Peer Acceptance of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Kindergarten Classrooms

Sevgi KÜÇÜKER*, Nesrin Işıkoğlu ERDOĞAN**, Çiğdem ÇÜRÜK*

Abstract

Peer acceptance is considered crucial to gain positive outcomes for young children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood education. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate peer acceptance of children with mild intellectual disabilities (ID) in inclusive kindergartens. Through a purposeful sampling technique, three children with ID and their 51 typically developing classmates were included in the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the classmates and the content was analyzed. Differences in peer acceptance were evident across three cases: one was socially accepted, one was socially rejected, and third was socially "controversial", that is, he was both accepted and rejected. While good social skills of children with ID were closely related to the peer acceptance, social skill deficits and problem behaviors were related to the peer rejection. Therefore, well-designed practices that promote social competence in inclusive early childhood classrooms are needed to enhance the social interactions and peer acceptance of young children with disabilities.

Key Words: *Peer acceptance, inclusion, kindergarten education, children with disabilities.*

Anasınıflarında Kaynaştırma Eğitimine Devam Eden Yetersizliği Olan Çocukların Akran Kabulü

Özet

Yetersizliği olan çocukların okulöncesi kaynaştırma eğitiminden olumlu kazanımlar elde edebilmelerinde akran kabulü oldukça önemlidir. Bu nitel çalışmanın amacı, okulöncesi kaynaştırma ortamlarındaki hafif zihinsel yetersizliğe (ZY) sahip çocukların akran kabulünü incelemektir. Çalışmaya, amaçlı örneklem yöntemiyle belirlenen ZY olan üç çocuk ile aynı sınıflardaki normal gelişim gösteren (NG) 51 çocuk katılmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla NG çocuklardan elde edilen veriler içerik analizi ile çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, ZY olan çocuklardan birisinin akranlarından kabul gördüğüne, birisinin reddedildiğine, diğerinin sosyal kabulünün ise "ihtilaflı" olduğuna, yani hem kabul hem de red gördüğüne işaret etmiştir. Bu çocuklarda sosyal becerilerin gelişmiş olması akran kabulüyle ilişkiliyken, sosyal beceri yetersizlikleri ve problem davranışlar ise akran reddiyle ilişkili görünmektedir. Çalışmanın bulguları, okulöncesi kaynaştırma sınıflarında akran ilişkilerini ve sosyal kabulü arttırmak üzere özel gereksinimli çocukların sosyal yeterliklerini geliştirmeye yönelik iyi düzenlenmiş programların gerekliliğini desteklemektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Akran kabulü, kaynaştırma, okulöncesi eğitim, yetersizliği olan çocuklar.*

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*Pamukkale Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Özel Eğitim Bölümü, Denizli
e-posta: skucuker@pau.edu.tr
**Pamukkale Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Okul Öncesi Anabilim Dalı, Denizli
e-posta: nisikoglu@pau.edu.tr
*Pamukkale Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Özel Eğitim Bölümü, Denizli
e-posta: ccuruk@pau.edu.tr

Introduction

There has been a trend towards inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood programs. An important reason for placing young children with disabilities in inclusive preschool settings is all children have the right to a life that is as normal as possible. Through early inclusion, young children with disabilities can experience quality early childhood education, become members of the classroom community through participation in class activities and develop positive social relationships with their typically developing (TD) peers (Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman & Kinnish, 1996; Odom, 2000; Odom & Diamond, 1998).

Inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular classrooms has been supported by arguments based on the potential social and emotional benefits for the child with a disability. The main ideas of these arguments assert that typically developing children act as models for children with disabilities of appropriate social skills and behaviors (Bricker, 2000). Inclusion also enhances the opportunity to engage in social interaction, important in itself, and that interaction may lead to social acceptance of children with disabilities by their classmates (Gottlieb, 1981; Odom et al., 2006; Roberts & Zubrick, 1992; Walker & Berthelsen, 2007). Children's social relationships have major influences on development and learning during the early childhood years. Hooper and Umansky (2008) suggest social relationships offer children the opportunities for enhanced cognitive and language development as well as social and emotional benefits. Rafferty, Piscitelli and Boettcher (2003) revealed children with severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms gained more language and social skills than their peers with disabilities in segregated classrooms. Current literature states early peer acceptance and social engagement with the peer group acts as a catalyst for the development of social competence. On the other hand, early peer rejection continues through the school years and has been considered a psychological risk factor for later behavioral and emotional problems in adulthood (Parker & Asher 1987; Roberts & Zubrick 1992).

Earlier studies have suggested that the success of early childhood inclusion practices heavily depends on peer acceptance of children with disabilities (Bricker, 1995). According to Ladd (2005), *social acceptance* refers to the generally positive appraisals of a child by his/her peers, usually in reference to playing or working together in classrooms or in playgroup settings whereas *social rejection* refers to the active exclusion of a child from peer group activity (Odom et al., 2006). The early childhood years are a foundation for social development in which children start to develop positive or negative attitudes towards people who are different (Diamond, Hestenes, Carpenter & Innes, 1997; Sigelman, Miller & Whitworth, 1986). In the majority of the studies, children with disabilities were less accepted as playmates than typically developing children (Bakkaloğlu, 2010; Baydık & Bakkaloğlu, 2009; Manetti, Schneider & Siperstein, 2001; Nabors & Keyes, 1997; Odom et al., 2006; Rotheram-Fuller, Kasari, Chamberlain & Locke, 2010; Vuran, 2005). Similarly, recent studies document that children with disabilities have fewer interactions with their classmates, experience difficulties in social participation, have significantly fewer friends than their typically developing peers and participate less often as members of a subgroup (Koster, Pijl, Nakken & Van Houten, 2010; Pijl, Frostad & Flem, 2008; Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010). Despite these findings, Buysse, Goldman and Skinner (2002) found that children with disabilities in inclusive child care programs were almost twice more likely to have at least one typical friend than were the children attending specialized programs. Additionally, socially accepted children with disabilities had at least one reciprocal friendship in inclusive settings (Walker & Berthelsen, 2007).

Developmental competencies/skills of children are considered as an important factor in peer acceptance or rejection. Moreover, peer acceptance was significantly associated with children's social communication abilities (Laws et al., 2012) and personal-social skills (Ummanel, 2007). Odom et al. (2006) revealed that socially accepted children tended to have disabilities that were less likely to affect social problem solving and emotional regulation,

whereas children who were socially rejected had disabilities that were more likely to affect such skills and developmental capabilities. In the same study, social awareness and interest in peers, communication and play skills of children with disabilities were appeared to be associated strongly with social acceptance. On the other hand, deficiency in communication skills, social withdrawal, and aggression appeared to be characteristics associated strongly with social rejection.

The early childhood years are considered to be an important period for developing peer relations and friendships, and thus these relationships affect developmental areas including socialization of aggression, development of prosocial behaviors, and formation of self-concepts (for a review, see Guralnick, 2006). In contrast, the social rejection resulting from behavioral problems of children (Ummanel, 2007) may lead to an increase in the occurrence of social-emotional difficulties later in life (Parker & Asher 1987). In the light of these findings, facilitating peer acceptance for young children with disabilities is crucial in order to obtain positive developmental outcomes from early childhood programs.

Recently, public education institutions have taken the matter of early inclusion highly into consideration in Turkey. Although according to the Act 573 of the Special Education Law legislated in 1997, preschool education is legally mandatory for all children with developmental disabilities between the ages of 3 to 6; today only a minority of these children in Turkey can benefit from these programs (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People, 2006). In spite of positive efforts to expand inclusive early childhood practices, both the quantity and quality of these services need to be improved. Physical inclusion of children with disabilities is merely a basic requirement and it is less likely to provide social acceptance without any further interventions. Research studies have highlighted children with disabilities also need extra support in participating in inclusive classrooms (Pijl et al., 2008).

Several recent studies have examined the social status of children with disabilities in Turkey.

Some of these studies included elementary school children (e.g., Bakkaloğlu 2010; Baydık & Bakkaloğlu, 2009; Vuran, 2005) and others involved high school students (Akçamete & Ceber, 1999). Other research studies in this area predominantly focus on the views and perceptions of parents and teachers about inclusive early childhood education (Akalın, Demir, Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu & İşcen, 2014; Küçüker, Acarlar & Kapci, 2006; Özbaba, 2000; Yavuz, 2005; Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir & Akalın, 2013) and the self-efficacy of kindergarten teachers in inclusive early childhood programs (Kaya, 2005). Studies examining peer relations and social status of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings are limited (Çulhaoğlu, 2009; Metin, 1989). Therefore, additional studies on peer acceptance and the factors that are likely to affect peer social acceptance and social rejection of children with disabilities would help in planning interventions that can enhance the developmental benefits for these children in early childhood educational settings. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine peer acceptance of three young children with mild ID in three inclusive kindergarten classrooms. Peer acceptance or rejection will also be examined regarding the developmental and behavioral characteristics of these young children with ID.

Methodology

Research design

As a way of gaining an in-depth understanding of peer acceptance of these three young children, all boys with mild ID, the qualitative case study method was chosen (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Three inclusive public kindergarten classrooms were included as cases. Through semi-structured interviews with the focal children's classmates, the peer acceptance of kindergarten boys with ID was investigated qualitatively.

Participants and settings

Using the purposeful sampling technique, three boys who were attending half-day kindergarten programs in three separate public schools in Denizli were identified as focal children. All three boys had been diagnosed as having mild intellectual

disabilities. A total of 51 (30 girls and 21 boys) typically developing (TD) peers with an age range from 60 to 73 months (Mean=66.8 months, SD=4.49) were included in the study. Permission for participation was obtained from the school principals, the classroom teachers, and the parents. The 5- to 6-year-old classmates gave their assent to be interviewed. The names of the focal children have been changed in this report. The first focal child, named Efe, was 7 years old. He had been attending an inclusive public kindergarten classroom located in a socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Along with Efe, 16 TD children, a teacher and a teacher's aide were in the classroom. The second focal child, named Ahmet, was 6 years old. Nineteen TD children, a teacher and a teacher's aide were in his kindergarten classroom located in a disadvantaged neighborhood. The third focal child, named Can, was also 6 years old. He had been attending an inclusive public kindergarten classroom located in a middle socio-economic neighborhood. In his classroom, there were 16 TD children, a teacher and a teacher's aide. All participant typically developing children were verbally able to express their views during the interviews.

Data collection

In research related to peer acceptance of children with disabilities, sociometric peer ratings or peer nomitations are frequently used tools in which researchers generally conduct individual interviews with young children (see, Yu, Ostrosky, Fowler, 2012 for a review). Measuring social status with peer rating assessment is found to be an appropriate way for preschool children (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, and Hymel,1979; Kapçı & Çorbacı-Oruç, 2003; Şendil & Erden, 2014). Adapting from previous studies, the semi-structured interviews with TD children were conducted individually in this study. In order to collect in-depth qualitative data about focal child, we included following questions: (1) Do you play with him/her? (2) (If s/he plays with him/her) which games do you play together? (3) (If not) why don't you play with him/her? (4) What are the things you like about him/her? (5) What are the things you dislike about him/her? During the interview children were allowed to talk freely; additional questions

were posed by the interviewer as a means of clarifying and expanding upon the responses given by the children.

The typical sit-down research interview is difficult to conduct with preschool children, so that we adopted Graue & Walsh's (1998) a pretend play format. In this child friendly interview format, the interviwer tells children they will play a game. As a part of the game, each child was told he/she was a guest in a television show and the host would ask questions about his/her school and friends. The interviews were conducted individually at the end of the school year so all the children had a whole year to get familiar with the setting, peers and teachers. Before the data collection, the research assistant was trained about conducting qualitative interviews with children. Prior to beginning the interviews, the classroom teacher introduced the research assistant to the children; she participated in a free play session and spent approximately half an hour with all the children together in order for children to get acquainted with her. In order to make children comfortable, each child was interviewed individually in a quiet area away from their classmates. For the interviews, a desk, two chairs, a video camera, and photos of children in the classroom were used at each school. The research assistant and the child sat down at a desk facing one another. Each child was first asked for his/her name and age. Then as a part of these introductory questions, each one was presented with several photos that include all of his/her classmates and asked who s/he chooses to play with, and what kinds of games they play together. After that the research assistant said "I am going to close my eyes and select a picture and ask questions about your friend." In order to be sensitive toward focal child, the research assistant randomly selected the focal child's photo among other photos and asked the research questions. Likewise, the focal child was invited to play the game which is mentioned above just to prevent any exclusion, but this time only introductory questions were asked. Each interview lasted approximately about from 10 to 15 minutes and in the end of the session, the research assistant expressed her gratitude towards the child for participating in this television show. The participant children were able to understand and answer to the research

questions. The interviews with classmates were videotaped and transcribed for later analysis.

Data analysis

Content analysis techniques were used to analyze the transcripts of the videotaped interviews. Content analysis appeared to be the most appropriate technique to illuminate shared meanings across participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). Each child's interview responses were read and coded, independently, by two researchers. Afterward, the researchers developed categories for emerging themes and specific descriptors. They compared their thematic codes and descriptive categories to revise them and then resolved any differences. After this discussion, themes and descriptive categories were determined and the data for the three cases were summarized. Thematic categories for each case included: (1) Play, (2) Play type, and (3) Reasons for not playing. (4) Things that they like about the focal child, and (5) Things that they dislike about the focal child. Themes, descriptive categories and definitions are shown on Table 1.

Table 1. Themes, categories and definitions

Themes	Descriptive Categories	Definitions
Play	Playing	Child reports s/he plays with the focal child.
	Not playing	Child reports s/he do not play with him/her.
	Sometimes playing	Child states s/he sometimes play with the focal child.
Play type	Dramatic play	Child names play activities such as *'house keeping'*, *'pretending'*
	Physical play	Child names play activities such as *'running', 'chasing'* and *'hide and seek'*
	Preschool activities	Child names preschool activities such as *'play dough', 'drawing'* and *'singing'*
Reasons for not playing	Problem behaviors	Child states the focal child's aggressive, hurtful and disruptive behaviors such as *'hitting', 'fighting'* and *'ruining play or drawing', 'shouting'; 'cursing'* is a problem.
	Developmental skill deficits	Child comments about focal child's cognitive, communicative and social skill deficits such as *'He does not understand what we say.', 'He cannot speak a lot.', 'We do not understand what he says.', 'He does not share his toys.'*
	Others	Child comments on individual characteristics such as *'He does not play with girls.', 'He plays with guns.'*
Things that they like about the focal child	Social skills	Child comments about focal child's social skills such as *"When he asks for permission", When he behaves nicely, when he shares his toys with me, "When he helps me"*
Things that they dislike about the focal child	Problem behaviors	Child states the focal child's aggressive, hurtful and disruptive behaviors such as *"He behaves badly to his friends, and he hits Ayşe's head", "When he ruins our play", "When he swears"*
	Developmental skill deficits	Child comments about focal child's cognitive, communicative and social skill deficits such as *"When he does not play with me". "He takes my pencil box without my permission" "He asks strange questions. He does not understand what I say."*

Findings

In this study peer social acceptance of three young children with ID are described qualitatively and compared in terms of the factors that appear to contribute to their peer acceptance or rejection.

Efe

Most of the children's responses to questions about the nature of play with the focal child Efe were largely negative. A substantial proportion of the children (62.5 %) responded to "Do you play with Efe" with "I do not play." Only 4 children stated they played together and 2 children said they sometimes played together. The 6 children who played with Efe reported dramatic play (50%) such as "housekeeping" and "driving" were the most frequent way they played together. Beside dramatic play, the children also mentioned playing "hide and seek" and "running and chasing." The frequencies and percentages of children's responses related to Efe were presented on Table 2.

Table 2. Peers' responses to questions about Efe

Themes	Categories	n	%
Play	Yes	4	25
	No	10	62.5
	Sometimes	2	12.5
	Total	16	100
Play type	Dramatic play	4	50
	Physical play	3	37.5
	Preschool activities	1	12.5
	Total	8*	100
Reasons for not playing	Problem behaviors	6	60
	Developmental skills	2	20
	Others	2	20
	Total	10	100

* Some children's responses coded into more than one category.

The children who did not play with Efe were also asked about their reasons for not playing with him. A large proportion of their responses (60%) mentioned Efe's problem behaviors. They talked about how he had physically hurt them during play. e.g. *"He always squeezes my arm. It hurts. One time, we were solders [and] he squeezed my arm and [a] fight began.", "Umm… Because, I don't like him. He hit my back.", "He ruined my drawing."*

As it is indicated in the comments above, Efe had displayed aggressive, hurtful and disruptive behaviors during the past year. Another commentary for not playing with him was related to his developmental skill deficits (social or cognitive). e.g. *"When we play, he does not understand what we say." , "When we play together, he won't do what I say.", "We want to include him but he just doesn't want to."*

Classmates were asked about the things they liked about Efe. Some children responded to this question with *"none",* or *"I don't know"*, while others responded with *"when he asks for permission", "when he share things such as his book", "when he helps me",* or *"when he*

does what I tell him to do". His classmates were also asked about the things they did not like about him. Their responses mainly indicated his problem behaviors. e.g. *"He takes my pencil box without my permission", "He behaves badly to his friends, and he hits Ayşe's head", "When he ruins our play", "When he swears".* As it can be seen above, his peers frequently mentioned some aggressive, hurtful or disruptive behaviors of his. Some children addressed Efe's social skill deficits by saying *"He won't do what I say."* or *"When he does not play with me".* Consequently, the children's responses indicated a considerable proportion of them (62.5%) chose not to play with him and

mentioned mostly negative statements about him. Given all of these findings it can be interpreted that he is mainly rejected by his peers.

Ahmet

Most of the children's responses to questions about the nature of play with focal child Ahmet included positive statements. A majority of the children in his class (57.9%) stated they played together and 26.3% of the children indicated they sometimes played together. In contrast, only three children (15.8 %) reported they did not play with him. The children's responses were shown on Table 3.

Table 3. Peers' responses to questions about Ahmet

Themes	Categories	n	%
Play	Yes	11	57.9
	No	3	15.8
	Sometimes	5	26.3
	Total	19	100
Play type	Dramatic play	4	22.2
	Physical play	8	44.4
	Preschool activities	6	33.3
	Total	18*	100
Reasons for not playing	Problem behaviors	1	33.3
	Developmental skills	1	33.3
	Others	1	33.3
	Total	3	100

* Some children's responses coded into more than one category.

The ones who stated they played together were asked about the type of play; nearly half of their responses (44.4 %) were related to physical play, including "hide and seek", "gun play" and "chasing." Doing preschool activities together and dramatic play were also reported by his classmates. Each child who was reluctant to play with Ahmet reported different reasons. One child mentioned his problem behaviors (*"He ruins our play"*), another mentioned his developmental skills (*"We want him play with us, but he cannot speak a lot"*, *"When he comes to play we do not understand what he says"*), and the last one gave an irrelevant response (*"I don't feel like it."*).

Peers' responses related to things they liked about Ahmet focused on his helpful and supportive behaviors. Most of his peers' answers included positive comments about him. e.g. *"He does favors for me.",* "*…For example, when he helps me. When I built a house, he helped me.",* "*When he behaves nicely, when he shares his toys with me and when he does not fight with me."* Some children stated they liked him because of his sense of humor. e.g. *"He makes us laugh.", "He says funny things.", "When he makes funny things I like him".* Along with those positive behaviors, a few unlikeable behaviors about him were expressed by his peers such as, *"He plays with*

guns." or *"He teases me.".* Taken as a whole, he frequently received positive comments from his peers. These comments can be considered as an evidence of his good social skills such as sharing, helping and playing, which may facilitate his social interactions with peers. In light of the children's responses, it is possible to say that he was socially accepted by his classmates.

Can

The children's responses to questions about the nature of play with focal child Can were both positive and negative. When Can's classmates were asked if they played together, half of the children reported they played together, less than half (43.8%) reported they did not play with him, and one child said they sometimes played together. The children's responses were shown on Table 4.

Table 4. Peers' responses to questions about Can

Themes	Categories	n	%
Play	Yes	8	50
	No	7	43.8
	Sometimes	1	6.3
	Total	16	100
Play type	Dramatic play	1	11.1
	Physical play	5	55.6
	Preschool activities	3	33.3
	Total	9	100
Reasons for not playing	Problem behaviors	2	28.6
	Developmental skills	3	42.9
	Others	2	28.6
	Total	7	100

For those children who played with Can, the largest proportion (55.6 %) indicated they engaged in physical play such as "hide and seek", "chasing" and "running around." Additionally, several children (33.3%) pointed out preschool activities as things they did together. When the children who were unwilling to play with him were asked about the reasons, two children pointed out his problem behaviors, such as *"He hits everybody"* and *"He teases us".* Three children mentioned his developmental skill (especially cognitive) deficits, e.g. *"I do not play with him, because he is a little bit crazy. He does not understand anything."* For those children who did not play with him, two children's responses were coded in the "others" category (*"Umm. I do not go near him and he does not come near me", "He does not want to play with girls"*).

Although some of Can's classmates expressed their concerns of his problem behaviors, and his cognitive and social skill deficits, they still reported likeable things about him such as his sense of humor and his play skills. e.g. *"I like his funniness", "He says funny things and makes me laugh", "He plays with me", "Everything. He plays with me".* His peers were also asked about the things they disliked about him. The majority of the children mentioned his problem behaviors such as, *"He treats me badly and hits us."* and *"He hits his friends."* Additionally, some of the children's responses were related to his developmental (especially cognitive) skills deficits. For example: *"He asks strange questions. He does not understand what I say.", "He does not do anything well enough."* Repetitions of both positive and negative comments about Can suggested he

would be considered to be a sociometrically "controversial" child. The frequency of comments about his problem behaviors and his developmental skills deficits may be considered as the main factors affecting his variable social acceptance by his peers.

Comparisons of cases

Peer acceptance of children with disabilities has a major influence on obtaining positive outcomes from inclusive education. Examination of three young children with ID in inclusive preschool classrooms indicated three different peer acceptance patterns. Among these three children, only Ahmet was considered as a regular playmate by his peers. Additionally, close examination of his peers' responses mentioned his positive social skills such as helping and sharing. Along with these likeable attributes, his lack of problem behaviors contributed positively on Ahmet's acceptance by his classmates. In contrast, Efe was seen as rejected by his peers and they rarely chose him as a playmate. His classmates frequently mentioned his problem behaviors and social skills deficits when asked why they did not choose him. Examination of peers' responses about the third focal child, Can, indicated he was a "controversial" child. In his case, half of his peers reported him as a playmate, whereas, others did not choose to play with him. As reasons for not playing with him, his peers mentioned his developmental skills deficits more frequently than his problem behaviors.

Comparison of these three boys indicated socially accepted children had common characteristics. In the present study, these were positive social skills such as sharing, helping and playing, which may facilitated peers' social interactions; fewer problem behaviors may also contributed positively to interactions with classmates. Ahmet, the socially accepted child, and Can, the controversial child, shared characteristics of having good social skills and fewer problem behaviors. On the other hand, Efe's problem behaviors such as being aggressive, hurtful and disruptive may be associated with his rejection by classmates. Across these three cases, the children's play types were found to be similar. In these inclusive early childhood classrooms, typically developing children frequently reported playing physical games with both the socially accepted and rejected boys.

Discussion

This study investigating peer acceptance of three young boys with mild ID in inclusive kindergarten classrooms revealed each child experienced different patterns of social acceptance by his own classmates. The study has indicated that one of them was an "accepted" child, another was "rejected" child and the third was a "controversial" child with a mixed acceptance pattern. Consistent with the Odom et al. (2006) finding that a substantial proportion of children with disabilities may be well accepted and at least an equal proportion of children with disabilities may be at risk for social rejection in inclusive settings, this study has shown these three focal children in three different inclusive kindergartens encountered both social acceptance and rejection by peers. The results of Dyson's (2005) study indicated only half of children with typical development reported having friends who have disabilities. Similarly, Walker and Berthelsen (2007) revealed socially accepted children with disabilities had at least one reciprocal friendship in inclusive settings. On the other hand, results of some comparative studies showed children with disabilities, even children with mild disabilities were less accepted as playmates than typically developing children (Guralnick et al., 1996; Odom & Diamond, 1998). Research indicated children with disabilities have lower level of social interaction skills and they exhibit more problem behaviors than typically developing peers (Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Sucuoglu & Ozokcu 2005; Roberts & Zubrick, 1992). These children's lower levels of peer acceptance may be related to their inability to socially interact or to enter peer groups during play (Guralnic & Groom, 1987). Studies have also indicated these children mostly prefer solitary play and thus they are unable to use appropriate problem solving strategies when they are faced with a conflict among their peers (for a review, see Guralnick et al., 2006).

Our case study revealed socially accepted child had better social skills than the other two children with ID. Peers' responses about him mentioned frequent occurrences of his

positive social skills such as sharing, helping, and playing with his classmates. In accordance with the literature, close friendship, pretended play skills, social skills and communication skills all contribute to social acceptance (Odom et al., 2006). Gresham and Reschly (1987) reported socially accepted children tend to have positive social skills whereas children who were socially rejected tend to exhibit lower levels of such skills. These findings imply having good social skills are closely related to peer acceptance of children with disabilities.

Along with the contribution of positive social interaction skills to peer acceptance, the role of problem behaviors in social rejection was demonstrated in the findings of our three cases. Peers' responses about the rejected child, Efe, included frequent comments about his aggressive, disruptive and hurtful behaviors. These results are consistent with previous studies which found that emotional and behavioral problems of children were related to peer rejection, and that physically aggressive and disruptive behaviors in class were characteristics shared by socially rejected children (Baydık & Bakkaloğlu, 2009; Odom et al., 2006; Ummanel, 2007). Guralnick (2006) stated behavior problems identified in young children with intellectual delays represent emotion-regulation deficits that are associated with difficulties in organizing adaptive behavior patterns towards their peers and preventing these children from contributing efficiently to their social environment and reducing social isolation.

The present case study contributes to the literature which indicates better social skills and fewer problem behaviors are among the characteristics of socially accepted children with disabilities. Therefore, it can be said that enhancing social skills of children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood classrooms is highly crucial. Well-designed inclusive practices can promote peer-related social competence and social interactions of young children with disabilities (Brown, Odom, Li & Zercher, 1999; Dyson, 2005; Jenkins, Odom & Speltz, 1989; Çolak, Vuran & Uzuner, 2013). Research shows that children with disabilities are not automatically accepted by their peers unless teachers support their acceptance (Favazza, 1998). Thus, it can be said

that preschool teachers working in inclusive settings should be aware of the level of social competence in these children and help them gain better social skills for interacting with their peers. Since social skills deficits is found to be related with exhibiting more problem behaviors (Guralnic, Hammond ve Connor, 2003), improving children's such deficits may play a critical role in reducing the occurance of problem behaviors. In order to gain positive outcomes for children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, providing special education services, adapting the curriculum and instructional strategies according to children with disabilities, and creating appropriate learning environment for children with and without disabilities are considered to be crucial. Preschool teachers play a key role in implementing successful inclusive practices thus it is expected that they should have the knowledge, skills, experiences and supports in order to meet needs of children with disabilities (Akalın, Demir, Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu & İşcen, 2014). However, research studies indicated that preschool teachers in Turkey do not have adequate qualification for implementing effective inclusive practices (Kaya, 2005; Küçüker, Acarlar & Kapci, 2006; Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir & Akalın, 2013). This study investigates the topic of social acceptance in terms of developmental characteristics of children with disabilities; therefore further research should include examining the relation to other aspects of this phenomenon such as teachers' level of knowledge and skills in implementing effective inclusive education regarding the learning environment factors that are mentioned above.

This case study has presented qualitative findings that may advance understandings about the social acceptance of children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood classrooms. Rather than contributing to quantitative findings, our purpose was to provide case-based evidence regarding explorations of classmates' responses to particular individuals (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). From our three cases, we expect that the reader will see the similarities and differences and transfer relevant information to his/her practice, policy or research. This study investigated only young

boys with mild ID. It remains for future studies to examine other type of disabilities in more detail, and the impact on social acceptance of those disabilities in young girls. Due to source and time limitations, we were only able to conduct interviews with classmates about the focal child in each of their classrooms. In addition, future studies should include classroom play observations to collect rich and detailed information related to social interactions and social status of children with and without disabilities. Sociometric measures are advantageous in a way that they are peer reports, and they provide information about a child's social status from the viewpoint of their peers (Walker & Berthelsen 2007, p.12). However, peer acceptance, or lack thereof, in young children with disabilities could also be confirmed by teacher reports and classroom observations of these children's social interactions with their typically developing peers in future studies.

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Geniş Özet

Giriş

Yetersizliği olan çocukların okulöncesi kaynaştırma eğitiminden olumlu kazanımlar elde edebilmelerinde akran kabulü oldukça önemlidir. Bu dönemdeki arkadaşlık ilişkileri ve akran kabulü çocukların sosyal yeterliklerinin gelişmesinde önemli bir rol oynarken, sosyal red görme ise kısa ve uzun dönemde psiko-sosyal uyum açısından risk oluşturmaktadır. Kaynaştırma ortamlarında yetersizliği olan çocukların normal gelişim gösteren yaşıtlarına göre akran ilişkilerinde daha fazla güçlük ve sosyal red yaşayabildikleri; sosyal beceri yetersizlikleri ve problem davranışların akran kabulüyle yakından ilişkili olduğu görülmektedir.

Türkiye'de okulöncesi kaynaştırmaya ilişkin yasal düzenlemeler olmasına karşın, uygulamada hem nicelik hem de nitelik açısından hala önemli eksiklikler bulunmaktadır. Normal gelişim gösteren akranlarıyla yalnızca fiziksel olarak aynı ortamda olmaları bu çocukların sosyal kabulünü sağlamamakta, bunun için daha iyi planlanmış uygulamalara gereksinim bulunmaktadır. Okulönesi kaynaştırma ortamlarında yetersizliği olan çocukların akran ilişkilerinin incelenmesi, kaynaştırmadan olumlu sonuçların elde edilmesine yardımcı olacak müdahalelere yol göstermesi açısından önemli görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu çalışmada, okulöncesi kaynaştırma ortamlarındaki hafif zihinsel yetersizliğe (ZY) sahip çocukların akran kabulünün ve bununla ilişki olabilen çocuğa ilişkin özelliklerin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem

Zihinsel yetersizliği olan çocukların okulöncesi kaynaştırma ortamlarında sosyal kabulünü incelemeyi amaçlayan bu nitel araştırmada durum çalışması tekniği kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya amaçlı örneklem yöntemiyle, Denizli'de üç ayrı anasınıfına devam eden zihinsel yetersizliğe sahip üç çocuk ile bu sınıflardaki normal gelişim gösteren (NG) 51 çocuk katılmıştır. Araştırma verileri, NG çocuklarla yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve içerik analizi ile çözümlenmiştir. Analiz sürecinde, görüşmelere ilişkin video kayıtlarının dökümü yapılmış, bu dökümler iki araştırmacı tarafından birbirinden bağımsız olarak kodlanmış ve anlamlı (betimleyici) kategoriler oluşturulmuştur. Çalışma bulguları rapor edilirken zihinsel yetersizliği olan çocukların isimleri değiştirilmiştir.

Bulgular

Çalışmanın sonuçları, okulöncesi kaynaştırma sınıflarına devam eden hafif zihinsel yetersizliğe sahip üç çocuğun akran grubu içindeki kabullerinin farklı olduğunu göstermiştir. Efe ile oynayıp oynamadıkları sorulduğunda, sınıftaki çocukların çoğunluğu onunla oynamadıklarını belirtmişler, bunun nedeni sorulduğunda ise sıklıkla Efe'nin problem davranışlarını ve sosyal beceri yetersizliklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Efe ile ilgili nelerden hoşlandıkları sorusuna çocukların çoğu "hiçbirşey" derken, onunla ilgili nelerden hoşlanmadıkları sorulduğunda ise büyük bir kısmı problem davranışlarını belirtmişlerdir. Efe ile ilgili sorulara akranların verdikleri yanıtlar birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, Efe'nin

sınıf içinde sosyal kabul görmediği söylenebilir. Ahmet'le ilgili sorulara sınıf arkadaşlarının verdikleri yanıtlar incelendiğinde ise, çocukların çoğunun Ahmet'le oyun oynadıkları, onunla ilgili nelerden hoşlandıkları sorulduğunda, sıklıkla olumlu sosyal etkileşim davranışlarını belirttikleri, sadece birkaçının Ahmet'le ilgili hoşlanmadığı davranışları dile getirdiği görülmektedir. Sınıf arkadaşlarının yanıtları bir bütün olarak değerlendirildiğinde, Ahmet'in akranlarından sosyal kabul gördüğü söylenebilir. Can ile ilgili olarak elde edilen bulgulara bakıldığında ise, sınıftaki çocukların yaklaşık yarısı Can ile oynadıklarını, yarısı ise oynamadıklarını belirtmiştir. Can'la oynamayan çocuklara bunun nedeni sorulduğunda, çoğunluğu onun gelişimsel (özellikle bilişsel) yetersizliklerini dile getirirken, çocukların daha azı problem davranışlarından söz etmiştir. Can'la ilgili nelerden hoşlandıkları sorusuna ilişkin olarak çocuklar sıklıkla Can'ın oyun oynama, komiklik yapma gibi sosyal becerilerini belirtirken, onunla ilgili nelerden hoşlanmadıkları sorusuna çoğunluğu onun problem davranışlarını, bazıları ise gelişimsel beceri yetersizliklerini dile getirmiştir. Sınıf arkadaşlarının görüşme sorularına verdikleri yanıtlar birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, Can'ın akran grubu içindeki kabulünün "ihtilaflı" olduğu, yani birbirine yakın biçimde çocukların bir kısmından kabul görürken, bir kısmı tarafından dışlandığı söylenebilir.

Tartışma

Bu çalışmada, okul öncesi kaynaştırma sınıflarında akranlarla ilişkileri ve sosyal kabulü incelenen zihinsel yetersizliğe sahip üç çocuktan birisinin akranlarından kabul gördüğü, birisinin red gördüğü, diğerinin ise hem kabul hem de red gördüğü belirlenmiştir. Kabul gören çocuğa ilişkin olarak sınıf arkadaşları paylaşma, oyun oynama ve yardım etme gibi olumlu sosyal davranışları sıklıkla belirtirken, red gören çocukla ilgili olarak sınıf arkadaşları sıklıkla fiziksel zarar verme, oyun bozma gibi problem davranışlarını ve sosyal beceri yetersizliklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Hem kabul hem de red gören çocukla ilgili olarak ise akranları bir yandan olumlu sosyal davranışları belirtirken, diğer taraftan da gelişimsel yetersizlikleri ve problem davranışları ifade etmişlerdir. Alanyazınla tutarlı olan bu bulgular, kaynaştırma ortamlarında sosyal kabulü arttırmak üzere yetersizliği olan çocuklarda sosyal becerilerin geliştirilmesi ve problem davranışların azaltılmasına yönelik etkili müdahalelerin gerekliliğini desteklemektedir. Bu çalışmada yetersizliği olan çocukların akran kabulü, bu çocukların gelişimsel ve davranışsal özellikleri temelinde incelenmiştir. İleride yapılacak çalışmalarda, etkili kaynaştırma uygulamaları için önemli görülen, yetersizliği olan çocuğa sağlanan destek hizmetler, programın çocuğun gereksinimlerine göre uyarlanması, uygun öğrenme ortamının yaratılması ve öğretmenlerin bu uygulamaları yürütmeye yönelik yeterlikleri gibi ortamsal faktörlerin yetersizliği olan çocukların sosyal kabulündeki etkisi incelenebilir.