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## The Effects of Young Children's Self-esteem and Social Competence on Elementary School Adjustment

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### Abstract

*This study aims to discover how self-esteem and social competence in early childhood affect school adjustment in elementary school. This study used the 7th year (2014) and 10th year (2017) of the panel study on Korean children, which are longitudinal research data from the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (KICCE). Pearson's correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis were used as the main statistical analysis methods. The analysis was performed using the the Spss 21.0 program. As a result of this study, peer acceptance among early childhood's self-esteem, assertion, cooperation, and self-control among social competence have influences on adjustment to elementary school life. This study is meaningful in that it is a longitudinal study conducted with a time difference for 3 years with the same subjects in order to investigate the influence of the inner factors of early childhood on school adjustment in elementary school.*

**Keywords:** Panel Study, Self-esteem, Social Competence, Young Children, Elementary Student, School Adjustment

### 1. INTRODUCTION

School adaptation is a process in which each student adapts to the rules or goals of the individual school, and is a process in which students interact and grow with their peers and teachers [1]. In order to help children adapt to school, the need to find out the factors that have a positive effect on elementary school children is raised [2]. From early childhood to later childhood, development is on a continuous line. Factors that can check early childhood development are also found in elementary school life [3].

Early childhood is an important time to form a self internally and establish relationships with others externally. In order for children to be happy by increasing their adaptability to society, they must develop positive thoughts and feelings for themselves [4]. These young children's self-esteem is an important factor for forming a healthy personality and for positive environmental adjustment. Social competence is the ability of young children to know themselves as members of society and to form positive relationships with their peers and their surroundings [5]. Early childhood is an important period for the formation and development of sociality, and the foundation of sociality that began to form in infancy affects social competence throughout life [6].

Therefore, this study aims to discover how self-esteem and social competence in early childhood affect school adjustment in elementary school. In order to discover the effect of young children's self-esteem and social competence on elementary school adjustment, this study compares the period of 3rd grade just before

elementary school enrollment and after some adjustment to elementary school. The research questions set in this study are as follows.

Research Question 1. What is the relationship between the self-esteem and social competence of 5 years old and elementary school adjustment of 9 years old?

Research Question 2. How is the influence effect of the self-esteem and social competence of 5 years old on elementary school adjustment of 9 years old?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research Subject

This study used the 7th year (2014) and 10th year (2017) of the Panel Study on Korean Children (panel.kicce.re.kr/panel), which are longitudinal research data from the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (KICCE). This study was analyzed by using the self-esteem, social competence and school adjustment data of 3rd graders of elementary school before entering elementary school among open data of the panel study on Korean children.

Data retrieval took place in December 2020. Raw data was downloaded from the panel study on Korean children's website. Among all the scales, only children with scores were extracted. 510 children were used in the analysis. The background of the children to be analyzed is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Individual background of the analyzed children (N=510)**

	Month	Frequency(Percent)
<b>The 7th year, age of month</b>	<b>72-73</b>	57(11.2)
	<b>74</b>	107(21.0)
	<b>75</b>	150(29.4)
	<b>76</b>	115(22.5)
	<b>77</b>	50( 9.8)
	<b>78-79</b>	31( 6.1)
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls among the subjects of analysis</b>	238(46.7)
	<b>Boys among the subjects of analysis</b>	272(53.3)
	<b>Sum</b>	510(100.0)

### 2.2. Data Analysis

The mean, standard deviation (SD), skewness, and kurtosis for each variable were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Pearson's correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis were used as the main statistical analysis methods. As an independent variable of the step-by-step model, the young children's self-esteem (cognitive ability, peer acceptance, physical ability, mother acceptance) were introduced in stage 1. In the second stage, young children's social competence (assertion, cooperation, self-control) were additionally added. The absolute value of skewness for self-esteem, social competence, and elementary school adjustment in the young children were 3 under, and kurtosis was 9 under. The analysis was carried out as it was proved to be a normal distribution. The analysis was performed using the the Spss 21.0 program. The descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. The descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study**

	Major variable	Lower variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Young children to be analyzed	Self-esteem	Cognitive ability	20.273	1.766	-1.390	3.059
		Peer acceptance	17.422	2.837	-0.470	-0.431
		Physical ability	18.012	2.464	-0.723	0.687
		Mother acceptance	17.410	3.216	-0.519	-0.271
	Social competence	Assertion	12.345	2.241	-0.696	-0.120
		Cooperation	24.028	3.497	-1.259	0.767
		Self-control	16.863	3.112	-0.544	-0.384
Children to be analyzed	School adjustment	Adjustment to school life	46.680	8.931	-1.240	1.041
		Academic performance	44.033	8.792	-0.785	0.405
		Peer adjustment	32.794	6.319	-0.912	0.452
		Teacher adjustment	20.300	3.787	-0.830	0.501
		Sum of school adjustment	143.808	24.232	-0.960	0.764

### 2.3. Investigation Tool

#### 2.3.1. The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance, PSPCSA

In this study, the tool modified to fit the panel study on Korean children was used for the social competence tool for young children[7]. This tool was consisted of 4 sub-areas: cognitive ability (6 questions), physical ability (6 questions), peer acceptance (6 questions), and mother acceptance (6 questions). There were a total of 24 questions. The investigator showed the picture card to the young children and received a response. The cronbach's  $\alpha$  of self-esteem was 0.630.

#### 2.3.2. The Social Skill Rating System for Preschool Level, SSRS

In this study, for the measurement of social skills in elementary school, a modified and translated Korean version of the social skills measurement system for the panel study on Korean children was used[8, 9]. It was conducted by the homeroom teacher of the early childhood education institution, directly assessing the children. This tool was consisted of 21 questions: assertion (5 questions), cooperation (9 questions), and self-control (7 questions). It was a method of checking the 3-point Likert scale. The cronbach's  $\alpha$  of social competence was 0.924.

#### 2.3.3. School Adjustment Inventory, SAI

The tool used in this study is a school adjustment tool in the first grade of elementary school[10]. This tool was composed of 35 questions in 4 sub-areas of adjustment to school life (11 questions), academic performance (11 questions), peer adjustment(8 questions), teacher adjustment (5 questions). The subject's homeroom teacher responded with a 5-point Likert scale through a web questionnaire. The cronbach's  $\alpha$  of school adjustment inventory was 0.97.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Correlation between 5 Years Old Children's Self-esteem, Social Competence and 9 Years Old Children's Elementary School Adjustment

A correlation analysis was conducted for each variable set in this study. Among the self-esteem in the 5 years old children, cognitive ability was positively correlated with cooperation ( $r=0.13$ ) and adaptation to academic performance ( $r=0.148$ ) of social competence. Among the social competence in the 5 years old children, assertiveness was positively correlated with academic performance adaptation ( $r=0.204$ ) and teacher adaptation ( $r=0.193$ ). Cooperation was positively correlated with school life adaptation ( $r=0.401$ ), academic performance adaptation ( $r=0.269$ ), peer adaptation ( $r=0.349$ ), teacher adaptation ( $r=0.115$ ). Self-control showed a positive correlation with school life adaptation ( $r=0.289$ ), academic performance adaptation ( $r=0.292$ ), peer adaptation ( $r=0.308$ ), and teacher adaptation ( $r=0.200$ ). The specific correlation is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlation between self-esteem, social competence and school adjustment (N=510)**

The young children (5 years old children)					The elementary student (9 years old children)						
Self-esteem				Social competence			School adjustment				
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩		
①	1										
②	0.287***	1									
③	0.225***	0.170***	1								
④	0.139**	0.320***	0.215***	1							
⑤	0.095*	0.086	0.080	-0.022	1						
⑥	0.130**	0.054	0.078	-0.053	0.422***	1					
⑦	0.067	0.047	0.061	-0.018	0.631***	0.685***	1				
⑧	0.078	0.102*	-0.002	-0.022	0.061	0.401***	0.289***	1			
⑨	0.148**	0.101*	0.115**	0.008	0.204***	0.269***	0.292***	0.672***	1		
⑩	0.039	0.028	0.030	0.007	0.098*	0.349***	0.308***	0.730***	0.769***	1	
⑪	0.046	0.085	0.091*	0.004	0.193***	0.115**	0.200***	0.412***	0.698***	0.584***	1

① Cognitive ability, ② Peer adjustment, ③ Physical ability, ④ Mother acceptance, ⑤ Assertion, ⑥ Cooperation, ⑦ Self-control, ⑧ Adjustment to school life, ⑨ Academic performance, ⑩ Peer adjustment, ⑪ Teacher adjustment  
 \* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.01$ , \*\*\* $p<0.001$

**3.2. Effects of the 5 Years Old Children's Self-esteem and Social Competence on 9 Years Old Children's Elementary School Adjustment**

The predictive power of the 5 years old children's self-esteem and social competence for 9 years old children's elementary school adjustment was examined. For this, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed. In the first stage model, scores for each sub-factor of the 5 years old children's self-esteem were input. In the second stage model, a sense of social competence was added. The Durbin-Watson showed 1.892-1.976, close to 2. The VIF coefficient was 1.097-2.595, showing no multicollinearity problem.

The influence on school adjustment in elementary school was examined. In the first-stage model with self-esteem, adjustment to academic performance ( $F=4.397, p<0.01$ ) was significant. In the second stage model, the total score for adjustment to school ( $F=12.751, p<0.001$ ), adjustment to school life ( $F=17.441, p<0.001$ ), adjustment to academic performance ( $F=9.418, p<0.001$ ), adjustment to peers ( $F=9.418, p<0.001$ ) =12.226,

$p < 0.001$ ) and teacher adjustment ( $F = 4.436$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were all statistically significant. The self-esteem and social competence of the 5 years old children showed 15.1% of the explanatory power for the total score for school adjustment. By sub-factor, 19.6% of adjustment to school life, 11.6% of adjustment to academic performance, 14.6% of peer adjustment, and 5.8% of teacher adjustment were found.

When looking at the absolute value of  $\beta$ , it was found that cooperation ( $\beta = 0.235$ ,  $t = 4.113$ ) and self-control ( $\beta = 0.215$ ,  $t = 3.251$ ) of the young children's social competence affect the total score for school adjustment. Among the sub-factors, adjustment to school life was cooperative of social competence ( $\beta = 0.371$ ,  $t = 6.682$ ), assertion ( $\beta = -0.205$ ,  $t = -3.940$ ), and self-control ( $\beta = 0.159$ ,  $t = 2.471$ ). And peer acceptance of self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.108$ ,  $t = 2.241$ ) were found to have an influence. Adjustment to academic performance was found to be affected by self-control of social competence ( $\beta = 0.196$ ,  $t = 2.899$ ) and cognitive ability of self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.092$ ,  $t = 2.045$ ). Peer adjustment was influenced by social competence cooperativeness ( $\beta = 0.258$ ,  $t = 4.502$ ), self-control ( $\beta = 0.229$ ,  $t = 3.450$ ), and assertion ( $\beta = -0.156$ ,  $t = -2.921$ ). Also, It was found that only self-control ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $t = 2.361$ ) had an influence on teacher adjustment. The specific effects are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Effects of young children's self-esteem and social competence on elementary student's school adjustment (N=510)**

9 years old children's elementary school adjustment											
		Total score		Adjustment to school life		Academic performance		Peer adjustment		Teacher adjustment	
		$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$
<b>stage 1 model</b>											
	(constant)		7.941***		7.623***		5.094***		8.007***		7.616***
Self-esteem	Cognitive ability	0.073	1.560	0.060	1.273	0.115	2.479*	0.030	0.630	0.010	0.210
	Peer adjustment	0.082	1.704	0.108	2.241*	0.069	1.432	0.018	0.380	0.081	1.673
	Physical ability	0.043	0.931	-0.021	-0.450	0.088	1.915	0.022	0.476	0.084	1.805
	Mother acceptance	-0.049	-1.027	-0.061	-1.288	-0.049	-1.046	-0.007	-0.157	-0.041	-0.861
	$R^2$	0.018		0.017		0.034		0.002		0.015	
	$F$	2.307		2.197		4.397**		.292		1.887	
<b>stage 2 model</b>											
	(constant)		4.653***		4.423***		2.312'		4.882***		5.665***
Self-esteem	Cognitive ability	0.041	0.939	0.022	0.519	0.092	2.045*	-0.001	-0.027	0.001	0.019
	Peer adjustment	0.072	1.591	0.103	2.345*	0.055	1.203	0.011	0.251	0.069	1.449
	Physical ability	0.022	0.518	-0.040	-0.951	0.069	1.568	0.003	0.078	0.071	1.568
	Mother acceptance	-0.022	-0.499	-0.032	-0.739	-0.028	-0.620	0.017	0.393	-0.031	-0.655
Social Competence	Assertion	-0.095	-1.784	-0.205	-3.940***	0.016	0.291	-0.156	-2.921**	0.098	1.740
	Cooperation	0.235	4.113***	0.371	6.682***	0.106	1.827	0.258	4.502***	-0.051	-0.840
	Self-control	0.215	3.251**	0.159	2.471*	0.196	2.899**	0.229	3.450**	0.165	2.361*
	$R^2$	0.151		0.196		0.116		0.146		0.058	
	$\Delta R^2$	0.133		0.179		0.082		0.144		0.043	
	$F$	12.751***		17.441***		9.418***		12.226***		4.436***	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

#### 4. DEBATE

As a result of this study, peer acceptance among early childhood's self-esteem, assertion, cooperation, and self-control among social competence have influences on adjustment to elementary school life. The cognitive

ability of early childhood's self-esteem and self-control of social competence have a significant influence on the adjustment to elementary school performance. The assertion, cooperation, self-control of social competence have a significant influence on peer adjustment. Self-control of social competence has a significant influence on teacher adjustment. The results of this study are similar to studies that predict the effect of early childhood experiences on elementary school adjustment [11, 12], and studies that peer play behaviors have more influence on elementary school adjustment than in early childhood academic adjustment [13].

Young children's self-esteem is internally influenced by social intelligence, and externally, mother-rearing attitude, young children-teacher relationship, and peer relationship [14]. In young children's social competence, gender among internal factors and teacher-young children interaction and teaching efficacy among external factors affect children's social competence [15]. In order to promote young children's self-esteem and social competence, support measures that consider young children's social intelligence and gender are required. This is supported by the results that the emotional support of parents and homeroom teachers is important in the process of transitioning from kindergarten to elementary school students [16]. In addition, support for parents is needed to improve mothers' parenting attitude. In early childhood education institutions, teachers need to build positive relationships with young children and provide quality interactions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study is meaningful in that it is a longitudinal study conducted with a time difference for 3 years with the same subjects in order to investigate the influence of the inner factors of early childhood on school adjustment in elementary school. In this study, it was discovered that early childhood's self-esteem and social competence had a significant influence on elementary school adjustment. It is important for young children to feel social competence while forming a healthy sense of self-esteem and establishing social relationships with others through it. Young children's high self-esteem and social competence play an essential role in forming their own self and forming positive relationships with others. Furthermore, it helps young children to effectively adjust to school life, academic performance, peers, and teachers at the point of growth into elementary school students. Therefore, it is necessary for parents and teachers to provide rich interactions based on positive relationships with young children so that young children's self-esteem and social competence can be well formed. As a follow-up study, we propose the study on the long-term effects of more diverse factors in early childhood on the growth of later children.

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