

## **Determining the Methods of Mothers Use to Support Their Children's Emotional Intelligence**

İlkay Ulutaş and Esra Ömeroğlu

Child Development and Education Department,  
Vocational Education Faculty, Gazi University, Besevler-Ankara/Turkey

---

**Abstract:** This study investigated to determine the methods of mothers use to support their children's emotional intelligence. 244 mothers with six-year-old children attending a pre-school comprised this research. Parents were evaluated by "Emotional Intelligence Assessment Scale" and "Parental Attitudes Research Inventory". Mother-child interactions observed at their home and evaluated using "Home Observation For Measurement Of The Environment (Home) Inventory". The results revealed a relationship between parents' emotional intelligence, parental attitudes and the home environment they offer to their children.

**Key words:** Emotional intelligence · Parents · Children

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is often emphasized today that children should be provided with emotional as well as cognitive support so that they lead a happy and successful life [1-4]. It is important that children understand emotions as this will prevent them from becoming aggressive in their relations with the people around them. Children who can recognize feelings appropriately appear to establish more positive relationships with their peers and other people in their environment and be more adaptable and easygoing both at school and in their social lives [1,5]. For this reason, parents have a big responsibility in today's fast changing world so that children grow up to become emotionally healthy. Parenting involves skills that require fighting against dangers that children might encounter and providing effective guidance for them [6]. It is the family environment where children first feel, observe and learn about emotional relations. Therefore, a secure commitment between parents and children is expected especially in their early years. It has been observed that the stronger the emotional attachment between children and their family, the fewer emotional problems in later life. These children are also able to solve problems more easily [7].

Children's commitment to their parents in a secure way eases the process of recognizing basic feelings such as happiness, sadness and fear as well as other more sophisticated feelings such as anxiety and pride [8-12]. Children who have a secure attachment with their parents are more positive in their relations with the people around them, are more readily accepted into peer groups and can make new friends without any concern for being criticized or lonely [13]. On the other hand, with children who cannot establish a secure attachment, risk factors start to appear in early childhood, which lead to undesirable behavior such as complaining or fighting [14-16].

Through emotional interaction with parents, children learn how to express themselves, how others may react to their feelings, what they should think about these reactions, what choices they have when giving reactions and how they will

---

**Corresponding Author:** İlkay Ulutaş, Child Development and Education Department, Vocational Education Faculty, Gazi University, Besevler-Ankara/Turkey

recognize and express certain feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger and fear [2,17]. Parents' emphasizing and drawing attention to feelings in their communication with the child enhances the emotional interaction between them and makes it possible for the child to recognize and understand emotions [17]. Research reveals that when parents use emotional statements in their speech, children can recognize these emotions much better [11,18].

Parents who have high emotional intelligence frequently draw attention to feelings when interacting with their children. This type of communication not only helps children understand and make use of emotions and emotional skills but also facilitates sharing of emotions between children and parents. Moreover, parents' using terminology of emotions improves children's emotion-related vocabulary and eases the understanding of emotional concepts [11].

Thus, the primary purpose of the study was to examine mothers' emotional intelligence, attitudes and home environment factors as they relate to representations of their children. Based on previous research examining links between mother emotional behavior and interactions with their children we expected that emotional intelligence would be positively associated with their attitudes and home environment.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Participants:** Mothers with six-year-old children attending a pre-school comprised this research. 244 mothers were chosen to participate in the study. The total of the mothers were married. Mothers ranged in a age from 20-40 with a mean of 29 years (SD = 3.42). Education level of the mothers ranged from less than 5 years of schooling to college graduates. 47.1 percent of mothers had less than a high school education, 36.9 percent had a high school diploma, 16.0 percent had graduate university. The majority of the mothers had two children (62.7%, N = 153), or only one child (23.8%, N = 58) and had not a job (61.9%, N = 151).

### **Measures**

**Personal Information Form:** Information on the age, number of children, level of education, profession and socioeconomic level of mothers were included in the Personal Information Form.

**Emotional Intelligence Self-evaluation Test:** Emotional Intelligence Self-Evaluation Test designed by Hall was adapted to Turkish by Ergin [19] and comprises 30 items. The scores received from the scale range between 30 and 180 and higher scores indicate higher emotional intelligence. When observed in terms of total score, a correlation coefficient at the level of 0.84 was found between the first and last application.

**Parental Attitudes Research Inventory (PARI):** PARI (Parental Attitudes Research Inventory), developed by Schaefer and Bell, was used in this research to determine the attitudes of mothers towards their children. The test was adapted to Turkish by LeCompte *et al.* [20]. There are 60 items and 5 subscales in the test that were redesigned according to Turkish standards. The subscales include overprotective mothering, democratic attitudes and recognition of equality, rejecting the role of housewife, marital conflicts and strict discipline. A total score cannot be obtained from the scale; however, factor scores are evaluated.

**Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (Home) Inventory:** This inventory was developed by Caldwell and Bradley [21] in order to determine the facilities provided to children at home by the family and to observe their interaction with the mother. A validity and reliability study on Turkish children was conducted and the reliability coefficient emerged as .69. The inventory consists of eight subsections and a total of 55 items on "supporting learning", "supporting speaking", "physical environment", "intimacy and acceptance", "academic stimulation", "modelling", "variety in experience" and "acceptance". The score received from the inventory is evaluated between 0-55 and higher scores point to a positive outcome in terms of home environment observation.

**Procedure:** A lot of participants were contacted via preschool teacher and invited to participate in a follow-up visit. The first 244 families who expressed interest in participating were contacted via preschool teacher to schedule a visit for data collection. Firstly Personal Information Form, Emotional Intelligence Self-Evaluation Test and Parental Attitudes Research Inventory was given to mothers via preschool teachers. Then researchers visited the mothers at home. The visit took approximately 50 moment and during that time mothers observed. After observation Home Observation For Measurement Of The Environment (Home) Inventory was filled.

**RESULTS**

The results are divided into two sections. First preliminary analyses among demographic variables are presented (Table 1 and 2). Second relations between mothers' emotional intelligence and attitudes, emotional intelligence and and home environment are examined (Table 3 and 4).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of demographic variables for total emotional intelligence test and total home environment inventory

	Total emotional intelligence			Total home environment		
	Mean	SD	F	Mean	SD	F
<b>Mother age</b>						
20-24 years old	126.77	40.01	0.670	42.00	5.17	0.210
25-29 years old	124.44	36.96		41.67	4.26	
30-34 years old	133.08	41.77		42.52	6.56	
35-39 years old	131.49	40.69		42.62	5.43	
40 years and older	139.22	25.37		41.78	6.63	
<b>Mother education</b>						
Primary	132.51	35.82	8.41**	41.66	6.11	6.72**
Middle	109.54	42.91		39.94	5.05	
High school	131.63	39.52		42.59	5.18	
University	149.51	27.05		45.10	5.57	
<b>Number of children</b>						
One	139.47	29.97	2.06	42.97	5.50	0.723
2-3	127.53	43.17		42.06	5.68	
4 and more	127.67	32.00		41.61	6.02	

\*\*p<0.01

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of demographic variables for Parental Attitudes Research Inventory (PARI)

	Overprotective			Demokratic and equality			Rejecting of homemaking role			Marital conflict			Strict discipline		
	Mean	SD	F	Mean	SD	F	Mean	SD	F	Mean	SD	F	Mean	SD	F
<b>Age</b>															
20-24 ages	47.22	7.85		28.33	3.39		25.50	7.95		13.26	4.63		33.78	6.47	
25-29 ages	45.67	10.01		28.44	2.18		27.44	7.79		14.33	4.79		33.39	6.36	
30-34 ages	45.01	9.35	0.949	28.24	5.76	0.530	26.36	9.97	1.493	12.50	5.76	1.671	33.89	5.78	1763
35-39 ages	48.02	9.22		27.26	3.89		29.09	9.31		14.45	5.55		32.43	6.10	
40 age and older	46.52	11.32		27.70	7.14		28.57	10.35		15.04	5.16		30.48	4.10	
<b>Education</b>															
Primary	48.40	8.64		27.33	6.21		1.990	26.10		2.251	14.46		32.42	5.84	
Middle	50.67	8.19	18.624**	27.31	3.10	7.64	28.58	11.13	4.64	13.67	5.40	1.943	32.90	6.14	1552
High school	46.72	7.64		28.52	3.90		27.70	9.47		13.44	5.78		34.29	6.05	
University	38.20	8.71		29.10	4.11		24.08	6.80		11.95	4.35		32.46	6.60	
<b>Number of children</b>															
One	44.76	8.80		28.62	3.25		25.85	7.74		12.55	5.32		34.33	6.55	
2-3	47.14	8.23	1.585	28.34	4.15	5.403	27.58	9.51	1.331	13.82	5.09	1.335	32.75	6.08	1410
4 and more	47.33	12.43		25.67	7.26		25.30	8.97		13.88	5.60		33.36	5.45	

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

Table 3: Bivariate correlations between mothers emotional intelligence and attitudes

	Emotional Awareness	Managing One's Emotions	Self-Motivation	Empathy	Coaching Others' emotions	Total emotional Intelligence
Overprotective	-0.176(**)	-0.133(*)	-0.152(*)	-0.139(*)	-0.126(*)	-0.159(*)
Democratic attitude and equality	0.273(**)	0.241(**)	0.340(**)	0.311(**)	0.267(**)	0.313(**)
Rejecting of homemaking role	-0.039	-0.037	-0.022	-0.033	-0.034	-0.036
Marital conflict	-0.074	-0.031	0.017	-0.033	-0.028	-0.032
Strict discipline	-0.009	0.002	-0.057	-0.004	-0.009	-0.017

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4: Correlations between mothers' emotional intelligence and home environment

	Emotional Awareness	Managing One's Emotions	Self-Motivation	Empathy	Coaching Others' emotions	Total emotional Intelligence
Learning materials	0.140(*)	0.141(*)	0.173(**)	0.136(*)	0.112	0.154(*)
Language stimulation	0.085	0.116	0.136(*)	0.145(*)	0.119	0.131(*)
Physical environment	0.219(**)	0.276(**)	0.219(**)	0.218(**)	0.243(**)	0.256(**)
Responsivity	0.035	0.088	0.100	0.065	0.061	0.077
Academic stimulation	-0.011	-0.010	-0.012	-0.013	-0.037	-0.017
Modelling	-0.040	-0.019	-0.051	-0.022	0.005	-0.029
Variety	0.117	0.143(*)	0.216(**)	0.200(**)	0.149(*)	0.180(**)
Acceptance	0.006	0.085	0.042	0.070	0.087	0.063
Total Home Environment	0.157(*)	0.216(**)	0.230(**)	0.215(**)	0.194(**)	0.221(**)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Preliminary Analyses:** Preliminary analyses were conducted in order to determine the means of emotional intelligence, parental attitudes and home environment according to mothers' demographic variables.

There were no statistically significant differences among age groups on Emotional Intelligence Scale or Home Environment Scale (Table 1). But there were statistically significant differences among education groups on Emotional Intelligence Scale and Home Environment Scale. Emotional intelligence and Home environment means of mothers who were graduated from universities was higher than others. (Dz.:  $F = 8.41$   $p < 0.01$ ; ev ort:  $F = 6.72$   $p < 0.01$ ).

There were no statistically significant differences among age groups on PARI (Table 2). But there were statistically significant differences among education groups on overprotective attitudes of mothers. Means of mothers who were graduated from primary schools was higher than others. ( $F = 18.64$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Higher educated mothers are less protective than primary and middle schools.

There were statistically significant differences among number of children on democratic and equality attitudes of mothers ( $F = 5.403$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Mothers with one child or 2-3 children had more democratic attitudes than other.

**Correlations:** Bivariate correlation analysis was used to assess the relation between mothers' emotional intelligence and attitudes (Table 3), emotional intelligence and home environment (Table 4).

Positive correlations were found among measures of Emotional Intelligence and Parental Attitudes at Table 3. Mothers' total scores of Emotional Intelligence and components were positively associated to their democratic attitudes ( $r = 0.313$   $p < 0.01$ ), but negatively related to their Extreme attitudes ( $r = 0.313$   $p < 0.01$ ).

Mothers' total emotional intelligence was significantly associated with their total home environment ( $r = 0.221$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also there were significant associations among components of emotional intelligence and learning materials and physical environment subsection of home environment ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

It was found in this study which aimed to determine the methods of mothers use to support their children's emotional intelligence that the emotional intelligence, attitudes and home environment of mothers differ according to their age, education and number of children.

The study reveals that the emotional intelligence of mothers tend to rise as their level of education increases. A higher level of education brings about an increase in individual's cognitive, social and emotional skills. İşmen [22] also came to the conclusion in his study that the emotional intelligence of parents varies with respect to level of education and that parents who stopped receiving formal education after primary school received lower emotional intelligence scores. For this reason, the rise in emotional intelligence of mothers with high educational levels also tend to provide supporting conditions at home for their children.

When the attitudes of mothers are analyzed, it is seen that university graduates are less overprotective. Each level of education provides the individual with knowledge and experience that help one become more independent. Demiriz and Öğretir [23] have come to the conclusion that mothers with little education adopt more negative attitudes. İşmen [22] points out that the functioning of parents differ according to education received and that primary school graduates have a more unhealthy perception of their families. In line with this, university mothers' being less protective over their children can be interpreted as a positive outcome in that they support the independence of their children. The study reveals that mothers with one or 2-3 children show a more democratic attitude; however, more children prevent them from being so. As more children prevent the time and interest allocated by the mother, it may lead to a difference in attitudes. When the number of children increases, mothers tend to be more overprotective and apply more discipline on their children [23,24].

Emotional intelligence of mothers seem to be in correlation with their democratic attitudes but negatively correlation with their overprotective attitudes. Parents who have sufficient emotional abilities give more importance to feelings, establish empathy relations, show consistent attitudes, adopt better solutions for their children's undesirable attitudes [11, 16, 25]. Zevalkink, Riksen-Walraven and Bradley [26], found out in his study in which he searched the relationship between home environment and emotional attachment of children to their mothers that children who have strong emotional attachment with their mothers come from a high quality home environment.

Democratic parents try to balance the limits within their families with their intimate and loving approach. They guide their children but do not control them. They let their children take part in the decision-making process in the family and they, at the same time, provide their children with explanations for their own actions. These parents appreciate their children's independence; however, they also expect them to have responsibility for the family, peers and society. They value their children and try to understand them through empathy. Children of democratic parents are generally observed to be sensitive to themselves and the environment, have high social skills, have high self-esteem; that is, have high emotional intelligence [2, 27]. Arı and Şahin-Seçer [28] observed the psychosocial impact of democratic attitudes on children. They came to the conclusion that children who grew up in totally democratic families have significantly higher problem-solving skills than those who grew up in medium-level or non-democratic families.

The relationship between the emotional intelligence of mothers, their attitudes and their home environments found in the study supports the study of Raikes and Thomspon [11] and Eisenberg *et al.* [29], those the home environment and the psychological condition of the mother determine the external attitude problems of children in relation to his intelligence. Zevalkink *et al.* [26], study on the relationship between home environment and children's emotional attachment to their mothers show that children who are emotionally attached to their mothers live in a high quality home environment.

It is observed that parents with high emotional skills give importance to feelings in the family, establish empathetic relations, have consistent attitudes and prefer more empathetic solutions when they encounter negative behavior from their children [11, 17, 29]. The results indicate that as mothers' emotional intelligence becomes stronger, their democratic attitudes become visible as well and that they are supportive towards their children at home. When these mothers' offering support for their children both in terms of emotional intelligence, attitudes and home environment is taken into consideration, their supporting methods seem to gain importance.

Children need support such as modelling, intimacy, interest and openness to be provided by their parents so that they can control their feelings. Therefore, supporting the emotional intelligence of children requires improving parents' own emotional intelligence first. As mentioned before, parents' attitudes play a vital role on emotional intelligence of children.

This implies that mothers need to be made aware of emotional intelligence, attitudes on child raising and organizing the home environment before giving birth to children. This preparation at the pre-maternal period will make the mother feel more comfortable with her communication with the child. Moreover, as educational level of mothers determines their emotional intelligence, attitudes and even home conditions, it may be very beneficial if educational programs are designed with such values.

## REFERENCES

1. Hughes, C., J. Dunn and A. White, 1998. Trick or treat? Uneven understanding of mind and emotion and executive dysfunction in hard-to-manage preschoolers. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatry*, 39: 981-994.
2. Shapiro, L.E., 2000. How to raise a child with high emotional intelligence. (translator: Ümran Kartal), İstanbul: Varlık Publications.
3. O'neil, J., 1996. On Emotional Intelligence: A Conversation With Daniel Goleman, *Educational Leadership*, September, 6-11.
4. Goleman, D., 2001. Emotional intelligence. (Translator: Banu Seçkin Yüksel), İstanbul: Varlık Publication.
5. Fabes, R., N. Eisenberg, L. Hanish and T. Spinrad, 2001. Preschoolers' spontaneous emotion vocabulary: Links to likability. *Early Edu. Develop.*, 12: 11-27.
6. Melmed, M.E., 1998. Talking with parents about emotional development. *Pediatrics*, 102 (5): 1317-1326.
7. Warhol, J.G., 1998. Facilitating and encouraging healthy emotional development. *Pediatrics*, 102(5): 1330-1331.
8. Denham, S.A., E. Workman, P.M. Cole, C. Weissbrod, K.T. Kendziora and C. Zahn-Waxler, 2000. Prediction of externalizing behavior problems from early to middle childhood: The role of parental socialization and emotion expression. *Develop. Psychopathol.*, 12: 23-45.
9. Laible, D.J. and R.A. Thompson, 1998. Attachment and emotional understanding in preschool children. *Develop. Psychol.*, 34: 1038-1045.
10. Ontai, L. L. and R.A. Thompson, 2002. Patterns of attachment and maternal discourse effects on children's emotion understanding from 3 to 5 years of age. *Social Develop.*, 11: 433-450.
11. Raikes, H.A. and R.A. Thompson, 2006. Family emotional climate, attachment security and young children's emotion knowledge in a high risk sample. *British J. Develop. Psychol.*, 24(1): 89-104.
12. Suess, G.J., K.E. Grossmann and L.A. Sroufe, 1992. Effects of infant attachment to mother on quality of adaptation in preschool. From dyadic to individual organization of self. *Intl. J. Behavioral Develop.*, 15: 43-65.
13. Kerns, K., L. Klepac and A.K. Cole, 1996. Peer relationships and preadolescents' perceptions of security in the child-mother relationship. *Develop. Psychol.*, 32: 457-466.
14. DeMulder, K.E., S.A. Denham, M. Schmidt and J. Mitchell, 2000. Q-sort assessment of attachment security during the preschool years: Links from home to school. *Develop. Psychol.*, 36: 274-282.
15. Wartner, U., K. Grossmann and E. Fremmer-Bombik, 1994. Attachment patterns at age six in south Germany: Predictability from infancy and implications for preschool behavior. *Child Develop.*, 65: 1014-1027
16. Denham, S., 2007. Dealing with feelings: how children negotiate the worlds of emotions and social relationships. *CogniŞie, Creier, Comportament/Cognition, Brain, Behavior*, 1: 1-48.
17. Morris, A.S., J.S. Silk, L. Steinberg, S.S. Myers and L.R. Robinson, 2007. The role of the family context in the development of emotion regulation. *Soc. Develop.*, 16(2): 361-368.
18. Oppenheim, D., N. Koren-Karie and A. Sagi-Schwartz, 2007. Emotion dialogues between mothers and children at 4.5 and 7.5 years: Relations with children's attachment at 1 year. *Child Develop.*, 78 (1): 38-52.

19. Ergin, F.E., 2000. A study on the relationship between emotional intelligence levels and sixteen personality characteristics of the university students. (Unpublished master thesis). Turkey; Selçuk University.
20. LeCompte G., A. LeCompte and S. Özer *et al.*, 1978. Üç sosyoekonomik düzeyde Ankara’lı annelerin çocuk yetiştirme tutumları: Bir ölçek uyarlaması. Psikoloji Dergisi, 1:5 -8.
21. Caldwell, B.M. and R.H. Bradley, 1984. Home observation for measurement of the environment. Revised edition. Little Rock: University of Arkansas at Little Rock.
22. İşmen, E., 2004. The relationship between emotional intelligence and family functions. Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 7 (11): 57-75.
23. Demiriz, S. and A.D. Öğretir, 2007. A study of the attitudes of mothers of 10-years-old children in lower and upper socio-economic status. Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi, 15 (1): 105-122.
24. Davis-Kean, P., 2005. The influence of parent education and family Income on child achievement: the indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment. J. Family Psychol., 19(2): 294-304.
25. Shipman, K., R. Schneider and C. Sims, 2005. Emotion socialization in maltreating and nonmaltreating mother-child dyads: Implications for children's adjustment. J. Clin. Child Atid Adolescent Psychol., 34 (3): 590-596.
26. Zevalkink, J., J.M. Riksen-Walraven and R.H. Bradley, 2008. The quality of children’s home environment and attachment security in Indonesia. J. Gene. Psychol., 169 (1): 72-91.
27. Navaro, L., 1992. How to communicate with child. Ana-Baba Okulu. s. 129, İstanbul: Remzi Pub.
28. Ari, R. and Z.S. Seçer, 2003. The effects of the parents’ attitudes on children’s psychosocial based problem solving capabilities. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 10: 451-464.
29. Eisenberg, N., Q. Zhou, T.L. Spinrad, C. Valiente, R.A. Fabes and J. Liew, 2005. Relations Among Positive Parenting, Children’s Effortful Control and Externalizing Problems: A Three-Wave Longitudinal Study. Child Develop., 76(5): 1055-1071.

**Note:** This paper presented as a poster XXIX International Congress of Psychology (July 20-25, Berlin-Germany)?