

The Effect of Communication Skills and Interpersonal Problem Solving Skills on Social Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine communication skills, interpersonal problem solving skills, and social self-efficacy perception of adolescents and the predictive role of communication skills and interpersonal problem solving skills on social self-efficacy. This study is a quantitative and relational study aimed at examining the relationships among communication skills, interpersonal problem solving skills, and social self-efficacy. The study group was comprised of 494 (226 females; 268 males) randomly selected high school students studying in different high schools in Mugla, Turkey. The data were collected using the Communication Skills Inventory, Interpersonal Problem Solving Inventory, and Social Self-Efficacy Expectation Scale for Adolescents. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was employed to search for relationships among communication skills, interpersonal problem solving skills, and social self-efficacy; multiple hierarchical regression analysis was also used for explaining social self-efficacy. The findings showed that the communication skills and interpersonal problem solving skills were found to be significantly correlated to social self-efficacy and communication skills and interpersonal problem solving skills important predictors of social self-efficacy.

Key Words

Communication Skills, Interpersonal Problem Solving Skills, Social Self-Efficacy, Adolescents.

Adolescence is the period and process of development from childhood to adulthood. It is a period demanding significant adjustment to the physiological, cognitive, psychological, and social changes which distinguish childhood behaviour from adult behaviour. These changes affect the personality and adjustment in later life. During adolescence, communication with other people is very important for adolescents (Muuss, 1996). Communication is one of the most basic elements of human functioning, because it is the cornerstone of strong, healthy interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships begin and develop through communication. The quality of communication has a direct impact on the quality of the interpersonal relationships. And the quality of these interpersonal relationships often affects how they feel about themselves, it's easy to understand why effective communication in

interpersonal relationships is so important. The use of effective communication skills is an important interpersonal competency. Interpersonal competence involves the development of communication skills. Interpersonal competence also involves the ability to engage effectively in complex interpersonal interaction and to use and understand people effectively. People in an interpersonal relationship tend to influence each other, share their thoughts and feelings, and engage in activities together. Because of this interdependence, most things that change or impact one member of the relationship will have some level of impact on the other member. A relationship is normally viewed as a connection between two individuals, such as intimate relationship, parent-child relationship, or a teacher-student relationship. Without effective communication, a message can turn into error, misunder-

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standing, or frustration. And interpersonal relationship problems arise when messages on either end are misunderstood (Cüceloğlu, 2004; Demirci, 2002; Korkut, 2004; Özerbaş, Bulut, & Usta, 2007; Özgüven, 2001; Şimşek, 2003; Yüksel-Şahin, 1997). In today's world one of the most common problems that an individual experience is interpersonal relationships. The problems that are faced in interpersonal relationships affect individuals quite deeply and stand as one of the most important issues in their lives. Problem solving has been defined as the cognitive-affective-behavioral process by which people identify, discover, or invent effective or adaptive coping responses for specific problematic situations (Çilingir, 2006; Dökmen, 1997; D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1982, 1990; D'Zurilla, Maydeu-Olivares, & Kant, 1998; Goffin & Tull, 1985; Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987; Horowitz, Rosenberg, & Bartholomew, 1993; Kruger, 1997; Maydeu-Olivares, & D'Zurilla, 1996; Maydeu-Olivares, Rodriguez-Fornells, Gomez-Benito, & D'Zurilla, 2000; Öğülmüş, 2006; Pellegrini & Urbain, 1986; Yüksel, 2008). Problem solving is thus the ability to plan, organise, take action, evaluate, adopt and summarise. Being proficient at problem solving can have an important influence on life success (Aksu, 1989; Belzer, D'Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2002; D'Zurilla, Nezu, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). Interpersonal self-perceptions may influence interaction frequency and other social behaviors. Interpersonal problem solving has been defined as the general coping strategy by which a person attempts to identify effective coping responses for specific problematic situations (D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1999). Interpersonal problem solving is important for psychological adjustment because it influences adaptive functioning across a wide range of stressful situations. Successful interpersonal problem solving requires the capacity to define an interpersonal problem, to generate possible solutions, and to make a rationally founded choice among solutions that lead to the desired goal. Interpersonal problem solving is one area of functioning that is thought to impact on coping, and moderate the deleterious effects of stressful life-events (D'Zurilla & Chang, 1995). Interpersonal problem solving skills affect people's self-efficacy expectations. Self-efficacy is one's belief about one's skills in organizing and changing them into behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Perceived self-efficacy, is not related to one's own skills, but to one's own belief about one's probable achievements in different conditions. Self-efficacy refers to a person's perceived capability, as distinct from functional ability, to perform a particular action or course of action. An individual's

thoughts, emotions, and actions before and during a particular event are influenced by the person's judgement of his or her abilities, whether or not that judgement is correct. A strong sense of self-efficacy also influence the amount of energy that individuals are willing to invest in overcoming certain obstacles. Bandura (1993; 1997) claimed that even the perception of self-efficacy affects problem solving skills. People with high social self-efficacy use more effective ways to solve problems because they have self-confidence about their ability to handle chaotic situations. Thus, problem solving skills can be related to enactive mastery experience. Innes and Thomas (1989) stated that students who have no problem solving behaviors show avoidance and have a low level of social self-efficacy. Social self-efficacy includes such skills as social boldness, participation in a social group or activity, friendly behaviors, and getting and giving help (Connolly, 1989). The level of social self-efficacy plays a determinant role in the adolescent's interpersonal relationships and interaction (Akkök, 1999; Bilgin, 1996, 1999; Coleman, 2003; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003).

Method

Model

This study was a quantitative and relational study aimed at examining the relationships among communication skills, interpersonal problem solving skills, and social self-efficacy. The data were collected by Communication Skills Inventory, Interpersonal Problem Solving Inventory, and Social Self-Efficacy Expectation Scale for Adolescents.

Participants

In the study, the data were collected by randomly selecting one 1st, one 2nd, one 3rd and one 4th grade classes from each high school of different type in Mugla. The research was carried out with the data gathered from 226 female (46%) and 268 male (54%) high school students. Students were in 15-18 age range and, the average age was 16.49 with a standard deviation of 1.41. 26.8 % of the participants were 1st grade students, 22.7% 2nd grade students, 25.6% 3rd grade students, and 24.9% of them were 4th grade students.

Instruments

In the study, in order to determine the social self-efficacy expectancy of high school students Social

Self-Efficacy Expectation Scale for Adolescents (SSES-A) was used which was developed by Bilgin (1999). This scale is a five-point Likert scale consisting of 40 statements. The participants indicated their responses as Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes, Never (For example: "I can help my friends to prepare their assignments"). For the convergent validity of the SSES-A, the correlation between SSES-A and the Self-Acceptance Inventory (SAI; Temuge, 1987) was .18. The factor analysis revealed that the total factor load of 40 items ranged from .31 to .70, based on 5 factors (Bilgin, 1999). In two different studies, as a result of using the split-half method, the reliability coefficients were .86, and .90. The internal consistency coefficients for the whole scale were .93, and .82 regarding the Cronbach alpha equivalence. The item-total score correlations of the scale ranged from .43 to .56, and .23 and .55 (Akkapulu, 2005; Bilgin, 1999). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the scale was calculated .89.

In the study, in order to determine the communication skills Communication Skills Inventory (CSI) was used which was developed by Balci and Ersanlı (1998). The CSI, which consists of 45 statements, was developed to evaluate communication skills of adolescents. It is a 5-item Likert-type scale which examines the general attitude of an individual in relationships. The CSI has three subscales, and these subscales are called cognitive, affective, and behavioral in terms of their item content. It measures the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of communication. There are 15 items that evaluates each subscales. As a result of reliability analyses via test retest method, Cronbach alpha coefficient was found .68 and Cronbach alpha coefficient was .64 in the study via half split test. For the convergent validity of the CSI, the correlation between CSI and the Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CSAS; Korkut, 1996) was .70. Higher scores on each subscale or higher total scores indicate that the individuals consider themselves to be successful in communication. The total score ranges from 45 to 225. In this study, Cronbach's alphas for the subscale of the inventory were cognitive, .77, affective .79, and behavioral .75.

In the study, in order to determine the interpersonal problem solving skills Interpersonal Problem Solving Inventory (IPSI) was used which was developed by Çam and Tümkaya (2008). The IPSI consists of five subscales and a total of 50 items. The item ratings vary between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores obtained for each subscale indicates that the characteristic about

interpersonal problem solving is higher. In factor analysis study of the inventory, a total of five factors which explained a total of 38.38% of the variance related with interpersonal problem solving were obtained. These factors were approaching problems in a negative way, constructive problem solving, lack of self-confidence, unwillingness to take responsibility, and insistent-persevering approach. The number of items in each subscale was 16, 16, 7, 5 and 6 respectively. The correlation coefficient calculated with total scores of the subscales varied between .22 and .74. For the convergent validity of the IPSI, the correlation between IPSI and the Problem Solving Inventory (PSI; Heppner & Petersen, 1982); and Trait Anxiety Inventory (TAI; Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970) was meaningful. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) coefficients of the subscale scores of the inventory were approaching problems in a negative way $r=.90$, constructive problem solving $r=.88$, lack of self-confidence $r=.68$, unwillingness to take responsibility $r=.74$, and insistent-persevering approach $r=.67$. Test re-test correlation values on 60 students in a four week interval showed .89, .82, .69, .76, and .70 for the subscales, respectively. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the subscales were calculated .87, .86, .62, .68, and .71.

Procedures

A permit for data collection was obtained from the Mugla Provincial Directorate of National Education, and the data were gathered in the randomly selected schools and classes by researcher. Data collection procedure was carried out by providing students with the appropriate environment and sufficient time for answering the questions in groups in the classroom.

Data Analysis

In this study, the analysis of relationships among communication skills, interpersonal problem solving skills, and social self-efficacy was performed by Pearson product-moment correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The data were investigated from the point of erroneous or missing values, outlier values, and multicollinearity in data analysis. The values considered to be entered erroneously were corrected in the erroneous values analysis. In the missing values analysis, randomly remaining few blank items were assigned values by Expectation-Maximization algorithm (Green & Salkind, 2008; Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). In the outlier analysis, 14 observations, which have

Mahalanobis (1936) distance value greater than the $\chi^2_{11;0.01}=31.26$ table value, were excluded from the data set. The low level bivariate correlation values show that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables. It has been seen that Variance Inflation Factor value is less than 5, the tolerance value is greater than .20, the condition index is less than 30, and consequently 494 observations remain in the data set.

Results

According to the results of this research communication skills and interpersonal problem solving skills were found to be significantly correlated to social self-efficacy and communication skills and interpersonal problem solving skills important predictors of social self-efficacy for high school students. Results showed that social self-efficacy is positively related to cognitive, affective, and behavioral communication skills. And social self-efficacy is positively related to constructive problem solving and insistent-persevering approach; negatively related to approaching problems in a negative way, lack of self-confidence, and unwillingness to take responsibility interpersonal problem solving skills. Results also showed that the cognitive, affective, and behavioral subscales of communication skills significantly predict social self-efficacy. Social self-efficacy is significantly explained by the communication skills ($R=.43$, $R^2=.18$, $F=27.83$, $p<.001$). Three communication skills -cognitive, affective, and behavioral- significantly explained 18% of the total variance in social self-efficacy. And approaching problems in a negative way, constructive problem solving, lack of self-confidence, unwillingness to take responsibility, and insistent-persevering approach subscales of interpersonal problem solving skills important predictors of social self-efficacy. Social self-efficacy is significantly explained by the interpersonal problem solving skills ($R=.47$, $R^2=.22$, $F=29.97$, $p<.001$). Five interpersonal problem solving skills -approaching problems in a negative way, constructive problem solving, lack of self-confidence, unwillingness to take responsibility, and insistent-persevering approach- significantly explained 22% of the total variance in social self-efficacy. The results of the research are thought to give important information about the formation of social self-efficacy expectancy in adolescence period.

Discussion

It was found that there were significant relation-

ships among communication skills, interpersonal problem solving skills, and social self-efficacy. The results of the study indicated that there was a positive relationship among cognitive, affective, and behavioral communication skills and social self-efficacy. The results also indicated that there was a positive relationship among constructive problem solving skills, insistent-persevering problem solving skills and social self-efficacy; while there was a negative relationship among approaching problems in a negative way, lack of self-confidence, and unwillingness to take responsibility problem solving skills and social self-efficacy. These results indicated that effective communication skills, such as cognitive, affective, and behavioral communication skills increased, social self-efficacy increased as well. And effective interpersonal problem solving skills, such as constructive problem solving and insistent-persevering problem solving skills increased, social self-efficacy increased as well. On the other hand, approaching problems in a negative way, lack of self-confidence, and unwillingness to take responsibility problem solving skills increased, social self-efficacy decreased. It can be concluded from the research findings that adolescents' communication skills and interpersonal problem solving skills may be an antecedent to social self-efficacy expectancy.

Communication skills play a very important role in interpersonal relationships. Communication is the basis of personal relationships and effective communication happens when the message that is sent is the same message that is received. The mutual understanding of needs and figuring out the message by both sender and recipient contributes to communication. Appropriate problem solving is achieved by effective communication, which is the common feature of all problem solving approaches. The problems people have to solve emerge in interpersonal communication networks, and problem solving requires an effective use of communication skills. Therefore, it is necessary for each person to pay attention to the other's problems and use a constructive way of problem-solving, to be supportive, accepting, and to initiate and maintain good communication. Individuals who are successful in communication generally have self-confidence and are respectful and open to sharing and cooperation (Bilen, 2004). Individuals who lack confidence, are fearful, and fail to empathize experience problems in communication (Berscheid, 1994 as cited in Erözkan, 2009). It has been found that individuals who perceive themselves as competent in problem solving are more extraverted, positive, and have a more positive self-perception in interpersonal re-

relationships (Çam & Tümkaya, 2007; D’Zurilla & Nezu, 1999, 2007) and results of some studies have indicated that having effective problem solving skills improved communication skills. The findings of these studies support the results of current study. The adolescents’ belief in their ability to effectively deal with problems and harness control over the problem’s resolution may be as important as its use. When adolescents have confidence in their ability to solve problems they are more likely to view problems as challenges to be tackled than as stressors to be avoided. Theories of social problem solving propose that social problem solving ability is associated with adjustment, such as behavioral competence, psychological functioning and negative emotionality (D’Zurilla & Nezu 2007). In this manner, social self-efficacy can be defined as one’s own perception about one’s competent responses in one’s interpersonal relationships (Bandura, 1997). Social self-efficacy, which can also be defined as a person’s confidence in his or her ability to initiate and sustain social interactions, is important not only in its possible relationship to effective social behavior but also in its linkages to other indices of mentally healthy functioning. For example, it has been consistently shown to be related to higher levels of global self-esteem (Connolly, 1989; Di Tomasso, Brannen-McNulty, Ross, & Burges, 2003; Hermann & Betz, 2004; Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995; Schwarzer, Hahn, & Schröder, 1994; Solberg, O’Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993). Bandura (1977) proposed self-efficacy theory as a model for explaining the cognitive processes in producing change in psychological treatment settings. The basis of this theory is that an individual’s perceived level of self-confidence, or self-efficacy, in a particular domain influences the individual’s change producing behavior. In social situations, individuals have varying perceptions of their ability to successfully interact with others. In other words, their self-efficacy beliefs reflect their level of social confidence (Galanaki & Anastasia, 1999; Hermann & Betz, 2004; Kashani, Canfield, Borduin, Soltys, & Reid, 1994; Malecki & Demary 2002; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). The relationship between social self-efficacy and psychological adjustment has implications for the treatment of mental health issues because it suggests that an increase in social self-efficacy can increase levels of self-esteem and reduce levels of anxiety and loneliness (Akkapulu, 2005; Dekovic & Meeus, 1997; Fırıncioğlu, 2005; Karahan, Sardoğan, Özkamalı, & Menteş, 2006; Payne & Jahoda, 2004; Torres & Solberg, 2001). These authors were interested in the role of social

self-efficacy in the ability to cope with interpersonal problems, and found that social self-efficacy did in fact predict decreased interpersonal problems and increased coping skills for these problems.

It is thought that the way of an individual’s perception of communication and problem solving skills affect his or her approach to solve problems and cope with them, and expectancy of social self-efficacy. According to the research results, there is a significant relationship among adolescents’ perception of social self-efficacy, communication skills, and interpersonal problem solving skills. According to these results, it is important that adolescents need to have communication and interpersonal problem solving skills in order to perceive themselves as socially self-efficacious. Therefore it can be considered that it is appropriate to organise psychological counselling and guidance services at schools to help children gain effective communication and interpersonal problem solving skills starting from pre-school stage to adolescence.

In this respect, some studies can be carried out in order to help adolescents to take “Communication Skills Training” to develop communication and social skills such as sharing, cooperation, empathy, establishing positive relations with others, which are important for interpersonal problem solving, by preparing psycho-educational group work programs. It is assumed that these kinds of activities and studies help individuals, in also their later periods of life, to trust themselves and their skills, and have intrapersonal/interpersonal communication skills, high life satisfaction, and mentally healthy against the problems they encounter.

This study should be evaluated with two important limitations. First, the study group consists of adolescents in a city centre and is small. Therefore, it hinders extensive evaluation and generalization. Second, the study is conducted with adolescents from high schools. For further studies, more extensive researches also including adolescents apart from high schools can be carried out. The results of the study should be interpreted in respect of these limitations.

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