

*Araştırma*

## **SOCIAL SKILL LEVELS OF STUDENTS OF SOCIAL WORK: DO OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

### **Sosyal Hizmet Öğrencilerinin Sosyal Beceri Düzeyleri: Ders Dışı Etkinlikler Bir Fark Yaratıyor mu?**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this study is to discover whether participation in activities outside the classroom has an effect on the social skill level.*

*The study tries to compare the social skill levels of 97 students in the Department of Social Work Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences, Hacettepe University, who participate and those who do not participate in activities outside classroom. The data obtained through the research shows that there is a meaningful relationship, statistically, between certain demographic characteristics of the students and their scores on social skill inventory sub-scales; and proving that the total social skill scores of those who participate in artistic, sports and any other social activities are considerably higher than those who do not participate in such activities.*

**Key Words:** *Social work students, social skill, outside activities*

#### **ÖZET**

*Bu çalışmanın amacı ders dışı etkinliklere katılımın sosyal beceri düzeyi üzerinde bir etkisi olup olmadığının anlaşılmasıdır. Araştırmada, Türkiye’de Hacettepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Sosyal Hizmet Bölümünde ders dışı etkinliklere katılan ve katılmayan öğrencilerin sosyal beceri düzeylerinin karşılaştırılmasına çalışılmıştır. Araştırmaya 97 öğrenci katılmıştır. Araştırmada elde edilen veriler, öğrencilerin bazı demografik özellikleri ile sosyal beceri envanteri alt ölçekleri arasında istatistiksel açıdan anlamlı ilişkilerin varlığı gösterirken; sanatsal, sportif ve sosyal herhangi bir faaliyete katılan öğrencilerin sosyal beceri toplam puanlarının, katılmayan öğrencilerden anlamlı derecede yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Sosyal hizmet öğrencileri, sosyal beceri, ders dışı etkinlikler*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

There are ongoing discussions about the education and training of social

work practitioners. The complex and difficult nature of social work places a serious pressure on social service education. Today, efforts are still being made to find the tools and methods required to educate and train social work practitioners to enable them to respond to changing social needs and can enhance problem-solving capacities of individuals. Petrovich (2004: 429) states that social work education involves a unique difficulty, in that it is not sufficient for social work students to be competent in different theories and skills. The students are also expected to elevate social justice, to empower the oppressed and to preserve the differences in the framework of the experiences they have accumulated.

How to ensure the unity of knowledge, skills and values that social work practitioners are expected to possess is one of the basic questions. The fundamental problem here is observed in terms of developing the skills of social work practitioners which they need during the problem-solving process. Social work education reflects the effort of the students to integrate their knowledge, values and skills into practical application. Therefore, social work education differs from other social science disciplines and involves more than solely an information accumulation process.

### **The Basic Characteristics of Social Work**

Social work aims to empower those who are vulnerable and living under oppression and/or poverty, to increase social welfare by taking human needs as the basis, and to meet the needs of all people (Haynes 1998: 501). The

comprehensive focus of the discipline is one of the difficulties, which has direct impact on social work education and educators. This difficulty stems from the fact that the discipline of social work aims to intervene in any problem at any level which appears or is likely to appear in the social structure. Indeed, those working in the field of social work are expected to possess the information and skills necessary for the discipline to achieve these objectives. Social work is defined also as an art besides being defined as an academic discipline and a profession. It is, therefore, very important that social work education is designed to cover all these scores.

So how can the qualities that a social worker must possess be defined? Johnson (1995: 41) provides an answer to this question. Johnson defines social work as a creative mixture of knowledge, values and skills; therefore, only having one part of this mix is not sufficient to perform social work. Johnson (1995: 57) argues that integrating the knowledge, values and skills required in helping situations in a relevant and creative manner is an important characteristic of the social worker. This situation is important for it both reflects the differentiation of social work and is also the basic difficulty in social work education. Providing students with a theoretical background is a process about which academicians have much experience. However, what should be done in order to develop the skills necessary during the problem-solving process? The concept and process of developing the social skill level of students has become one of the fundamental concepts of current research.

### **Social Work Education and the Importance of Social Skill Development**

Combs & Slabe (1977; cited in: Graves, Openshaw and Adams 1992: 141) defined social skill as the socially acceptable talent to interact with others in a mutually beneficial way. Sorias (1986) emphasizes that social skills are learned behaviors. Social workers are integral parts of the social structure and their professional life is shaped on the basis of the relationships they will establish with individuals and groups. Therefore, it is the basic objective that those who intend to work in the field of social work to become people whose social skills are well-developed. Kut (1988: 90) explains this situation as follows: "One characteristic of vocational education is that it is not limited only to a transfer of information. Vocational education must be effective for the individual to shape his/her own personality, to gain insight regarding his/her own self and to develop vocational skills and behaviors. Vocational education equips the individual with an insight into life in general and ensures that he/she be integrated with his/her job". Johnson (1995: 100) argues that the most important tool of the social worker is again actually his/her own 'self'.

Indeed, all basic qualifications that a social worker must possess as a helping professional are linked to the development of a personality with a high level of social skill. In order for social workers to establish satisfactory helping relations, they must have effective inter-personal communication skills, and the basic ability to analyze the social setting around them, to comprehend, and sustain the relationships that

have been established. The question that arises here is what tools must be available so as to develop these skills in social work schools. This leads to a further question about the role of activities outside the classroom on the development of social skills.

### **The Role of Activities Outside of the Classroom on Development of Social Skill Level**

The basic approach in the field of development of social skills and of social skill education is the direct pedagogical model. This is based on Bandura's social learning model. Since the Direct pedagogical model requires special equipment to be used in classes, there are often difficulties in implementation. In the direct pedagogical model, students are informed about the ideal skills, and the aim is that students acquire these skills in time through use of techniques, such as role playing and model playing. Classical studies about the development of social skills prove that role modeling, role playing, social reinforcements and improving feedback have an important place in social skill education.

Studies, which argue that the pedagogical approach has certain deficiencies, advocate that social skill education be provided in settings outside the classroom. For example, Weiner, Fritsch and Rosen (2002) argue that innovative models be implemented in order to develop the social skills of today's young people. Scholars contend that the new models must be developed in a way that will also include the positive aspects of the direct pedagogical approach.

In the recent studies on the development of social skills, it is observed that

discussions on different alternatives are frequently debated. For example, Bloom and Smith (1996; cited in: Nucci and Shim 2005) socialization can take place through participation in sport since they provide learning environments where participants have the opportunity to acquire an understanding of competition, cooperation, role-playing and discipline in relation to rules, regulations, and goals. In this sense, sport can be seen as a laboratory of human experience. The structure of social relations in organized sports can give participants experience in acting out various roles and group interaction, and can contribute to the development of social characteristics that integrate them into existing larger social structures. Weiner, Fritsch and Rosen (2002) emphasize that group play and sports activities have a considerable role in the development of social skills and propose a new approach for the development of social skills. Researchers argue that cartoons, pop music, cooperative games and sports, and small economic initiatives initiated and managed by students are innovative and effective ways of developing social skills.

Ever increasing number of studies on development of social skills refer to activities outside the class. Nucci and Shim (2005) suggest that competitive sports are an educational vehicle for young athletes, and positive behavior changes in children are assured when children changes are positively reinforced and exposed to quality role models.

Dutton (2001) says that arts programs have long been used to help people communicate, share beliefs, learn skills and transfer information. This new goal of youth development aims to help

build competencies, increase feelings of self-worth, and encourage the recognition of strengths and assets, thus the use of arts is a natural vehicle.

Forgan and Jones (2002) focus on a project called *Adventure*, which utilizes a combination of activities inside and outside the classroom. The curriculum of the Project *Adventure* consists of experiential adventure games, problem-solving initiatives, and trust-building activities that teachers and other professionals can use with students.

## METHOD

The study aims to discover whether participation in activities outside the classroom has an effect on the social skill level and has been conducted as descriptive research which based on single measurement.

## Participants

Within the scope of the research, the number of students that take part in any activity in the department is 43 (44.3%) and for those that do not it is 54 (55.7%) (SD= 0, 49). 70 (72.2%) students have stated that they have talent in social activities, 57 (58.8%) of them have stated that they have talent in sportive activities, and 42 (43.3%) of them have talent in artistic activities. 13 of the students (13.4%) stated that they do not have a talent for social activities, 15 (15.5%) in sport, and 38 (39.2%) in arts activities. 14 of the students (14.4%) stated that they were not interested in participating social activities, 25 (25.8%) in sports, and 17 (17.5% ) were not interested in arts activities.

The study was conducted on group of students from the Department of Social

Work, Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences in Hacettepe University in the academic years of 2005-2007. All the students that participated in activities outside the classes (arts, sports, social, cultural) were included and a similar number that did not participate in such activities were also included. A total of 97 students participated in the study in total between the ages of 18-29 ( $M= 22, 04, SD= 1, 94$ ). 38 of the students (39.2%) were in their second year; and 23 (23.7%) were in their first year. The number of those in their third and fourth years were the same ( $n= 18, 18.6\%$ ). 47 of the students (48.5%) were male and 50 (51.5%) were female.

Almost all of the students stated that they spent a large part of their lives in a city ( $n= 83, 85.6\%$ ). Students who had spent a large part of their lives in rural area were in the minority ( $n= 14, 14.4\%$ ). 76 of the students (78.4%) stated that they had participated in social, sports and arts activities at high school, while 21 (21.6%) stated that they had not participated in such activities at high school.

### Instruments

Questionnaires and a Social Skill Inventory were used in the study as data collecting instruments.

(1) Demographic Data, was included in the questionnaire which contained questions about gender, age, education, where they lived most, student's participation activities in high school and the kind of activities in which the students participate in university.

(2) The Social Skill Inventory (SSI) was developed in 1986 by Riggio and is

used for those of age 14 and above, the inventory was revised and finalized in 1989. The SSI is an instrument of self-report with 90 items which measure social skills in six fields. The inventory can calculate the total global social skill level which includes all of the social skills. The sub-scales are as follows:

1. Perceptive expressionism (measures the non-verbal communication skills of individuals, especially their skills in sending perceptive messages)
2. Perceptive sensitivity (measures the skills to receive and analyze non-verbal messages of others)
3. Perceptive control (measures the skills of individuals to arrange and control their perceptive and non-verbal reactions)
4. Social expressionism (measures verbal expressionism and the skills of individuals to establish inter-personal social communication and to participate in communication)
5. Social sensitivity (measures the skills to analyze verbal messages of others).
6. Social control (measures the skills of individuals in social role playing and to assert themselves socially).

Each of these sub-scales includes 15 items. A Likert-type 5-point answer sheet was prepared for the items. The lowest score on the sheet is 1, and the highest score is 5. The lowest score that can be obtained in the overall inventory is 90, and the highest score is 450. With regard to the sub-scales, the lowest score that can be obtained is 15, and the highest score is 75. Out of the 90 items

in the SSI, 32 are graded reversely (from 1 to 5 points). The items graded normally and reversely in each of the sub-scales are added together and written in the space opposite to that reading "base point as the score of the relevant sub-scale on the SSI answer sheet. This procedure is repeated for the other six sub-scales, the scores of the six sub-scales are added and thus, the total social skill score of the individual is obtained. Interpreting the scores obtained in the SSI, if the scores obtained in the total and in the sub-scales are high in all sub-scales the means that "social skill is high", and if these scores are low, it means that "social skill is low" (Yüksel, 2000).

The reliability co-efficient in this study has been calculated as ( $\alpha = .7957$ ).

### Procedure

The administration of the questionnaire and the Social Skill Inventory lasted 30 minutes on average. The student participants were told that the purpose of the study was to obtain information about their social skills, and told not to put their name on the questionnaire to ensure the anonymity of the study. During the data collecting process, the students were gathered in particular classes, informed about the study, told about the importance of true and

**Table 1: The Relationship between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Perceptive Expressions**

Student Characteristics	Perceptive Expression			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				t = 2,94**
Male	47	49,93	4,80	
Female	50	46,76	5,75	
Age	97	48,29	5,52	r=-0,094
Place the Student Lived in				t= -0,45
the longest	83	48,19	5,42	
City	14	48,92	6,26	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at				t=1,17
High School	76	48,64	5,40	
Participated	21	47,04	5,89	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at				t=0,41
University	43	48,55	5,36	
Participated	54	48,09	5,68	
Not Participated				

\* p< 0.05 \*\* p< 0.01

sincere answers; questionnaires were handed to those who had volunteered to be included in the study, and taken back when completed.

## FINDINGS

Research findings were presented as social skill total scores and sub-scale scores according to certain characteristics of the students.

As can be observed in Table 1, the perceptive expression scores of males were found higher than those of females; the difference between the two

groups was found to be meaningful statistically ( $t= 2,94$ ;  $p< 0.01$ ). However, no relationship was found between the perceptive expression scores of students and their age, the place the student lived longest, and their participation in arts, sports and social-cultural activities at high school and university ( $p > 0.05$ ).

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a meaningful relationship between the perceptive sensitivity of the students and the place they lived longest. The perceptive sensitivity of the students

**Table 2: The Relation between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Perceptive Sensitivity**

Student Characteristics	Perceptive Sensitivity			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				
Male	47	54,57	4,98	t=0,80
Female	50	53,62	6,56	
Age	97	54,08	5,83	r= 0,018
Place the Student Lived				
Longest	83	54,62	5,73	t= 2,28*
City	14	50,85	5,60	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at				
High School	76	55,01	5,68	t=3,11**
Participated	21	50,71	5,23	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at				
University	43	55,74	5,72	t=2,57*
Participated	54	52,75	5,63	
Not Participated				

\*  $p< 0.05$  \*\*  $p< 0.01$

that lived in city the longest were statistically and meaningfully found to be higher ( $t= 2, 28$ ;  $p< 0.05$ ). It is also observed that there is a statistically meaningful relationship between the perceptive sensitivity of the students and their participation in an activity at high school. Accordingly, it is observed that the perceptive sensitivity scores of students that participated in an activity at high school are higher than those who did not participate in any activity ( $t=3, 11$ ;  $p< 0.01$ ). Similarly, it can also be seen that the perceptive sensitivity scores of students who participate

in an arts, sports or social activity at university are statistically meaningfully higher than those who do not participate in any activity ( $t=2,57$ ;  $p< 0.05$ ).

As can be seen in Table 3, there is a statistically meaningful relationship between the perceptive control of the students and their gender ( $t=2,65$ ;  $p<0,01$ ). It is observed that the perceptive control of female students is meaningfully higher than that of male students. Furthermore, the perceptive control of students who participated in arts, sports or social activity at high school is higher than those who did not participate in any

**Table 3: The Relationship between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Perceptive Control**

Student Characteristics	Perceptive Control			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				
Male	47	40,97	6,76	t= 2,65**
Female	50	44,88	7,65	
Age	97	42,98	7,46	r=0,04
Place the Student Lived				
Longest	83	43,15	7,48	t=0,53
City	14	42,00	7,52	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at				
High School	76	43,82	7,79	t=2,14*
Participated	21	39,95	5,21	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at				
University	43	45,20	7,92	t= 2,69**
Participated	54	41,22	6,62	
Not Participated				

$p< 0,05$  \*\*  $p< 0,01$

activity ( $t=2,14$ ;  $p<0,05$ ). The perceptive control of students who participated in arts, sports or social activity at university is statistically meaningfully higher than those who did not participate in any activity ( $t=2,69$ ;  $p<0,01$ ). There is a statistically meaningful relationship between the place where students lived longest and their ages and their perceptive control.

As can be observed in Table 4, there is a meaningful relationship between the social expression of students and their participation in arts, sports or social activities at high school and university.

Accordingly, the social expression of students who participated in activities at high school is meaningfully higher than those who did not participate ( $t=4,37$ ;  $p< 0,01$ ) and of those who participate in activities at university is meaningfully higher than those who do not ( $t=2,55$ ;  $p<0,05$ ). No meaningful relationship was found between social expression of the students and their other characteristics.

Table 5 shows the statistically meaningful and negative correlation between the ages of the students and their social sensitivity ( $r= -0,234$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus,

**Table 4: The Relationship between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Social Expressions**

Student Characteristics	Social Expression			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				
Male	47	51,31	6,73	t= 0,02
Female	50	51,28	7,00	
Age	97	51,29	6,84	r=-0,02
Place the Student Lived				
Longest	83	51,46	6,46	t=0,59
City	14	50,28	8,98	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at				
High School	76	52,76	5,89	t=4,37**
Participated	21	46,00	7,51	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at				
University	43	53,23	5,75	t= 2,55*
Participated	54	49,75	7,28	
Not Participated				

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

the older the students, the lower their social sensitivity gets.

In Table 6, the relationship between the place where the students lived in the most and their social control is shown to be statistically meaningful ( $t=2,30$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), meaning that the students who lived in city longest have more social control than those who lived longest in rural areas. Nevertheless, the social control scores of the students who participated in arts, sports or social activities at high school ( $t=3,90$ ;  $p<0,01$ ) and those who participate in such activities at university are statistically higher than

those who did and do not participate in such activities ( $t=3,53$ ;  $p<0,01$ ). That means that those students who participated in any activity at high school or participate any activity at university have more social control.

As can be seen in Table 7, the social skill total scores of the students who participated in arts, sports or social activities at only high school ( $t=4,52$ ;  $p<0,01$ ) and those who participate in these activities at university ( $t=3,56$ ;  $p<0,01$ ) are statistically meaningfully higher than those who did and do not. This finding is important since it reflects the impact

**Table 5: The Relationship between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Social Sensitivity**

Student Characteristics	Social Sensitivity			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				
Male	47	48,36	6,92	t= 0,047
Female	50	48,30	6,11	
Age	97	48,32	6,48	r=-0,234*
Place the Student Lived				
Longest	83	47,97	6,03	t=1,31
City	14	50,42	8,69	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at				
High School	76	48,10	6,43	t=-0,64
Participated	21	49,14	6,79	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at				
University	43	47,76	6,46	t=-0,76
Participated	54	48,77	6,53	
Not Participated				

\*  $p<0.05$  \*\*  $p<0.01$

**Table 6: The Relationship between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Social Control**

Student Characteristics	Social Control			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				
Male	47	52,06	7,13	t=1,37
Female	50	49,86	8,58	
Age	97	50,92	7,95	r=0,10
Place the Student Lived				
Longest	83	51,67	7,59	t= 2,30*
City	14	46,50	8,86	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at High School	76	52,47	7,36	t=3,90**
Participated	21	45,33	7,63	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at University	43	53,95	7,32	t= 3,53**
Participated	54	48,51	7,66	
Not Participated				

\* p< 0.05 \*\* p< 0.01

of participating in arts, sports or social activities on social skills.

## CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the relationship between the social skills of social work students their age, places they lived longest, participation in arts, sports or social activities at high school and university. The data highlights a statistically meaningful difference between some variables and social skill sub-scale scores and social skill scores.

A statistically meaningful relationship has been found between the perceptive control of social work students and their age. The perceptive expression of male students is statistically higher than that of female students and the perceptive control of female students is meaningfully higher than that of male students. Perceptive expression measures the non-verbal communication skills of the individual, especially his/her ability to send perceptive messages. Males are observed to have more of these skills a higher ability in this area. Perceptive

**Table 7: The Relationship between Specific Characteristics of the Students and Their Total Scores in Social Skill**

Student Characteristics	Social Control			Statistics
	n	M	SD	
Gender				
Male	47	297,23	20,48	t= 0,55
Female	50	294,70	23,98	
Age	97	295,92	22,27	r=0,043
Place the Student Lived				
Longest	83	297,09	21,69	t= 1,26
City	14	289,00	25,23	
Rural				
Participation in Activities at				
High School	76	300,00	19,72	t=4,52**
Participated	21	278,19	22,39	
Not Participated				
Participation in Activities at				
University	43	304,46	20,25	=3,56**
Participated	54	289,12	21,62	
Not Participated				

\* p< 0.05 \*\* p< 0.01

sensitivity measures skills to receive and analyze non-verbal messages of other person.

The social skill level of students who participate in activities outside the class are meaningfully different. This situation not only shows that in social work education participation in activities outside the classroom is important, but also it is evident that such activities must be incorporated into the education process. It is obvious that activities outside the class are important variables in the students developing basic personal, social and vocational skills and

ensuring the attainment of the socialization objective during the process of social work education.

It is consider to be necessary that activities outside the classroom become one of the basic components of the education for social work students to achieve the desired outcomes from their education. From this perspective, it can be seen that discussions in the field of education continue in a parallel direction. The concept of life-long learning has been intensively emphasized by the European Council in recent years. Many countries are offering academic credit

for activities outside the formal teaching environment are good examples of the development of the practice of life-long learning. Furthermore, the combination of classical classroom based education with approaches which incorporate activities external to the classroom can facilitate the achievement of the desired outcomes of social work education.

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