

## The Role of Social-emotional skills among kindergarteners in Foreign Language Learning

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### Abstract

Nowadays, second language learning among young learners is considered to be one of the main subjects in the field of education around the world. A lot of researches dealt with this subject, and focused on the processes of second language learning among young learners. Researchers were trying to understand and diagnose young language learners' strengths and weaknesses. They came up with some evidences which show that language aptitude, gender, age, creativity, and motivation are among the elements that make a young student be different from other students. Unlike the other researches, this paper investigated the role of social-emotional skills among young learners in second language learning. It examined the influences of these skills in the process of foreign language learning. For this study a kindergarten was chosen, and 20 children were randomly selected as representatives of the 60 children who applied for an English language course in this kindergarten. Thirteen of the selected children were male learners, while the rest were females, and the age of the participants were between 4-5 years old. At the beginning of the English course a group of socialworkers conducted a pretest to measure the young learners' social and emotional skills, and after the English course a group of English language teachers conducted the second test to measure the learners' language proficiency. After the data collection, the finding showed a significant relationship between social-emotional skills and foreign language learning. Those students who showed a high level of social-emotional skills were more active in learning the new language, and passed the test of English proficiency with high degrees, while those students who showed a low level of social-emotional skills couldn't pass the English proficiency test or passed with low degrees.

### Introduction and Literature review

English language is considered as the first language in the world because it became the language of science and medicine. Meanwhile, the technological progression, and the social networks assisted learners around the world to learn this language as a second language. For that reason, linguists and psychologists are always trying to diagnose the difficulties and the obstacles in front of the learners in order to reassure a better approach and strategy for English Language learning. Many factors have been discovered that are supposed to be the obstacles in front of the process of foreign language learning or English language learning.

Individual differences are also among those issues that affect the process of language learning according to researchers like Erin Richard. Therefore, a lot of researches has been conducted in the last few years to reveal and detect some of the individual differences that may

affect the process of foreign language learning. The researches came up with some evidences that show; language aptitude, gender, age, creativity, and motivation are among the individual differences that make a student be different from other students. These differences can make a student attain the target language quicker comparing to his classmates in the same course. So, the researchers emphasized on the significance of individual differences in foreign language learning. Fredric Doryei demonstrates that “individual differences are the most reliable predictor of language success; no other phenomena investigated have come even close”. Doryei discussed the significance of motivation as an individual difference for language learning by stating that, “students who are motivated, will learn the target language better and in a shorter time comparing to the other students”.

Gender is also considered as an individual difference that influences the process of language learning. Erin Richard quoted from Kirmura (Kirmura, 1987 & Long 1991) who says; “due to a more global representation of language centers in the brain, females utilizes more conscious strategies than males, including areas of met cognition, planning, and evaluation” (79). So, Kirmura emphasized on the relationship between gender and language learning.

The previous researches focused on the language aptitude, gender, age, creativity and motivation as individual differences, but this research concentrates on the role of social-emotional skills among preschoolers as an individual difference that may affect the process of language learning. It explores the social life of young learners in relation to the process of English language learning. Therefore, this research tries to answer the following question:

How important are the influences of social-emotional skills among preschoolers on foreign language learning?

### **Methods:**

For this study 20 preschoolers will participate, they consist of 13 males with 7 female students. The age of the learners are between 4 to 5 years old, and they are accepted to take a course of English language in a kindergarten (Avcilar Annaokulu) in Turkey-Istanbul. The students have been selected randomly to represent the total students in the kindergarten - 60 students. In the Kindergarten, five social workers would conduct the first test (DECA) before the English course to measure the students' social and emotional skills. After that, four English language teachers would conduct another test (ELD) at the end of the course as an English proficiency test to measure the student's proficiency in English language.

For the objective of this paper, two standard tests would be used to measure the students' social-emotional skills as well as their English proficiency. For the first test this paper uses DECA to measure the students' social emotional skills, and for the second test, (ELD) test would be used to test the students' English language proficiency. The objective of these tests is to find a relationship between the social-emotional skills of the learners and the process of foreign language learning. At the end of the two tests the collected data would reveal the influence of social-emotional skills on foreign language learning.

DECA (*The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment*) is a test which is set for measuring young children's social-emotional skills as a requirement for their admission. DECA is “a relatively new

measure developed for use with preschool children with ages 2-5 years; such measures have the potential to expand our knowledge about young children's social-emotional health and can help support the training of early care and education professionals" (Scott Rosas, 3). For this paper, forms or questions are available for the social workers in the Kindergarten to observe the young students' social-emotional skills. In this test, the paper adapted Richard Erin's scales and questions which are a part of DECA to measure the student's social-emotional skills.

A group of four social workers in the kindergarten would conduct the test, and the test consists of 7 scales that measure the students' social-emotional skills. A 5-point scale is used to check, test, and measure the students' social-emotional skills during the first week of the test, and the scales are;

(0= Never, 1= Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Frequently, 4= Very Frequently). Highest number suggests a great social-emotional strength, while lower number suggests undesirable behavior.

Starts or organizes play with other children.

- 1- Chooses to do a task that was challenging for him/ her.
- 2- Listen to or respects others.
- 3- Controls his/her anger.
- 4- Handles frustration well.
- 5- Responds positively to adults comforting when upset.
- 6- Acts happily or excited when parents returned.

ELDS is conducted to test the student's proficiency in English language. ELD (English Language Development Standards) is a standard test that is used by the USA's state of the Board of Education to test students in the public schools. According to CSBDE who quoted from *Language Arts - English Language Development* (2009) says, "ELD is designed to supplement the English-language arts content standards to ensure that limited-English proficient students develop proficiency in both the English language and the concepts and skills contained in the English-language arts" (California Department of Education, 2009). This test can also be applied to young children who are learning the English language as a second language.

A group of four English language teachers in the kindergarten would test the students' English language proficiency at the end of the English course. The test measures students' Writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. A four point scale would measure their ability during the test: (1=Fair, 2=Normal, 3=Good, 4= Excellent).

#### **A. Data Collection:**

After we conducted the social-emotional test, we analyzed the results and registered them according to the names of the participants, and after that we let the students to enter the English course that lasted for three months. After the English course, we conducted the English proficiency test, and then we analyzed the results of the test and registered the marks according to the names, and beside the results of the social-emotional test. Through comparing the results of the two tests one can see the difference.

**Results:**

Results will be displayed in statistical tables in order to validate the hypothesis that we have just finalized.

Table 1: shows the results of the test of the students' social-emotional skills (DECA), and the students were measured through the following criteria:

- 1- Starts or organizes play with other children.
- 2- Chooses to do a task that was challenging for him/ her.
- 3- Listen to or respects others.
- 4- Controls his/her anger.
- 5- Handles frustration well.
- 6- Responds positively to adults comforting when upset.
- 7- Acts happily or excited when parents returned.

(0= Never, 1= Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Frequently, 4= Very Frequently). Highest number suggests a great social-emotional strength, while lower numbers suggest undesirable behavior.

Note: C1 = first criterion, C2= second criterion, etc....

**Table 1:** Shows the result of the social-emotional test:

Names	Sex	Age	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	Average
Adam	Male	4	2	4	4	3	4	3	3	%85
Mehmet	Male	5	1	1	1	2	0	2	1	%20
Nazlihan	Female	4	3	3	4	2	2	3	4	%75
Erdim	Male	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	2	%88
Iknur	Female	5	2	3	3	4	2	3	3	%73
Catay	Male	4	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	%25
Yusuf	Male	4	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	%12
Furkan	Male	5	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	%35
Ilham	Male	4	3	3	2	3	4	3	4	%80
Turgut	Male	5	4	4	3	3	2	3	4	%90
Isin	Female	5	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	%86
Ceihun	Male	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	%70
Elif	Female	5	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	%84
Sule	Female	5	4	0	1	0	2	1	0	%15
Nuran	Female	4	3	3	2	2	3	2	1	%60

Sinem	Female	5	4	1	1	2	2	0	0	%55
Burak	Male	5	3	3	2	1	1	2	2	%58
Mahmut	Male	5	2	1	1	2	0	3	0	%40
Duhan	Male	5	2	2	1	2	3	2	1	%60
Sawas	Male	5	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	%85

After the three months of the English course, the students participated in the second test (ELDS) for their English language proficiency. The test measured the students' writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. A four point scale measured their ability during the test which was as the following:

(1=Fair, 2=Normal, 3=Good, 4= Excellent).

**Table 2:** Shows the results of the English Proficiency test (ELDS).

Names	Sex	Age	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Average
Adam	Male	4	3	3	4	3	%90
Mahmet	Male	5	2	1	1	2	%30
Nazlihan	Female	4	4	4	2	3	%80
Erdim	Male	4	4	4	4	3	%95
Iknur	Female	5	3	3	4	3	%85
Catay	Male	4	1	1	2	1	%20
Yusuf	Male	4	1	1	1	2	%25
Furkan	Male	5	1	2	2	2	%45
Ilham	Male	4	4	4	3	3	%90
Turgut	Male	5	3	4	4	4	%95
Isin	Female	5	3	3	4	4	%90
Ceihun	Male	4	2	2	4	4	%75
Elif	Female	5	4	3	4	4	%95
Sule	Female	5	2	2	3	2	%50
Nuran	Female	4	3	2	2	2	%50
Sinem	Female	5	3	2	2	3	%75
Burak	Male	5	2	1	2	2	%50

Mahmut	Male	5	1	2	1	3	%30
Duhan	Male	5	3	3	2	3	%80
Sawas	Male	5	4	4	4	3	%95

After we have presented the results of both of the tests, we compared them in order to observe the change happened. DECA is the result or the average of social-emotional test, while ELD is the result of English proficiency test.

**Table 3:** shows the comparison between DECA and ELD test

Names	DECA	ELD
Adam	%85	%90
Mahmet	%20	%30
Nazlihan	%75	%80
Erdim	%88	%95
Iknur	%73	%85
Catay	%25	%20
Yusuf	%12	%25
Furkan	%35	%45
Ilham	%80	%90
Turgut	%90	%95
Isin	%86	%90
Ceihun	%70	%75
Elif	%84	%95
Sule	%15	%50
Nuran	%60	%50
Sinem	%55	%75
Burak	%58	%50
Mahmut	%40	%30
Duhan	%60	%80
Sawas	%85	%95

After the two tests, the paper relates the results to the research question. The paper’s research question was (How important are the influences of social-emotional skills among preschoolers on foreign language learning?). Through the results, the paper shows a significant relationship between the social-emotional skills and foreign language learning. The results found that those students who showed a high level of social and emotional skills acquired their foreign language in a better way comparing to the other students in the same course, while those students who showed a low level of social-emotional skills couldn’t acquire the target language properly.

Through taking two samples from the tests (Adam “%85, %90” and Sawas “%88, %95) one can notice the changes happened in the two tests. Adam and Sawas who were enjoying a high level of social-emotional skills, passed the English proficiency test with a high degree. From their results, it becomes clear that there is a significant relationship between the psychology of a learners with his performance and cognitive skills.

From those learners who could not pass the tests we took another two samples (Mahmut “%40, %30” and Catay “%25, %20”). From their results, it appears that the psychological instability affected their improvement in the English course as we can observe it from their results.

### **Discussion:**

Usually when researchers study the difficulties in front of young learners during the process of language learning, they neglect the psychological side as one of these difficulties. Therefore, this paper focused on the social-emotional aspects as a psychological side of the young students in order to tackle one of the serious issues that restrict the process of language learning. The research came up with a result that may influence the field of language learning. This paper proved that the psychological instability or a low level of social and emotional skills in a child or a young learner can be a stumbling block to him to learn the target language properly.

The social workers in the kindergarten met with the parents of those students who showed a low level of social-emotional skills and couldn't pass the English proficiency test. The meeting came up with a result that demonstrates; the students' low level in the social-emotional test resulted from their abnormal lifestyle at home. This abnormality in lifestyle created a psychological problem for the learners in a way they are not willing to communicate with their teachers, and they don't like to participate in various activities that may help them to get the language properly. These learners do not like to interact with their classmates, and this affects negatively on their mental development and may cause problems for their school readiness. So, we can say that social-emotional skills among preschoolers have a huge influence on the process of foreign language acquisition.

### **Conclusion**

This paper, inspected the role of social-emotional skills among young learners in foreign language learning. accordingly, two tests were used in a kindergarten in Turkey which were (DECA and ELD) to find a relationship between the social-emotional skills and the process of foreign language learning. The result of this paper showed a significant relation between social-emotional skills and second language learning. Those students who showed a high level of social-emotional skills were more active in learning the new language, and passed the English proficiency test with high degrees, while those students who showed a low level of social-emotional skills couldn't pass the English proficiency test or passed with low degrees. The result of this paper also demonstrated that students with low level of social-emotional skills do not participate in activities, interaction with others in the classroom, and they are not happy with exchanging ideas with their teachers, thereby they cannot learn the language properly. However, students with high level of social-emotional skills are motivated, they like participation in activities, communication interaction, and challenging tasks. Therefore, they will acquire the new language normally and without any problem. In fact, learning a new language needs interaction with the natives or teachers in order to receive comprehensible input, it needs communication in order to improve speaking ability, and during this communication learners receive feedback and correction that help their improvement. Therefore, social-emotional skills directly affect the process of foreign language learning.

## References

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## Appendices

### Social-emotional skills and Second language acquisition ----Social worker---

You are invited to participate in this survey. This survey explores the impacts of social-emotional skills on second language acquisition. This survey aims at finding a connection between social-emotional skills and second language learning. Approximately 20 students will be asked to complete the survey, which consists of 7 criteria. The test takes 1day, during the day the social worker should observe the student's behaviors and measure his/her social-emotional skills according to the criteria.

For any question about the research or the procedures, you may send a message to ([Ranjdar213@gmail.com](mailto:Ranjdar213@gmail.com)) or ([chalakgh@yahoo.com](mailto:chalakgh@yahoo.com)) .

**Part A:** Personal information: Name:

**A1.Gender:**  Male  Female

- 1- Starts or organizes play with other children.
- 2- Chooses to do a task that was challenging for him/ her.
- 3- Listen to or respects others.
- 4- Controls his/her anger.
- 5- Handles frustration well.
- 6- Responds positively to adults comforting when upset.
- 7- Acts happily or excited when parents returned.

(0= Never, 1= Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Frequently, 4= Very Frequently). Highest number suggests a great social-emotional strength, while lower numbers suggests undesirable behavior.

### Social-emotional skills and Second language acquisition ----English Language Teacher---

You are invited to participate in this test. This test explores the impacts of social-emotional skills on second language acquisition. This test aims at finding a connection between social-emotional skills and second language acquisition. Approximately 20 students will be asked to complete the survey, which consists of 4 criteria. The test takes 1 hour, during the hour the teacher should test the students at the same time according to the pints bellow.

If you have questions at any time about the research or the procedures, you may send a message to ([Ranjdar213@gmail.com](mailto:Ranjdar213@gmail.com)) or ([chalakgh@yahoo.com](mailto:chalakgh@yahoo.com)).



**Part A: Personal information: Name:****A1.Gender:**  Male  Female

The test measures students' Writing, reading, listening, and speaking ability. A four point scale would measure their ability during the test which is the following: (1=Fair, 2=Normal, 3=Good, 4= Excellent).

**Listening:**

The teachers measure the students' listening ability, they would pronounce a name of an object in the classroom and ask the students to point to it, such as window, door, chair, and blackboard.

**Speaking:**

The teachers measure the students' speaking ability, they would pronounce a word or a phrase and ask the students to repeat it, such as; Father, House, I am a student.

**Reading:**

The teachers measure the students' reading ability, they would ask the students to identify a printed name or to match an image with its name.

**Writing:**

The teachers measure the students' writing ability, they would provide some pictures (pictures of a fish, book, car, etc) and ask the students to identify or write the name of the pictures.