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The Effects of Tourist Family Vacations, Which Offer Different Worlds Through the Eyes of Children, on the Visual-Motor Perception-Focused Cognitive Development of the Child *

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Abstract
Family vacations are valuable because they allow parents to see the world through their children's not-yet-tired eyes. Furthermore, they provide children with intense experiences in a short period of time. The positive social, physical, and spiritual effects of vacations for children are now widely accepted. This study hypothesizes that the brain engages in activities that require mind-body coordination and works to adapt to and focus on new conditions outside of the routine during vacations, and this supports the cognitive development of children. The Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test was applied as a pretest and posttest to measure the independent variable with the study's participants including 113 randomly selected children 5 or 6 years of age. The results indicated a statistically significant increase in children's visual-motor skills in terms of the independent variable. However, this increase was not found to be statistically significant. It has been suggested that the study should be detailed with controlled samples, examining repeated measures that ensure internal validity with different sample groups and a strong independent variable.
Keywords: *Child Development, Visual-motor, Family Vacations*

* This study is not included in the study group that requires TR Index Ethics Committee Approval.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a phenomenon that affects individuals of all ages, creating positive or negative effects on their behavior. Traveling entails individuals departing from their current locations for a set duration to visit different destinations, and it can lead to a range of social, spiritual, physical, and cognitive impacts (Packer, 2021; Dolnicar, Yamanandram, & Cliff, 2012). Children are among the groups most affected by this phenomenon, especially in the context of lived experiences. For this reason, the present study explores the effects of family vacations, which offer children the opportunity to experience new worlds, on the visual-motor perceptual cognitive development of the child. In the context of vacations, families make decisions that will benefit their children; thus, children are an important target market for the hotel industry. The benefits provided for children on these occasion directly influence the concept of holidays and family vacations in the tourism sector (Aksit-Asik, 2019; Wu et al., 2019).

Summer vacations, with the closure of schools, constitute a period in which children can enjoy free time filled with games and entertainment without the burdens of classes and homework. In this season, rather than sending children away to sports camps or other classes, parents may prefer to plan hotel holidays that involve traveling for a certain period of time for the entire family as a type of entertainment activity enjoyed by children (Labrecque & Ricard, 2001; Ying, 2010; Srnec, Lončarić, & Perišić Prodan, 2016). Therefore, families with children constitute a significant target group within the tourism sector, particularly during summer vacations (Schierkolk, 2019). In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of families going on vacation with their children, with the proportion of families with children in package tour sales reaching nearly 35% (Ahipasaoglu, 2018). It is predicted that the importance of family tourism within the broader tourism sector will continue to increase in the coming years (Taner, 2019). As children increasingly influence their families' travel and holiday decisions, they are crucial elements of the process (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Cheah, 2015).

The fact that some hotels offer children-oriented or child-friendly services and products attracts the attention of families with children. Vacations centered on spending time in a hotel offer positive opportunities for families to spend more quality time together and are significant and enjoyable activities for children in many ways. These vacations allow children to explore their interests, experience new things, and engage in productive and entertaining activities. The primary goals of families during vacations are to have fun, enjoy quality time together, unwind, and mentally relax. However, for children, the functions of vacations are not limited to these points alone. Children can benefit from rich learning opportunities and experiences during family vacations, particularly in the context of child-friendly tourism, which can lead to positive changes in their behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities (Niemczyk, 2015; Suryawijaya, 2023).

Research on hotel-centered vacations has often focused on adult satisfaction or the impacts and cost-benefit outcomes for adults (Kotíková & Schwartzhoffová, 2016). In the context of the impacts of vacations for children, which has received far less attention, studies focusing on the relationship between cognitive development and environmental changes may have the potential to reveal previously unrecognized benefits of vacations for the brain development of children.

When the previous research on cognitive development and changes in the environment is examined, studies conducted on Alzheimer's disease provide essential insights and serve as an inspiration for further research regarding the close relationship between those two factors. Recent studies of Alzheimer's patients have shown that changes in the environment significantly affect various parts of the brain, including motor neuron cells, as well as visual perception, reasoning, and analytical skills. It has been emphasized that for these patients, continuously remaining in the same environment is a significant risk factor for the progression of the disease. The importance of environmental changes and new experiences in different places for brain development has been highlighted in this body of research (Fleming & Purandare, 2010; Gaugler et al., 2014; Plagman et al.,2019).

Furthermore, similar effects have been reported in studies conducted with infants living in orphanages. In institutions such as foster homes, orphanages, and women's shelters, it has been reported that infants who spend considerable time in cribs with bars without experiencing any change in environment, often referred to as "bed prisoners," may develop irreversible cognitive deficiencies or impairments due to their months or even years of not seeing anything other than the ceiling. In these institutions, many infants spend their days in small rooms with metal cribs for as many as 3 years, and these environments have crucial negative effects on their personalities and brain development. This confirms the importance of spatial changes and environmental stimuli in the context of brain development, as evidenced by specific cognitive differences between children raised in atmospheres of love and attention by their parents and children raised in institutional settings (McKenzie, 2003; O'Sullivan & McMahon, 2006; Wolff & Fesseha, 1998).

Brain of a child receiving attention and engaging in activities	Brain of a child not receiving attention or engaging in activities

Figure 1. Brain Imaging Results hHghlighting the Difference Between Children Growing Up in Environments of Love and Care and Children Growing Up in Environments of Neglect (Perry, 1994)

In this context, it can be hypothesized that changes in location and environment and new experiences in different places will positively affect the brain development of children. Holiday resorts can effectively provide children with such different and appealing environments with intense stimuli within a very short period of time, such as vacations lasting 5 or 6 days. The intense stimuli experienced by children in different environments can lead to new connections between brain cells, exerting significant effects within short periods of time. In the present study, the effects of touristic family vacations that offer new experiences for children on the visual-motor perceptual cognitive development of the child are examined.

2. Methodology

This section presents the research model, population and sample of the study, data collection tools, and research procedures.

2.1. Research Model

In this study, a quasi-experimental design with a pretest/posttest model was used. The most fundamental difference between quasi-experimental and causal comparative designs is that the independent variable must be present before the independent variable in causal comparative designs. However, in quasi-experimental designs, the independent variable constitutes the application performed during the experiment for the experimental group of the study (Franken & Wallen, 2006). Due to the nature of the present research topic, which involves enjoyable activities, families willingly participated without the need for ethical approval.

2.2. Population and Sample

From among the probability sampling methods, the random sampling method was applied in this study in the form of simple random sampling (Ural & Kilic, 2011). In simple random sampling, a list is made, assigning a number to each unit that forms the universe, with precise boundaries determined. Numbers equivalent to the numbered samples from the prepared list are determined by lottery method or by chance (i.e., randomly) with the help of a computer (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012; Buyukozturk et al., 2024).

The study sample comprised 113 children 5 or 6 years of age who were selected through random sampling, with 56 children in the experimental group and 57 in the control group. No significant differences existed between the experimental and control groups regarding age, sex, socioeconomic status, place of residence, education, or basic skills. All participating children were currently attending preschool and residing in the Turkish provinces of Duzce or Izmir. Thus, the study population consisted of all children in the relevant age group in the provinces of Izmir and Duzce. In the process of applying the random sampling method, three preschools from Duzce province and two preschools from Izmir province were included in the study. The selected preschools are state-run institutions. From a sociological perspective, state-run preschools generally have middle-level socioeconomic structures and are thus more suitable for reflecting the population from a scientific standpoint. Private preschools were not included in the study.

The sample group data was collected before 2020. The population defined in this study is limited to the selected provinces and cannot be generalized to the entire country. It is highly likely that the sampled preschools reflect specific characteristics of the provinces in which they are located.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The researchers created a demographic information form for the purposes of this study and administered it to both the experimental and control groups, consisting of questions about the child's age and sex, the family's economic status, place of residence, and duration of school attendance. In addition, the Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test was administered to the children of the experimental and control groups. This test, developed by Lauretta Bender, is intended to evaluate children's perceptual maturity (Noronha, et al., 2020).

2.3.1. Demographic Information Form

This form, created by the researchers, was completed by the parents, who provided information about the child's age and sex, the family's socioeconomic status, place of residence, and the child's school. In determining socioeconomic status, parameters such as income, occupation, education, and assets are used. However, this study only obtained information on income levels.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Parameter	Description
Gender	
Female	56 (28 Experimetal + 28 Control)
Male	57 (28 Experimental + 29 Control)
Age	
Over 60 Months	58
Over 72 Months	55
Family's socioeconomic status (Income levels)	
Below Minimum Wage	2
Minimum Wage (580 USD)	13
Above Minimum Wage	98

2.3.2. Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test

The Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test is administered to children between the ages of 5 and 11 to assess visual-motor perception and identify potential problems in brain functions. It effectively identifies delays, regressions, functional losses, and organic brain damage in children. This test is crucial in offering valuable insights into conditions such as intellectual disabilities, aphasia, various forms of organic brain damage, psychoses, and fabricated illnesses in children (Somer, 1988).

The test, created by Bender in 1938, consists of nine shapes on individual cards. It offers insights into children's motor perception abilities and facilitates the assessment of potential neurological issues and emotional adjustment. Somer (1988) adapted the test to Turkish and validity and reliability studies were conducted. This test yields effective and accurate results, especially when used alongside complementary assessments such as the Koppitz Human Figure Drawing Test. It can be said that data related to the test are valid and reliable.

In the implementation of the test, card A is used as the beginning pattern, as seen in Figure 2. Patterns 1-8 are then given consecutively. The paper on which the children will draw these patterns should be plain, unlined, and white. One sheet of paper is generally sufficient, but children with lower intelligence or sensory problems may require more.

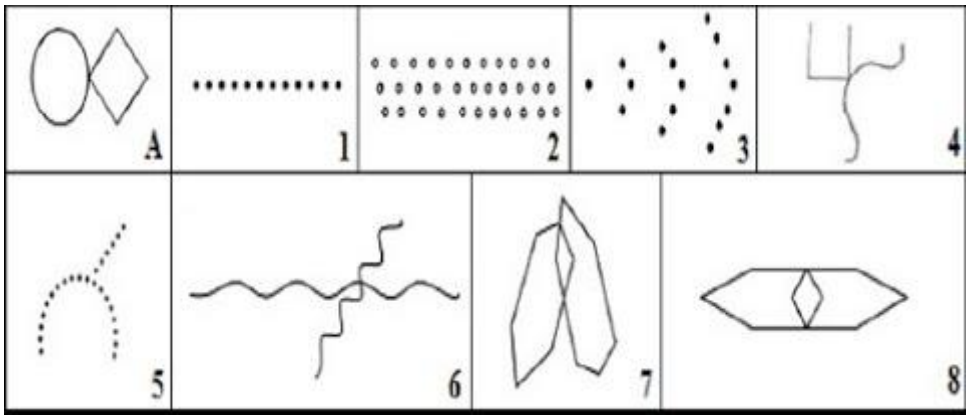

Figure 2. Patterns and Shapes from the Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test

The test materials thus include 9 cards, 1 or 2 blank sheets of paper, a pencil, and an eraser. Children are asked to draw figures based on their perceptions of the displayed cards. One point is assigned for each drawing error, and at the end of the test, the total score is calculated and used in statistical evaluations.

2.4. Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was the duration of the independent variable of family vacations, which was limited to 6 days. Experimental studies typically cover periods of 6-10 weeks (Buyukozturk, 2008; Ural & Kilic, 2011). Therefore, the limited duration of the vacations resulted in the study being temporally constrained. Another limitation is that the children only visited holiday resorts.

2.5. Procedure

The inclusion criteria of the study required that the children in the experimental group, who were considered equivalent in terms of their demographic characteristics, had spent at least 6 days of the summer vacation with their parents at a 5-star hotel with all-inclusive or ultra-all-inclusive features. Pretest and posttest applications were administrated to the experimental and control groups before and after the vacation period, respectively. There was an interval of approximately 1 month between the two applications.

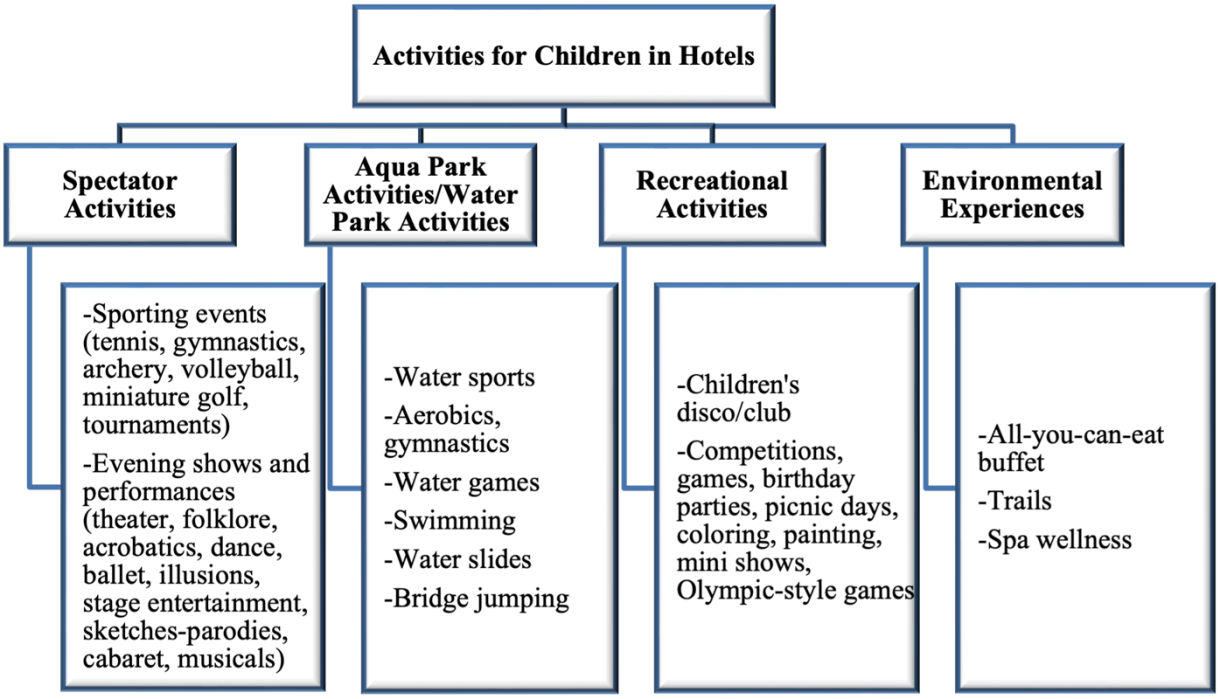

Figure 3. Stimulating and Entertaining Activities offered to Children at Holiday Resorts.

Activities for children were divided into various categories as seen in Figure 3 and it was confirmed that all of these categories are applied for the children during their vacations.

3. Findings

In this section, the findings of the research are presented. The Mann-Whitney U test was applied as a non-parametric test that serves as an alternative to the independent sample t-test. This test is used to evaluate the presence of differences in the means of two independent groups from similar populations.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U test results for the Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test pretest scores of the experimental and control groups

Groups	N	Rank Average	Total of the Ranks	U	P
Experimental	56	16.65	227.32	88.21	.240
Control	57	17.31	230.73		

P>.05

Table 2 shows no significant difference between the experimental and control groups regarding their Bender-Gestalt pretest scores. It can accordingly be said that before the hotel-centered family vacations, the experimental and control groups were homogeneously distributed in terms of their test scores and could be considered equivalent to each other.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test results for the Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test posttest scores of the experimental and control groups

Groups	N	Rank Average	Total of the Ranks	U	P
Experimental	56	25.63	264.12	45.52	.000
Control	57	19.95	226.07		

P<.05

Table 3 presents the data for the Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test posttest scores of the experimental and control groups after the experimental group's vacation experiences. A significant difference can be observed between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups after the hotel-centered experiences of the experimental group.

Table 4. Distribution of Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test Pretest and Posttest Results of the Experimental Group According to Sex.

Tests	Sex	N	X	ss	t	P
Pretest	Male	28	15.57	9.825	.450	.402
	Female	28	17.75	8.521		
Posttest	Male	28	25.17	6.619	.071	.156
	Female	28	26.09	6.454		

P>.05

Table 4 shows no significant difference between the changes in the experimental group's Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test pretest and posttest scores according to sex (P>.05). Thus, the sex of the child did not significantly affect the change in Bender-Gestalt Visual Motor Perception Test score after the children experienced hotel-centered family vacations.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the significance of planning vacations with children at least once a year and using those vacations to support child development has been highlighted for tourism managers and planners. The research findings indicate that vacations with children are not merely a source of entertainment. Rather, similar to appropriate play activities, vacations can provide various developmental benefits. In this context, vacation therapy, akin to the use of play therapy, may gain importance in the field of childhood cognitive development.

Children's cognitive development is susceptible to changes in space, time, environment, symbols, and activities. Researchers have long used the term "cognitive development" to refer to the overall development of active mental activities that enable individuals to understand and learn about the world around them. Accordingly, cognitive development, as defined by researchers, is considered to be the process by which individuals perceive their surroundings and the external world from infancy to adulthood with the development of more complex and compelling cognitive pathways (Pasnak et al., 1991; Rhodes, Whitten, & Copeland, 1997; Piaget, 2007; Baskale & Bahar, 2008). At a basic level, intelligence pertains to the individual's perceptions of the external world and adaptation to the environment. The relationship found in the present study between vacation activities that offer a change in physical environment and the visual-motor perception skills of children, as a sub-skill of intelligence, aligns with the most generally accepted definition of intelligence in the literature.

The results of the present study on children who went on vacation indicate that hotel-centered family vacation experiences may positively impact children's visual-motor perception skills. The concept of "vacation" addressed in this study encompasses vacations in hotels with specific qualities; these are not vacations in the sense of pure leisure time but rather vacations that involve intensive stimuli and activities within a specific period of time. Research conducted in the tourism sector has shown that children can develop necessary skills related to nutrition, entertainment, and learning during vacations (Meremikwu et al., 2013; Schierkolk, 2019; Wu et al., 2019). These positive changes observed in children may consciously or unconsciously lead families to choose relevant vacation destinations more frequently (Feng & Li, 2016; Kotíková & Schwartzhoffová, 2016; Rhoden, Hunter-Jones, & Miller, 2016).

In other studies on this topic, the relationships between hotel-centered family vacations and children's eating habits, social skills, self-efficacy, and other characteristics have been examined and positive effects of vacations on these cognitive competencies have generally been found (Meremikwu, Ekwueme, & Odigwe, 2013; Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015; Blichfeldt, 2019). There are few studies in the literature explicitly focusing on the impact of hotel vacations on childhood brain development. However, the studies cited here address developmental changes associated with learning activities, which can also be evaluated in the context of intelligence and visual perception.

The findings of the present study indicated no significant difference in the pretest and posttest scores of the children in the experimental group according to sex. This finding can be attributed to the universality of vacation activities, which appeal to individuals of all sociodemographic groups and yield similar effects.

Many studies on children's rights have emphasized not only fundamental rights such as nutrition, shelter, education, protection, play, and leisure but also the right to spend time freely and travel or explore to ensure their mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being (Przetacznikowa, 1967; Ainsworth, 1993; Morison, Ames, & Chisholm, 1995; Fawzy & Fouad, 2010; Dorsey et al., 2015; Singh & Suvidha, 2016). The right to spend time freely while vacationing or traveling can be emphasized in this context. In contrast, it has long been emphasized that children who spend their infancy in institutions such as orphanages or foster care homes and consistently remain in a single room without changes of the physical environment experience various mental and social deficiencies (Kaler & Freeman, 1994; Weitzman, 2003). These researchers have indicated that children residing in such institutions experience mental issues that can be attributed to the prison-like routines to which the children are subjected.

Recent studies of dementia patients have also highlighted the significant negative impact of spatially routine-bound and monotonous lifestyles on the development and progression of dementia. Therefore, purposeful and engaging travel experiences are recommended to support brain development in these patients. Such studies emphasize the importance of activities that stimulate the brain cortex when individuals venture beyond the ordinary spatial confines of daily life. Perceiving new and different places and adapting to them entails cognitive activities with various benefits, including intense memory updates and the encoding of new information in the brain (Connell, 2006; Cuffy, Tribe, & Airey, 2012). In their study titled "Tourism as a Dementia Treatment Based on Positive Psychology," Wen et al. (2022) suggested using tourism as a brain-enhancing tool in dementia treatment. They highlighted the fact that tourism activities engage and develop parts of the brain associated with processing and associative activities. Because visual-motor perception serves as a mechanism for spatial orientation, it can be said that touristic holidays serve as significant facilitators of visual-motor development, particularly when they are experienced in short periods of time with intense physical and cognitive stimuli.

As a result of the research presented here, the following recommendations can be made:

- The present study should be replicated while increasing the sample size and including sample groups in more intensive vacation programs.
- Based on the positive outcomes observed for children's visual-motor perception, the findings should be further investigated in terms of other cognitive abilities.
- To ensure that children from less economically privileged backgrounds, who may not have access to such activities, can also benefit from the significant cognitive advantages of vacation activities, various community service initiatives should be implemented.
- It is also important to increase awareness campaigns to promote the understanding that vacations spent in hotels for certain periods of time offer activities beyond mere leisure, providing children with various learning opportunities, chances to orient themselves to different environments, opportunities for multidimensional thinking, and increased adaptability to differences.

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