toys quickly.	8	5.4	She/he shares her/his toys and everything else.	2	3.3
It is because she/he likes me.	8	5.4	We chat.	2	3.3
It is because I go to her/his house.	6	4.1	I have known her/him for a long time.	2	3.3
It is because she/he helps me.	3	2.0	She/he is fun, not boring.	1	1.7
She/he asks for permission before taking things.	1	0.7	We do activities together.	1	1.7
It is because she/he is small (short).	1	0.7			
We go home together.	1	0.7			
It is because she/he finishes her/his food.	1	0.7			
Total	147	100.0	Total	60	100.0

Table 1 shows that while 12 variables were effective in the reasons for the young children in Turkey to like playing with their friends in the first rank, 9 variables were effective for the young children in North Cyprus. The first three reasons for the children in Turkey to like playing were “We play very well (59.2%)”, “She/he shares her/his toys (8.2%)”, and “She/he is my friend (7.5%)”. The first three reasons for the children in North Cyprus to like playing were “We play very well (38.3%)”, “She/he is my friend (33.4%)”, and “I don’t know (11.7%)”.

Table 2. Distribution of the reasons for the young children to like their peers in the second rank, in their response to the question “What are the names of top three friends you like playing with in the classroom?”

Preschool Children in Turkey			Preschool Children in North Cyprus		
Reasons of liking their peers in the second rank	f	%	Reasons of liking their peers in the second rank	f	%
We play very well.	22	29.3	She/he is my friend.	26	34.8
It is because she/he helps me.	11	14.9	We play very well.	24	32.4
She/he is my friend.	11	14.9	I don’t know.	7	9.5
She/he shares her/his toys.	9	12.2	She/he shares her/his toys and everything else.	4	5.4



It is because she/he is small (short).	7	9.5	We spend good time together.	4	5.4
It is because she/he is funny.	5	6.8	She/he is fun, not boring.	3	4.1
It is because she/he likes me.	3	4.1	She/he is my buddy and my sister/brother.	1	1.4
She/he is my first friend.	2	2.7	We chat.	1	1.4
It is because I go to her/his house.	1	1.4	She/he sits next to me.	1	1.4
It is because she/he tidies up the toys quickly.	1	1.4	It is nice to hug her/him.	1	1.4
We spend good time together.	1	1.4	She/he never makes noise.	1	1.4
She/he listens to me.	1	1.4	I like her/his behaviors.	1	1.4
Total	74	100.0	Total	74	100.0

Table 2 shows that the young children in Turkey and North Cyprus expressed 12 variables concerning their reasons of liking playing with their friends in the second rank. The first three reasons for the children in Turkey to like playing were “We play very well (29.3%)”, “It is because she/he helps me (14.9%)”, “She/he is my friend (14.9%)”, and “She/he shares her/his toys (12.2%)”. The first three reasons for the children in the North Cyprus to like playing were “She/he is my friend (34.8%)”, “We play very well (32.4%)”, and “I don’t know (9.5%)”.

Table 3. Distribution of the reasons for the young children to like their peers in the third rank, in their response to the question “What are the names of top three friends you like playing with in the classroom?”

Preschool Children in Turkey			Preschool Children in North Cyprus		
Reasons of liking their peers in the third rank	f	%	Reasons of liking their peers in the third rank	f	%
We play very well.	7	17.1	We play very well.	24	48.0
It is because she/he helps me.	6	14.6	She/he is my friend.	14	28.0
It is because she/he tidies up the toys quickly.	6	14.6	I don’t know.	5	10.0
It is because she/he likes me.	5	12.2	She/he is my buddy.	1	2.0
It is because she/he is funny.	4	9.8	She/he shares her/his toys and everything else.	1	2.0
We draw together.	4	9.8	She/he is so sweet.	1	2.0
It is because she/he is quiet.	4	9.8	She/he is never annoying.	1	2.0
She/he is my friend.	2	4.9	She/he is fun, not boring.	1	2.0
She/he shares her/his toys.	1	2.4	We spend good time together.	1	2.0
It is because I go to her/his house.	1	2.4	She/he always smiles.	1	2.0
I don’t know.	1	2.4			
Total	41	100.0	Total	50	100.0

Table 3 shows that while 11 variables were effective in the reasons for the young children in Turkey to like playing with their friends in the third rank, 10 variables were effective for the young children in North Cyprus. The first three reasons for the children in Turkey to like playing with their friends were “We play very well (17.1%)”, “It is because she/he helps me (14.6%)”, “It is because she/he tidies up the toys quickly (14.6%)”, and “It is because she/he likes me (12.2%)”. The first three reasons for the children in North Cyprus to like playing were “We play very well (48.0%)”, “She/he is my friend (28.0%)”, and “I don’t know (10.0%)”.

Table 4 shows that while 12 variables were effective in the reasons for the young children in Turkey to dislike playing with their friends in the first rank, 15 variables were effective for the young children in North Cyprus. The first three reasons for the children in Turkey to dislike playing with their friends were “She/he does not play with me (42.7%)”, “She/he ruins the plays (13.6%)”, and “She/he is naughty (11.7%)”.

**Table 4.** Distribution of the reasons for the young children to dislike their peers in the first rank, in their response to the question “What are the names of top three friends you dislike playing with in the classroom?”

Preschool Children in Turkey			Preschool Children in North Cyprus		
Reasons of disliking their peers in the first rank	f	%	Reasons of disliking their peers in the first rank	f	%
She/he does not play with me.	44	42.7	She/he does not play with me, speak to me, spend time with me, or call me to play.	7	18.4
She/he ruins the plays.	14	13.6	I don't know.	6	15.8
She/he is naughty.	12	11.7	She/he does harm.	5	13.2
She/he never obeys the rules.	8	7.8	She/he is frustrating and annoying.	5	13.2
She/he hits me.	7	6.8	She/he is naughty.	3	7.9
It is because she/he never shares.	7	6.8	She/he talks badly.	2	5.3
She/he always sits next to me.	4	3.8	She/he hits me.	2	5.3
She/he ruins my drawings.	2	1.9	She/he beats me.	1	2.6
She/he steps on my foot.	2	1.9	She/he scolds me.	1	2.6
She/he spits.	1	1.0	She/he hit my friend.	1	2.6
She/he breaks the toys and messes up.	1	1.0	She/he ruins the plays.	1	2.6
She/he throws the toys.	1	1.0	I don't play with her/him.	1	2.6
			She/he makes bad jokes.	1	2.6
			She/he plays with another kid.	1	2.6
			She/he always likes boy plays.	1	2.6
Total	103	100.0	Total	38	100.0

The first three reasons for the children in North Cyprus to dislike playing with their friends were “She/he does not play with me, speak to me or spend time with me, or call me to play (18.4%)”, “I don't know (15.8%)”, “She/he does harm (13.2%)”, and “She/he is frustrating and annoying (13.2%)” (Table 4).

Table 5. Distribution of the reasons for the young children to dislike their peers in the second rank, in their response to the question “What are the names of top three friends you dislike playing with in the classroom?”

Preschool Children in Turkey			Preschool Children in North Cyprus		
Reasons of disliking their peers in the second rank	f	%	Reasons of disliking their peers in the second rank	f	%
She/he never obeys the rules.	17	25.0	She/he is frustrating and annoying.	6	18.8
She/he is naughty.	9	13.2	She/he does not play with me, speak to me, spend time with me, or call me to play.	5	15.6
She/he hits me.	8	11.8	I don't know.	4	12.5
It is because I find her/him strange.	6	8.8	She/he hits me.	4	12.5
She/he ruins the plays.	5	7.4	She/he is not my friend.	3	9.4
She/he does not play with me.	4	5.9	She/he does harm.	2	6.3
It is because she/he never shares.	4	5.9	She/he is naughty.	2	6.3
She/he spoils the turns.	3	4.4	She/he talks badly.	1	3.1
She/he ruins my drawings.	2	2.9	She/he scolds me.	1	3.1
She/he never gives back what she/he takes from me.	2	2.9	She/he plays games that I don't like.	1	3.1
She/he calls me “dad”.	2	2.9	She/he has offended at me.	1	3.1
It is because she/he tickles me.	2	2.9	I don't like her/his jokes.	1	3.1
She/he beats me.	1	1.5	She/he takes my toys without permission.	1	3.1
She/he misbehaves.	1	1.5			
She/he always runs around.	1	1.5			
She/he yells.	1	1.5			
Total	68	100.0	Total	32	100.0



Table 5 shows that while 16 variables were effective in the reasons for the young children in Turkey to dislike playing with their friends in the second rank, 13 variables were effective for the children in North Cyprus. The first three reasons for the children in Turkey to dislike playing with their friends were “She/he never obeys the rules (25.0%)”, “She/he is naughty (13.2%)”, and “She/he hits me (11.8%)”. The first three reasons for the children in North Cyprus to dislike playing with their friends were “She/he is frustrating and annoying (18.8%)”, “She/he does not play with me, speak to me, spend time with me, or call me to play (15.6%)”, “I don’t know (12.5%)”, and “She/he hits me (12.5%)”.

Table 6. Distribution of the reasons for the young children to dislike their peers in the third rank, in their response to the question “What are the names of top three friends you dislike playing with in the classroom?”

Preschool Children in Turkey			Preschool Children in North Cyprus		
Reasons of disliking their peers in the third rank	f	%	Reasons of disliking their peers in the third rank	f	%
She/he does not play with me.	10	35.7	She/he is frustrating and annoying.	4	23.3
She/he never obeys the rules.	4	14.3	She/he does not play with me, speak to me, spend time with me, or call me to play	2	11.8
It is because she/he is quiet.	4	14.3	She/he does harm.	2	11.8
She/he ruins the plays.	2	7.1	She/he is naughty.	2	11.8
She/he is naughty.	2	7.1	She/he is not my friend.	1	5.9
It is because she/he never shares.	2	7.1	I don’t know.	1	5.9
She/he never gives back what she/he takes from me.	1	3.6	She/he scolds me.	1	5.9
She/he beats me.	1	3.6	She/he plays games that I don’t like.	1	5.9
She/he does things I don’t like.	1	3.6	She/he has offended at me.	1	5.9
She/he misbehaves.	1	3.6	She/he always wants me to play with her/him.	1	5.9
			It is because she/he never shares.	1	5.9
Total	28	100.0	Total	17	100.0

Table 6 shows that while 10 variables were effective in the reasons for the young children in Turkey to dislike playing with their friends in the third rank, 11 variables were effective for the children in North Cyprus. The first three reasons for the children in Turkey to dislike playing with their friends were “She/he does not play with me (35.7%)”, “She/he never obeys the rules (14.3%)”, “She/he hits me (14.3%)”, “She/he ruins the plays (7.1%)”, “She/he is naughty (7.1%)”, and “It is because she/he never shares (7.1%)”. The first two reasons for the children in North Cyprus to dislike playing with their friends were “She/he is frustrating and annoying (23.3%)”, “She/he does not play with me, speak to me, spend time with me, or call me to play (11.8%)”, “She/he does harm (11.8%)”, and “She/he is naughty (11.8%)”.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The primary reason for the children in Turkish and North Cyprus samples to like playing with their friends in the first and third ranks in ranking of friends they liked playing with was “We play very well”. Among their reasons for choosing the children in the second rank, “We play very well” was mostly mentioned in the sample of Turkey; whereas, “She/he is my friend” was mostly mentioned in the sample of North Cyprus. When examining the answers, the criteria called by the young children as “We play very well”, including also the quality and diversity of plays, came to the forefront for indicating how they like playing with their peers. In addition, it was seen that variables such as “She/he is my friend”, “She/he shares her/his toys”, “It is because she/he helps me” and “It is because she/he tidies up the toys quickly”, were among the first three reasons for the children to choose their peers. It was observed that only some children in the North Cyprus sample were not able to explain their reason for liking playing with their friends and thus said “I don’t know” (Tables 1, 2, and 3).



This answer might be explained with their failure to focus on the subject due to their short time of attention. Additionally, it can be thought that the children may have had difficulty in choosing the right words to express their feelings. When examining the tables, it was seen that the children expressed themselves successfully in subjects of liking and disliking playing with their peers in general.

It was observed that the variables which were effective on the children's state of liking playing with a peer, were involved in the emotional and social skill dimension. The young children from these two countries gave answers in the emotional dimension such as, "She/he is my friend, It is because she/he likes me, She/he is my buddy, It is nice to hug her/him, I like her/his behaviors, and She/he is so sweet.". These answers revealed the importance of emotional satisfaction in play friendship. Another dimension of friendship is emotional bond. Positive friendships not only make a social contribution to children's emotional development, but they may also increase emotional dynamics in the peer group (Berndt, 1989; Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996). It can be asserted that the young children from these two countries were affected by social skills in the social skill dimension such as "Sharing, chatting, being fun and funny, asking for permission, tidying up the toys, helping, being quiet/making no noise, listening, being non-annoying, and smiling". Social skills may provide young children with advantages both in plays and friendship relationships (Gregoriadis, & Grammatikopoulos, 2014). Children can also learn social skills while playing with their friends (Vidoni, 2007). As is seen, there is a mutual correlation between social skills and playing. Spending time was another variable that may affect young children's choice of playmate in this study. The answers "We go home together, I have known her/him for a long time, we do activities together, we spend good time together, she/he is my first friend, she/he sits next to me, it is because I go to her/his house, and we draw together" revealed the importance of spending time other than playing. In the study conducted by Dietrich (2005) to examine preschool children's friendships, it was determined that spending time in similar plays and activities, having similar interests, affection, and familial factors were effective in shaping friendships for children

The reasons for the young children living in both Turkey and North Cyprus to like and dislike playing with their peers were usually parallel. This result can be explained with basic elements in plays and peer relationships. To be more precise, young children's individual differences reflect on their plays (Howes & Matheson, 1992). Some of these individual differences are self-regulation or emotional regulation strategies (Fabes, Hanish, Martin & Eisenberg, 2002), cognitive and language competencies (Rubin & Daniels-Beirness, 1983). Besides individual differences, parent-child relationship may shape social and emotional competencies, as well (McCollum & Ostrosky, 2008). Moreover, young children may be selective in peer groups in terms of gender, race, behavioral patterns, social participation, and cognitive capacity. They may display more interested attitudes in their fellows and/or peers who exhibit similar behaviors. Because of such selectiveness, they may develop positive or negative reactions against their peers (Coplan & Arbeau, 2009). It may not always be easy for young children to make friends and be a good friend. Howes & Matheson (1992) state that cognitive and emotional skills have an important role in young children's peer relationships.

The primary reason for the children to dislike playing with their friends in the first rank in ranking of friends they disliked playing with was the variable "She/he does not play with me, speak to me, spend time with me, or call me to play". Accordingly, it is important for children to invite each other to play, accept such invitation and establish a dialogue, in terms of play friendship. Friendship is a type of relationship including special interests and mutual close interaction that show continuity (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker 2006). In the study conducted by Persson (2005) on four-year-old children, it was stated that prosocial behaviors corresponded to the same kind of behaviors in the circle of friends; whereas, negative behavior examples such as aggression reduced positive behaviors in the circle of friends. The children included in the study expressed that they disliked playing with their peers who did not invite them to play or communicate with them. When expressing their reason for choosing the



peers they liked playing with, they stressed spending good time together. In this context, it is possible to assert that the study results are consistent.

In addition, it was revealed that they had positive feelings and affection for their peers who were shorter than them with the answer, “It is because she/he is small”. The relevant studies have shown that physical appearance may direct young children’s peer relationships. For example, in the study conducted by Sanefuji (2013) on five-year-old preschool children in Japan, it was stated that similar physical characteristics may be effective on selecting friends.

The children from the two countries had also parallel views about unfavorable characteristics of a playmate. Accordingly, the young children did not want their friends to “ruin the plays/activities, be naughty, do harm, display violence, get angry, annoy, talk differently, spit, break the toys, mess up, make bad jokes, choose the same child all the time, disobey the rules, get offended, tickle, run all the time, misbehave, be quiet and behave oppressively”, although the ranking of these characteristics changed. In the study conducted by Coelho, Torres, Fernandes and Santos (2017) in Portugal, they revealed that there was a correlation between problems experienced by children during plays and sociometric measures. To be more precise, there was a negative correlation between communication problems in plays and close friendships. As the quality of plays enhances, social acceptance and friendship levels also increase. As is seen, relationships established by children during plays in preschool education institutions may become a determinant in terms of friendships.

Based on the results it was determined that obeying the rules was also an effective variable for the children’s choice of a playmate. The children from the two countries also stated that their reasons to choose their favorite peers for a playmate were behaviors expressed as classroom rules, such as “tidying up the toys quickly, finishing their meal and making no noise”. When examining their reasons of disliking their friends for a playmate, they mentioned classroom rules either directly or indirectly with statements, such as “not obeying the rules, ruining the turn and running all the time”.

According to the results, young children attach importance to social skills, mutual sharing, spending time outside plays and relationships based on kindness and love in their peer relationships and they dislike rude, bullying and disorderly behaviors. While expressing their playmate choices, the children in the study groups stated more criteria as their reasons to dislike than their reasons to like, which is noteworthy in terms of revealing problems of young children in their peer relationships.

Limitations and recommendations

This study revealed which variables children liked and disliked in their playmate choices. In accordance with the results, preschool education teachers should closely follow the dynamics in children’s peer relationships. They should observe play behaviors, types of play, playmate choices, conflict status and the consequences of conflicts. Ladd (2005) states that peer interactions expressed with conflict might be useful for teaching children how to balance between their own desires and other people’s desires. Thus, teachers should focus on developing conflict solution skills of children. Also, they should apply various guidance activities like coaching in order to enhance social competence of children and develop their social skills. Studies aimed at children’s playmate choices can be increased. In line with the limitations of the study, further studies can be conducted with more crowded sample groups. Changes occurring in children’s playmate choices in the course of time can be followed with longitudinal studies.

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