The Effect of Mothers’ Verbal Control Modes and Empathy On 5-year-old Children's Social Competence

Yeonhwa Byon¹, Sung-on Hwang²

¹ Student, Early Childhood Education, Incheon National University, Korea, byonyh0@naver.com
² Professor, Early Childhood Education, Incheon National University, Korea, hso@inu.ac.kr
Corresponding author: Sung-on Hwang

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of mother verbal control modes and empathy on social competence of 5-year-old children. The survey was conducted on mothers and teachers of 202 5-year-old children attending kindergartens and daycare centers in Incheon city who were chosen convenience sampling. The collected data were analyzed using the program SPSS 24.0. Cronbach's α coefficient was estimated for the reliability of the instruments and pearson's correlation analysis was carried out to determine the correlation between research variables. Lastly, multiple regression analysis was performed to find out the relative influence of the mothers' verbal control modes and empathy on the social competence of young children. The results of this study can be summarized as follows. First, a positive correlation was found between mothers' verbal control modes, empathy, and social competence of young children. Second, the relative impact of mothers' personality control mode among verbal control modes variable and mothers' emotional empathy of empathy variable on young children's social competence had meaningful explanatory power. Both the mothers' personality control mode and mothers' emotional empathy variables were also found to have the similar relative influence on young children's social competence. These results suggest that mothers' personality control mode and emotional empathy can be important factors for young children's social competence.

Keywords: The Verbal Control Modes, Empathy, Social Competence, Young Children

1. Introduction

Human beings are constantly growing in contact with their surroundings. The growth occurs consecutively in terms of all human development, including physical, cognitive, emotional and social aspects. In order to meet basic needs, humans learn the accepted ways in society, learn how to express emotions properly, and gradually grow into members suitable for society.

One of the important tasks of early childhood education is to help infants to grow properly as competent members of the society. Because society consists of people with diverse needs and needs, it is maintained through the process of understanding and compromising with each other.

The ability to interact with the social community is essential for an individual who constitutes a society to lead a life and realize the inherent possibilities he or she has. Interaction skills vary from person to person depending on the degree of understanding of the world to which the individual belongs and the ability to cope with various social problems. It is the individual's social competence to determine the quality of interaction with the social community, and this is an important virtue that young children must have in establishing themselves as members of society[1][2].

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Social competence is a comprehensive concept that includes not only individual social skills required by human beings in their lives, but also cognitive and emotional areas[3]. It is the ability to understand the norms of their society to control their emotions and behaviors and maintain good relationships with others[3]. Young children with high social skills have a high level of knowledge of interaction with their peers and are given positive growth opportunities by being more favored by their peers or adults, but young children with low social skills are rejected by their peers, which can lead to negative self-concepts and difficulties or contraction in social relationships[4][5]. Also, socially competent children feel satisfied with their relationships with adults and peers, feel happier, and are more satisfied with their lives[6]. Therefore, social competence is very important to acquire and develop social skills in early childhood.

This study seeks to examine the influence of many factors affecting the social competence of young children, focusing not on the social demographic variables of the children but on the mother-related variables, the primary care-giver of the children. The first variable related to mothers to be examined in this study is the mothers' verbal control modes.

The mothers' verbal control mode is a long-standing habitual behavior that can make a big difference in the social development of young children depending on the mothers' verbal control modes. According to MacDonald and Parker (1984), social skills are mainly influenced by interactions with care-givers such as parents, and the social behavior patterns of young children are modeled through parents, so parental influences are very important[7]. Families are the first social context that young children encounter, and parents are the basis for the development of their social abilities[8]. In particular, young children learn a variety of behaviors, including verbal, habits, values, and attitudes, through their mothers who communicate more closely and continuously than their fathers. As a result, young children are greatly affected by socialization and cognitive development by their mother, the primary care-giver. Therefore, it can be assumed that close interaction between young children and mothers is a very essential factor for developing social competence in early childhood.

Following the mothers' verbal control modes, the second variable is expected to affect young children's social competence is mothers' empathy. A mothers' empathy is a mothers' understanding of her child and acceptance of their needs in the process of raising children, which is very important for children development[9]. A mothers' empathy gives her child a sense of psychological stability and can help them more easily adapt and maintain relationships with their peers[10]. With the mothers' sympathy and support, the children can positively control his or her emotions and develop ability to empathize with other people's needs[11]. Although the mothers' verbal control modes and empathy are important factors in the child's social competence, few studies have been conducted to examine the impact of the two variables on the children's social competence.

Therefore, in this study, researchers would like to examine the correlation between mothers' verbal control modes, mothers' empathy, and child's social competence in detail and find out the relative influence of mothers' verbal control modes and empathy on the children's social competence. Through the results of this study, it can be used as basic data for parent education that can recognize the importance of mother verbal control modes and empathy to enhance social competence of young children and contribute to the improvement of social competence of early childhood children. In order to achieve the above research objectives, the following research questions were established.

Research question 1. What is the relationship between the mothers’ verbal control modes, empathy and the young children’s social competence?

Research question 2. What is the relative influence of the mothers’ verbal control modes and empathy on the social competence of young children?
2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The Verbal Control Modes of Mothers

According to Gumperz (1973), verbal control is a verbal form used by humans to change other people's behavior. In particular, the verbal control modes vary depending on the degree of role discretion given by parents to children at home[12]. Verbal control modes are divided into three modes: command, status, and personality control mode. The command control is a mode that a mother controls her child's behavior with physical punishment, threats, or orders, ignoring her child's intention. The status control is a mode of control over the behavior of children in accordance with the social status and role of mother. The personality control is a mode that allows a young child to learn responsibility and roles by himself or herself by giving the children discretion.

A prior study showed that the mothers' verbal control type differed according to the mothers' social demographic background variables. According to a study by Lim Mi-young (2004)[13] and Kim Yoon-hee (2010)[14], the higher the mothers' educational background, the more she uses the personality verbal control type, but there is no difference in the verbal control type depending on her job status. Meanwhile, a study by Jang Soo-yeon (2017)[15] showed that full-time employment groups were significantly higher than full-time housewives according to their mothers' jobs, but there was no statistically significant difference in verbal control types based on age and educational background.

In addition, the study by Lee Mi-kyung (2007)[12] found that the more status and personality control mode of mothers, the higher the social capacity of children. In a study by Nam Yeon-jung (2010)[16], the higher the mothers' command verbal control, the lower the child's interpersonal skills and social norms. Through the preceding researches, it can be assumed that the status control and personality control mode among verbal control modes will have a more positive impact on the children's social competence.

2.2 Empathy of Mothers

Empathy is the ability of an individual to enter into another person's personal perceptual world, to feel the meaning of someone else's inner thoughts, and to understand the other's interests[17]. According to Davis (1980)[18], parental empathy is a multi-dimensional concept and consists of cognitive factors such as taking and imagining others' perspectives, as well as emotional factors that empathize with empathetic interest and personal suffering.

The cognitive component of empathy is that the intellectual process that elicits empathetic emotions and empathetic behaviors is activated[19]. In other words, empathy is related to recognizing emotions and motivations, and in the process intelligent reasoning and imagination are mobilized[20]. This is the process of cognitive deliberation to understand the feelings of others by recognizing or imagining the situation from another person's point of view. The emotional component of empathy include sharing another person's feelings and reacting emotionally to the person's emotions and situations in contrast to those of the cognitive aspects, and empathic interest, personal pain, and sympathy as an emotional response after seeing the target's condition even if it does not necessarily feel the same emotion as the target[21].

In this study, the mother's empathic ability was considered to consist of such cognitive and emotional elements. Many studies[22-24] show that a mother's empathy has a positive effect on the development of pro-social behavior in young children. Putallaz (1987) found that if a mother interacts with her young child in a consistent manner, the child is accepted as a more social being in interactions with peers[25]. These findings show that accepting and sympathizing with children's opinions in the process of raising children is very important in developing children's social abilities, and that the mothers' empathy is a
factor that directly and positively affects the development of young children.

2.3 Social Competence of Young Children

Social competence can be defined as a social skill required by an young child in his or her life, as well as the ability to control his or her emotions and behavior and maintain good relationships with others by understanding the standards of society[26]. In other words, a sense of social competence is essential for children to grow up to be competent members of society and achieve their social goals while living in a social group. In the preceding studies, the mother-related variables related to the social abilities of young children include emotional expression[27], self-elasticity[28], parenting efficacy[29], and parenting stress and parenting behavior[30].

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted through a questionnaire survey on mothers and teachers of 202 5-year-old children attending a kindergarten and daycare center in Incheon city. This study used convenience sampling for the availability and convenience of data collection, and used the Volunteer Samples, which informs the research participants about the purpose and utilization of the data, and proceeds with consent. The social demographic background for the study participants is shown in [Table 1].

Among 202 young children, 112 boys(55.4%) and 90 girls(44.6%). According to the social demographic characteristics of mothers, 125 mothers(61.9%) were in their 30s, and 77(38.1%) were in their 40s or older. Then 121 mothers(59.9%) had jobs. The mothers’ education was followed by 84 university graduates(41.6%), 82 community college graduates(40.6%), 22 high-school graduates (10.9%), and 14 graduate or higher education(6.9%).

[Table 1] Subjects Demographic Characteristics (N=202)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40s or older</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>High-school</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate or higher</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of child</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>44.6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Verbal Control Modes of Mother

To measure the modes of verbal control of the mother, the instrument developed by Do Hye-sook(1997) and modified and supplemented by Kim Yoon hee(2010)[14] was used. This instrument consists of 3 sub-factors, a total of 24 questions, with all 3 modes(command, status, personality control mode) of verbal control presented for each question. Depending on the degree of use of each verbal control mode, it is required to be rated from 0 points for 'not used at all' to 4 points for 'always used'(5-
Likert scale). The higher the score, the more verbal control modes are used in each area. The reliability test of the instrument has shown that the reliability of each sub-variable is very high (command control $\alpha=.92$, status control $\alpha=.92$, personality control $\alpha=.93$).

3.2.2 Empathy of Mother

The instrument developed by Park Sung-hee (1997) was used to measure mothers’ empathy. The instrument consists of a total of 30 questions, 10 questions of cognitive empathy and 20 questions of emotional empathy, and is leveled on a 5-Likert scale. The scores of the questions in the negative sense were added together by reverse marking. The higher the score, the higher the mothers’ empathy. The reliability test of this instrument has shown a high reliability ($\alpha=.82$).

3.2.3 Social Competence of Child

The Measure of the Social Competence’ questionnaire designed and validated by Lee Hye-won (2005) was used to assess the social competence of young children. The questionnaire consists of 4 sub-factors (12 items for ‘emotional adjustment’, 8 items for ‘emotionality’, 12 items for ‘the peer relationship techniques’, 9 items for ‘the understanding social norms’, with a total of 41 items in 5-Likert scale. The questions in the negative meaning were added together by reverse grading, and the higher the total score, the higher the social competence of the young children. The total reliability of the instrument is very high ($\alpha=.93$).

3.3 Procedure

In order to find out the suitability and time required for research instruments, a preliminary survey was conducted on 15 young children and their mothers at kindergartens and daycare centers who would not participate in the primary survey from December 10 to December 14, 2018. The primary survey was conducted from December 18 to December 31, 2018, and visited kindergartens and daycare centers located in Incheon City to provide legal and ethical explanations in the use of research purposes and research data, and then visited the institution to deliver and retrieve the questionnaire with consent. Mothers’ questionnaires were distributed and retrieved through their children's teachers. A total of 250 copies were distributed, 220 of which were recovered, and a total of 202 copies were utilized for the final analysis, except for 18 non-response or insincere answers.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was analyzed using the SPSS 24.0 program. First, the Cronbach's $\alpha$ coefficient was calculated for the reliability test of the measurement instruments used in this study. Second, frequency and percentage were calculated to characterize the mothers’ social demographic. Third, a Pearson's Correlation Analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between the mothers’ verbal control modes, empathy ability and the children's social competence. Fourth, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to find out the influence of the mothers’ verbal control modes and empathy on the children’s social competence.

4. Results

4.1 Correlations Between Research Variables

The results of the correlation between the mothers' verbal control modes, empathy, and the children's
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social competence variables are as shown in [Table 2]. In the relationship between mothers’ verbal control modes and the children's social competence, the mothers' status control($r=.14$ $p<.05$) and personality control($r=.24$, $p<.01$) had a statistically significant positive correlation with the social competence of the children. In other words, the more mothers use status and personality control mode, the more socially competent their children are. On the other hand, the mothers’ type of command control mode showed no significant correlation with the overall social competence of the children.

Next, there was a significant positive correlation between the mothers' empathy and the child's social competence($r=.26$, $p<.001$), which can be interpreted as the higher the mothers' empathy, the higher the social competence of the children. Finally, in the relationship between the mothers' verbal control modes and the mothers' empathy, the mothers' status control mode showed a significant positive correlation ($r=.19$, $p<.01$), and the personality control mode also showed a significant positive correlation($r=.25$, $p<.001$) with the mothers' empathy.

[Table 2] Results of Correlation between Research Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Command control</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Status control</td>
<td>.62***</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. Personality control</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Cognitive empathy</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Emotional empathy</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>6. Total</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.79***</td>
<td>.93***</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>7. Emotional Adjustment</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>8. Emotionality</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.72***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. The peer relationship</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Understanding social</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.69***</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.57***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Competence</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Total</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.90***</td>
<td>.71***</td>
<td>.75***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.01

4.2 Regression Results of Independent Variables for Dependent Variable

The result of the multiple regression analysis is shown in [Table 3] to analyze the influence of the mothers' verbal control modes and empathy on the social competence of the young children. The mothers' verbal control modes and empathy explained about 8% of the children's social competence, and the regression model was found to be significant($F=4.50$, $p<.001$). Among the factors influencing the social competence of young children, the mothers' personality control mode($B=.13$, $t=2.26$, $p<.05$) and the emotional empathy factor($B=.25$, $t=2.17$, $p<.05$) had a statistically significant positive effect. The relative influence of factors affecting the social competence of children was shown to be similar in mothers' personality control mode($\beta=.18$) and mothers' emotional empathy($\beta=.18$).
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Table 3: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables (Mothers)</th>
<th>Dependent Variable (Social Competence of Young Children)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Command Control</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Status Control</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Personality Control</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cognitive Empathy</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emotional Empathy</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p<.05\), ***\(p<.01\)

The results of the above study are summarized as follows. The more mothers use status and personality control modes, the higher the mothers' empathy, the higher the child's sociality. In addition, personality control mode of mothers' verbal control modes variable and emotional empathy of empathy variable have been shown to be variables that predict the social competence of early childhood children.

5. Conclusions

This study was conducted to estimate the relative impact of mother’s verbal control modes and empathy on the social skills of 5-year-old children, to recognize the importance of mother verbal expression and empathy, and to contribute to the recognition of important factors in the development of parent education that can raise children as people with high social skills. The results obtained from this study are discussed as follows.

First, in the relationship between mothers' verbal control modes and children's social competence, the status and personality mode in mothers' verbal control modes showed a positive correlation with the social competence of young children. In the process of a mother raising her infant child, mothers will use many words or phrases based on their responsibilities and roles. It is assumed that these linguistic features of the mother have helped her child learn the behaviors, perspectives and concepts that society requires[31]. And in the positive relationship between mothers' personality control mode and children's social competence, the result is consistent with previous studies that suggest that children's pro-social behavior(personal skills, interpersonal skills, and institutional adaptability) increases when mothers use personality control[32].

Subsequently, in the relationship between mothers' verbal control modes and mothers' empathy, the mothers' status and personality control mode showed a significant positive correlation with her empathy. No prior study has been conducted on the mothers' verbal control modes and empathy, but this study has been found to be related to the mothers' status control mode and empathy. This is probably because Korean culture was influenced by Confucian ideas, so parents who grew up in the culture raised the importance of their authority as parents when raising children, and also because they have respect and empathy for their children. In addition, this study also showed the relationship between mothers' personality control mode and empathy. This can predict the relationship between the two variables because personality control mode is characterized by explaining how one's behavior can affect another person[33], and a mother using this mode can eventually predict a high level of empathy for thinking and responding from another's perspective.

Second, the personality control modes and emotional empathy were found to have significant positive effects on the social competence of children. These results are in line with the positive relationship
between the mothers' personality mode and child development, as in Bernstein (1971)[34]'s social linguistics theory. It also shows the same results as previous studies[35][36], who identified the mothers' emotional empathy as a variable that statistically and meaningfully explains the child's social competence. These findings showed that the more emotional a mother responds to an infant's psychological state, the greater the child's social ability. In other words, children will be able to achieve socially competent growth when the mother uses personality verbal control and emotionally empathizes with her children.

However, in this study, the cognitive empathy of mothers did not appear as a predictor of the sociality of children, which is a different result from the preceding study[36]. The results of this study showed that both the cognitive and emotional empathy of the mother were correlated with the sociality of the children, but the emotional empathy was higher in the figures. Based on this, the mothers' cognitive understanding of the other person's situation can help the child's sociality, but emotional empathy will have more influence on the social development of the children so the mother should try to develop her own emotional empathy.

In conclusion, it could be confirmed that the mothers' verbal control modes and empathy are closely related to the social competence of children and are important variables that influence them. Therefore, educational institutions will need to regularly implement parent education that can develop emotional empathy while using appropriate status and personality verbal control modes. In parent education, parents' verbal mode analysis should be conducted in advance, and parents' education should be conducted in similar groups depending on their children's age and sociality. It should also be a regular parent education for a certain period of time, not a one-time event. It is also expected that teacher education will be needed by analyzing the impact of verbal control modes and empathy on the child's social competence for teachers who have a great influence on the growth of children as members of society.

In this study, since this survey was conducted as a method of extracting convenience from kindergartens schools and daycare centers located in Incheon City, it is not possible to generalize the results of the study as there may be sampling errors. In addition, the survey was conducted with the mothers' self-reporting response. Since there may be differences between the verbal control modes that the mother herself measured and the verbal control modes that the children feels, various research methods such as in-depth interviews of children or observations of children and mothers will have to be combined for a more objective investigation. Finally, in the future, follow-up research needs to be conducted on the impact of the verbal control modes and empathy of the child's father or teacher on the child's social competence. Through follow-up research, it will be an opportunity to take a closer look at the factors of the child's home environment and the influence of institutional environmental factors on the child's social competence.

References


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