

Therapy and Rehabilitation Students' Opinions on the Dance Event with Disabilities and Disabled Individuals: No Barrier to Dance!

Engellilik ve Engelliler ile Dans Etkinliği Hakkında Terapi ve Rehabilitasyon Bölümü Öğrencilerinin Görüşleri: Dansa Engel Yok!

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to identify the views of students in the Department of Therapy and Rehabilitation regarding the concept of disability and, after participating in a dance event with individuals with disabilities, to reveal the students' perspectives on these individuals and to determine the benefits gained through the event. The study group for the research consists of 12 students from the Therapy and Rehabilitation Department of the School of Health Services at Bandırma Onyediy Eylül University. The research employed a case study design, a qualitative research method. Data were collected in two stages, before and after the activity, using the semi-structured interview technique, a qualitative research method. The MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program was used for data analysis. Based on the results obtained from the first part of the research, three main themes were identified: "Disability," "Problems Experienced in Society," and "Benefits of Spending Time Together." In the second part of the research, three main themes were identified based on the results: "Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life", "Gains Achieved After the Activity" and "Creating Disability Awareness". According to the research findings, university students perceive individuals with disabilities as living restricted lives, being excluded by society, and feeling isolated. The students who participated in the research stated that spending time with individuals with disabilities and participating in activities revealed that individuals with disabilities are not fundamentally different from themselves and that spending time with them provided many benefits.

Keywords: Perceptions of disability, Dance with disabilities, Student attitudes, Disability challenges, Student gains

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı Terapi ve Rehabilitasyon bölümü öğrencilerinin engellilik kavramına ilişkin görüşlerini tespit etmek ve engelli bireylerle gerçekleştirilen dans etkinliği sonrasında öğrencilerin engelli bireylere yönelik bakış açılarını ortaya koyarak etkinlik sayesinde elde edilen kazanımları belirlemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Bandırma Onyediy Eylül Üniversitesi Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu Terapi ve Rehabilitasyon bölümünde öğrenim gören 12 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden örnek olay deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırma kapsamında veriler, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği ile etkinlik öncesinde ve sonrasında iki aşamalı olarak toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizi için MAXQDA nitel veri analiz programı kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın ilk bölümünde elde edilen sonuçlara göre "Engellilik", "Toplum İçinde Yaşanan Sorunlar" ve "Birlikte Zaman Geçirmenin Kazanımları" olmak üzere üç ana tema oluşturulmuştur. Araştırmanın ikinci bölümünde elde edilen sonuçlara göre ise "Engelli Bireylerin Sosyal Hayatta Yaşadıkları Problemler", "Etkinlik Sonrası Elde Edilen Kazanımlar" ve "Engelli Farkındalığı Oluşturma" olmak üzere 3 ana tema oluşturulmuştur. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, üniversite öğrencileri gözünden engelli bireyler kısıtlanmış bir yaşam süren, toplum tarafından dışlanmış, yalnızlaştırılmış bireylerdir. Araştırmaya katılan öğrenciler engelli bireyler ile birlikte vakit geçirdiklerinde ve bir etkinlik içerisinde yer aldıklarında ise engellilerin aslında kendilerinden farklı olmadıklarını ve engelliler ile birlikte zaman geçirmenin kendilerine birçok kazanım sağladığını belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Engellilik algısı, Engellilerle dans, Öğrenci tutumları, Engellilik ile ilgili zorluklar, Öğrenci kazanımları

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* This study was produced from the project titled "No Barrier to Dance" which was approved by the Social Responsibility and Volunteering Coordination Office of Bandırma Onyediy Eylül University.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the disability report published by the World Health Organization (WHO), one in every six people has a disability (WHO, 2023). It is estimated that the population of people with disabilities worldwide exceeds 1 billion and a significant number of individuals with disabilities live with different types of impairments. This constitutes approximately 15% of the world's population (OHT, 2024).

Disability is defined as the restriction or inability to perform roles expected of individuals due to a deficiency or impairment, depending on gender, age, cultural and social factors (WHO, 1980). According to the definition by the United Nations, disability is described as a reduction or limitation in opportunities for equal participation in life (Kolat, 2010).

In the "Turkey Disabled Persons Survey" conducted in 2002 by the Prime Ministry State Institute of Statistics and the Turkish Administration for Disabled People, disability is examined under six main categories: orthopedic disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, speech and language impairments, mental disabilities, and chronic illnesses. In the "Disabled and Elderly Statistics Bulletin" published in 2022, additional categories were included: mental and emotional disabilities and other disabilities. Regardless of the diagnosis, disability is a condition that can cause individuals to feel isolated and excluded from social life or experience limitations in their lives (Apaydın & Barış, 2021). In this context, disability can be described as a social phenomenon beyond the physical and health-related issues experienced by individuals (Gedik & Toker, 2018).

Individuals with disabilities face many negative situations that hinder social inclusion within society. The negative attitudes exhibited towards individuals with disabilities significantly affect their lives (Altunhan et al., 2021). The problems experienced by individuals with disabilities within society stem not from a deficiency in their bodies, but from social isolation and societal pressure (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). In this context, it is necessary to change negative attitudes to ensure that individuals with disabilities are not marginalized by society and to facilitate their social adaptation.

The exclusion of individuals with disabilities from social life leads to both physical and psychological problems. Considering the positive effects of socializing and participating in various recreational activities on individuals, it is known that people with disabilities often miss out on these benefits (Saripek & Demir-Saripek, 2023). The WHO (2001) classification of disability indicates that any pathological condition observed in individuals can lead to impairment or activity limitations, resulting in reduced participation in activities. Therefore, it is

emphasized that the focus should be on activity participation rather than disability itself (İnal, 2007).

Individuals with disabilities frequently visit healthcare institutions and interact with healthcare professionals due to various health problems (Çömez & Altan-Sarıkaya, 2017). Çalbayram et al. (2018) emphasized in their study that healthcare personnel are the most frequent caregivers and interactors with individuals with disabilities. Therefore, they highlight the need to first investigate how students in health-related fields interpret disability in order to change societal perspectives on disability.

This research was developed considering the limited participation of individuals with disabilities in activities and the fact that students in the Therapy and Rehabilitation Department will be future healthcare professionals. In this context, the main purpose of this research is to identify the views of students in the Department of Therapy and Rehabilitation regarding the concept of disability and, after participating in a dance event with disabled individuals, to reveal the students' perspectives on these individuals and to determine the benefits gained through the event.

In addition, this research aimed to address the following questions:

- 1) Have there been any changes in students' attitudes towards disabled individuals as a result of participating in a dance activity with disabled individuals?
- 2) From the perspective of students who spend time with disabled individuals, what kind of difficulties do disabled individuals face in social life?
- 3) What are the ways to create disability awareness in society from the perspective of students who interact with disabled individuals?

METHOD

In this section, regarding the methodology used in the research, the research model, research group, data collection, data collection tools and analyses used in the study are provided.

Research Design

The study used a case study design, which is one of the qualitative research methods. A case study is a personal research method that focuses on a particular phenomenon, situation, or process within its own framework and is suitable for identifying interrelated processes and explaining data based on cause-and-effect relationships (Altunışık et al., 2012).

Participants/ Research Group

The population of the study consists of 12 students from the Therapy and Rehabilitation Department at Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University who participated in a social responsibility project between September 25 and October 27, 2023. Due to the presence of 12 individuals with different types of disabilities (mental disability, autism, schizophrenia and speech and language impairment) who were able to participate in the dance at the association where the project was conducted, 12 university students were included in the research on a voluntary basis.

To conduct the research, approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University with meeting number 2023-8 and decision date October 3, 2023.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using the semi-structured interview technique, a qualitative research method. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher prepares interview questions according to a specific plan and has the opportunity to explore the phenomenon in depth by asking additional questions based on the direction and depth of the interview (Altunışık et al., 2012).

Participants answered the questions on the interview form prepared by the researcher in two stages. In the first stage, questions prepared before the interaction with individuals with disabilities were posed to the students participating in the project. Subsequently, university students and individuals with disabilities came together and attended dance classes for 3 hours per week over 5 weeks, culminating in a performance at the end of the classes. At the end of the project, participants were asked a second set of questions. During the interviews, participants' consent was obtained and they were asked to sign a volunteer consent form.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, the data were transferred to a computer. Content analysis was conducted to explain the findings and establish relationships between concepts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software was used for data analysis. To ensure the reliability of the research, the data were evaluated by an academic expert independent of the author and specialized in qualitative research. During the coding phase, separate codings were done by the researcher and compared with expert opinions. The inter-coder reliability formula by Miles and Huberman (1994) ($\text{agreement} / (\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}) \times 100$) was used. The code agreement rate was found to be 94%.

RESULTS

The participants are coded as P1, P2, ..., P12. In response to the question included in the study, "Do You Have a Family Member with a Disability?" 7 students answered "Yes" and 5 students answered "No". The participants' responses are shown in Table 1.

Tablo 1. Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	Presence of an individual with a disability in the family
P1	Female	Yes
P2	Female	Yes
P3	Female	No
P4	Female	Yes
P5	Female	Yes
P6	Female	Yes
P7	Male	No
P8	Female	Yes
P9	Female	No
P10	Female	No
P11	Male	Yes
P12	Female	No

In the research, the data obtained before the activity were coded into three main themes: "Disability", "Problems Experienced in Society" and "Benefits of Spending Time Together".

A. Perspectives on Disability

The codes obtained from the responses to the question asked to determine participants' views on the definition of disability include "cause of disability", "restriction", "insufficiency", "differences", "struggle" and "disadvantage". Under the main theme of disability, the most frequently coded aspects are "restriction"(6) and "cause of disability"(5). Figure 1 shows the hierarchical code-subcode model representing the distribution of these codes related to the disability theme.

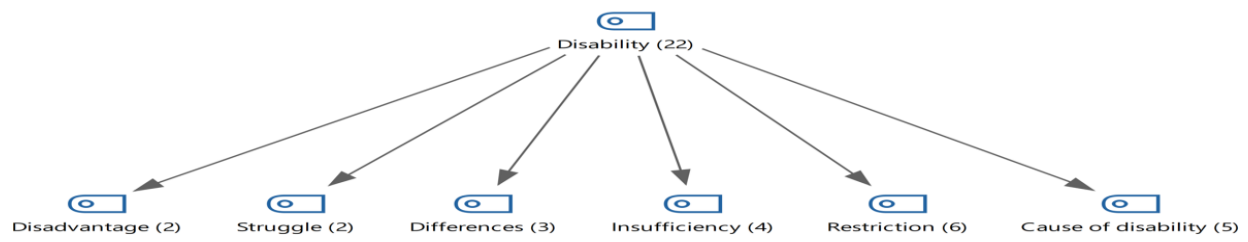


Figure 1. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model Showing the Distribution of Codes Related to the Disability Theme

Some of the answers participants gave to the question “What do you think disability is?” are as follows:

"Individuals who, due to being born with or having experienced accidents, cannot live as comfortably as we do and lead restricted lives". (P1)

"In some cases, it is feeling inadequate and restricted". (P5)

"Individuals who struggle in their normal lives and have limited daily activities". (P8)

B. Problems Experienced in Society

Based on the responses to the question, "What kind of problems might individuals with disabilities face in society?" the main theme of "Problems Experienced in Society" is divided into three sub-themes: "emotional issues", "employment issues" and "accessibility issues." The coding related to these themes is shown in Figure 2.

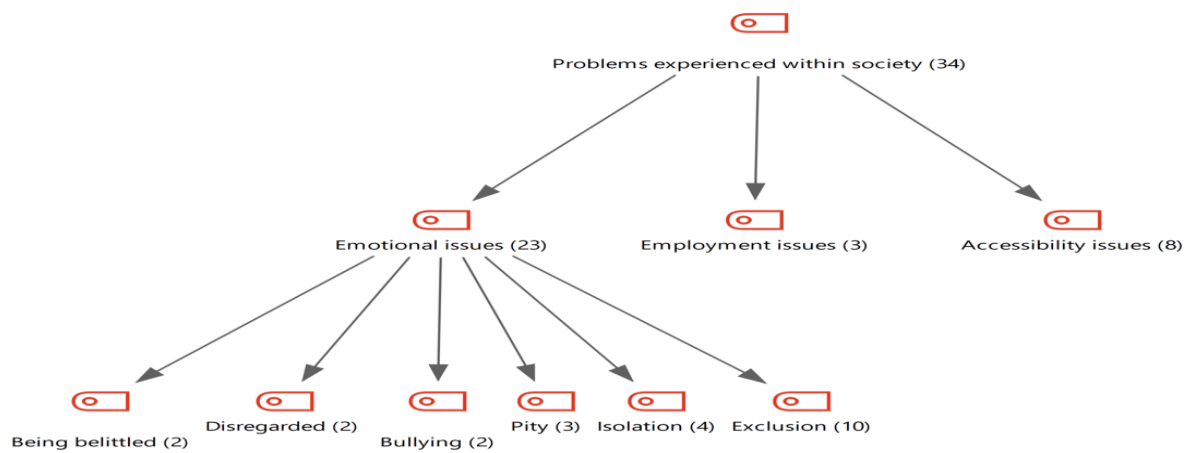


Figure 2. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model Showing the Distribution of Codes Related to the Theme of Problems Experienced in Society

In Figure 2, the sub-theme of "emotional issues" has been coded the most (23 times). The most frequently used code by the participating students is "exclusion." Some of the participants' expressions regarding the main theme of "Problems Experienced in Society" are as follows:

"No one consciously uses walking paths, parking spaces, or elevators for disabled people. We can leave cars, bicycles and motorcycles on walking paths and parking spaces and we don't use elevators by giving them priority". (P3)

"Individuals with disabilities face issues like exclusion and being looked down upon in society". (P5)

"Being excluded by people, parking in spaces designated for them and people not noticing them are some of the problems they face". (P7)

"They experience problems of exclusion from society, encounter physical barriers that we can see in many places and have to work for low wages". (P10)

C. Benefits of Spending Time Together

Based on the responses to the question, "How might spending time with individuals with disabilities or participating in an activity with them affect you?" the main theme of "Benefits of Spending Time Together" is categorized into three codes: "awareness", "happiness" and "empathy". The coding related to this theme is shown in Figure 3.

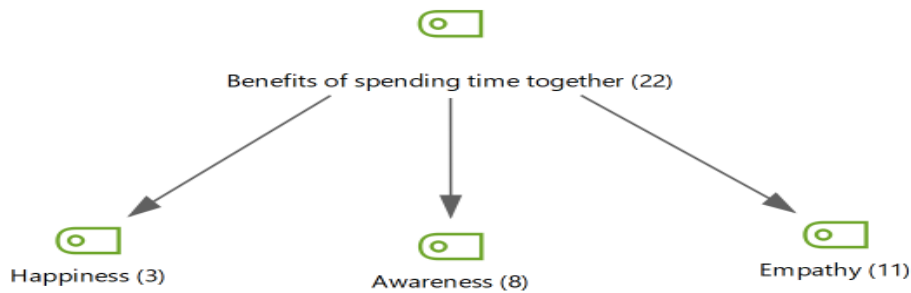


Figure 3. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model Showing the Distribution of Codes Related to the Theme of Benefits of Spending Time Together

According to Figure 3, the most frequently used codes under the main theme are "empathy" (11) and "awareness" (8). Some of the participants' responses within this theme are as follows:

"Understanding and learning how they react will help us behave and approach disabled individuals in a more correct and conscious manner when we encounter them later". (P2)

"Spending time with disabled individuals and engaging in activities with them will allow me to see the world from their perspective". (P6)

"Since there is no disabled individual in my surroundings, spending time with them could help me understand the difficulties they face in their lives". (P10)

"We will become more informed and be able to raise awareness among those who lack knowledge or have negative attitudes, proving that they are no different from us". (P12)

In the second phase of the study, four questions were posed to the students. Regarding the question "Did you experience any problems during the time spent with disabled individuals?" all students responded with "No".

In the second phase of the study, the data were categorized into three main themes: "Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life", "Gains Achieved After the Activity" and "Creating Disability Awareness".

D. Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life

To determine the participants' views on the problems experienced by disabled individuals in social life, the responses to the question posed were categorized into the following codes: "restriction", "communication problems" and "shyness". Figure 4 illustrates the hierarchical code-subcode model showing the distribution of these codes under the theme of "Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life."

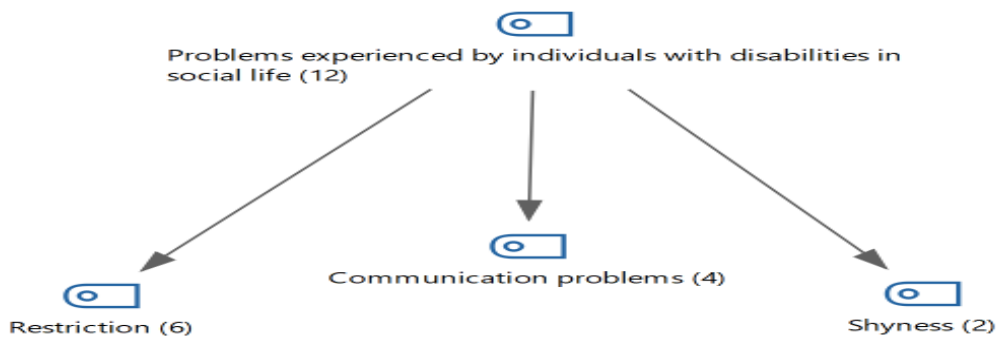


Figure 4. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model Showing the Distribution of Codes Related to the Theme of Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life

"Some of the answers participants gave to the question 'What kinds of problems do individuals with disabilities experience in their social lives?' are as follows:"

"They experience problems such as "communication and performing daily activities". (P9)

“He was hesitant around us, couldn’t even hold our hands. One of the women didn’t want to dance with a man”. (P3)

“In my view, disabled people are very much restricted by others. Their participation in an event is seen as strange by people because they believe that they can’t do anything and will lead a life dependent on others throughout their lives”. (P5)

E. Gains Achieved After the Activity

Based on the answers given to the question “What did spending time with/participating in activities with individuals with disabilities bring you?” the views under the main theme of “Gains Achieved After the Activity” are categorized into five codes: “not being different”, “happiness”, “eliminating prejudices”, “empathy” and “being understanding”. The relevant codes for this theme are presented in Figure 5.

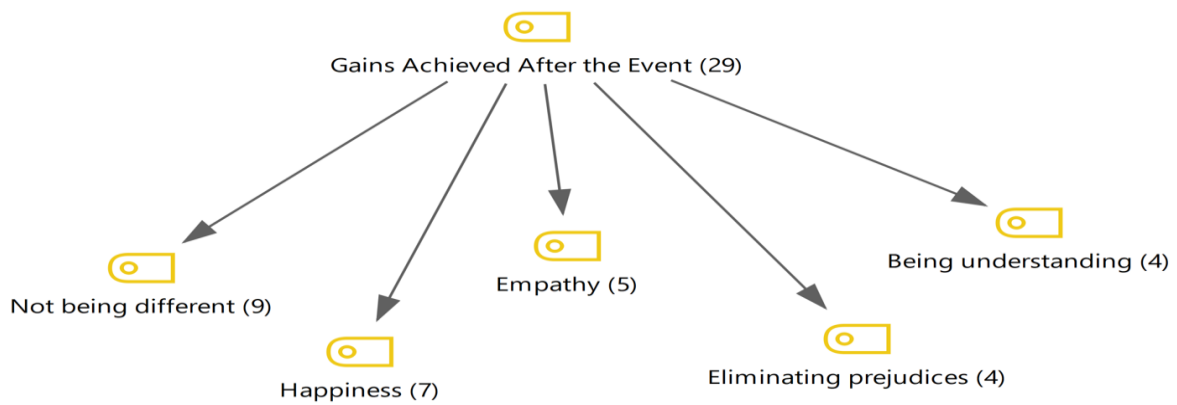


Figure 5. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model Showing the Distribution of Codes for the Theme of Gains Achieved After the Event

Some of the participants’ statements within the framework of the relevant theme are as follows:

“It was a wonderful experience; I previously had a fear and prejudice towards them, but I no longer have such feelings”. (P8)

“They taught me that obstacles cannot stand in the way of wanting to succeed”. (P6)

“It developed my empathy skills and helped me understand different perspectives”. (P9)

“I realized the difficulties they face and learned that we should approach them more calmly and kindly”. (P2)

F. Creating Disability Awareness

Based on the responses to the question “What can be done to create disability awareness in society?”, the codes obtained under the main theme of “Creating Disability Awareness” are “organizing an event”, “spending time together”, “project development”, “the role of education” and “opportunities for social activities”. Figure 6 shows the hierarchical code-subcode model depicting the distribution of codes for the theme of “Creating Disability Awareness”.

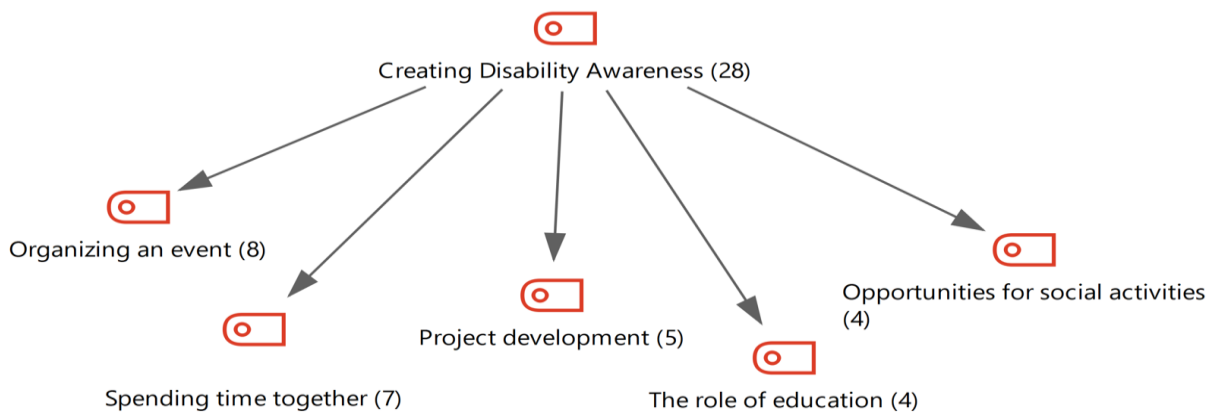


Figure 6. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model Showing the Distribution of Codes for the Theme of Creating Disability Awareness

Some of the participants’ statements within the framework of the “Creating Disability Awareness” theme are as follows:

“Education and awareness-raising activities can be carried out to understand the difficulties faced by individuals with disabilities”. (P9)

“Places where individuals with disabilities can engage in social activities can be opened. Shows, arts, sports, etc., can be organized through municipalities”. (P7)

“I think more projects involving individuals with special needs should be conducted and that our community should be included as much as possible”. (P6)

“I believe that the event organized by our school was very beneficial for better understanding individuals with disabilities and showing what they can do. On special days, we can take another step towards raising awareness in our community with such public events that many people can participate in”. (P1)

“Considering them more and increasing their participation in events would be a great awareness boost. Their achievements should be applauded and appreciated everywhere”. (P8)

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research is to identify university students' perspectives on the concept of disability and to determine the benefits gained from a dance activity conducted with individuals with disabilities. In this context, based on the results obtained in the first part of the research, three main themes were created: "Disability", "Problems Experienced in Society" and "Benefits of Spending Time Together". In the second part of the research, based on the results, three main themes were identified: "Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life", "Gains Achieved After the Activity" and "Creating Disability Awareness".

Within the theme of "Disability", according to the views expressed by students, the most frequently mentioned reasons for disability include terms such as restriction and insufficiency. According to Law No. 5378 on Persons with Disabilities, published on July 7, 2005, disability is defined as "a condition in which a person lives differently from other individuals in society due to the loss of various degrees of physical, mental, psychological, sensory and social abilities, whether congenital or acquired and is affected by attitudes and environmental conditions that restrict equal opportunities and full participation". In this context, it can be said that the students provided views that are consistent with the definition of disability.

In the main theme of "Problems Experienced in Society", students most frequently mentioned emotional issues and accessibility problems. Under the sub-theme of emotional issues, terms such as exclusion and isolation were commonly referenced. Gelmez (2018) in a study conducted with social work students, highlights that individuals with disabilities are perceived as abnormal in society and are often ignored by others. As a result of these views, the exclusion and isolation of individuals with disabilities emerge. Çelik (2013) states in his study that physical and environmental problems experienced by individuals with disabilities are among the biggest issues hindering social integration. Similarly, Tiyek et al. (2016) in their study highlight that individuals with disabilities face issues related to accessibility, such as inadequate architectural solutions in the physical environment, unsuitable public transportation systems and problems in education, employment and social participation.

In the first part of the research, based on the responses to the final question posed to students, the main theme of the "Benefits of Spending Time Together" emerged. Participants expressed that spending time with individuals with disabilities would enhance their empathy, increase their awareness and make them happier. Sağlam and Altındağ (2017) highlight in their study which examined university students' awareness of individuals with disabilities, that the awareness levels

of university students towards individuals with disabilities are low. The first and most important condition for ensuring that individuals with disabilities can exist in all areas of society and for protecting their personal rights is the change in societal awareness that sees disability as a problem (Gelmez, 2018). In another study, it was emphasized that academic programs, especially those training students in the healthcare field, should include topics related to individuals with disabilities. This approach would help students gain awareness about disability issues (Apaydın & Barış, 2021).

When examining the results of the data obtained after the activity, three main themes are observed. The first observations of university students during their time spent with individuals with disabilities were analyzed under the theme of "Problems Experienced by Individuals with Disabilities in Social Life". This theme includes terms such as restrictions, communication problems and shyness. Coşkun (2023) reported that being disabled limits a person's daily activities and leads to less interest in leisure activities. Çorlu and Gülerce (2021) emphasized in their study with disabled students at the university that weak social interactions create problems for disabled students. The restriction and isolation of a social being can lead to communication problems. These negative aspects can also cause individuals with disabilities to exhibit shyness when entering a new environment or meeting someone. Indeed, labels such as disabled, handicapped, or needy indicate that disabled individuals are considered to be in a disadvantaged group. Therefore, being a person with a disability is a source of disadvantage due to the barriers and limitations faced in their social environment (Afacan, 2023).

Another result obtained after the activity is summarized under the main theme of "Gains Achieved After the Activity". University students reported that spending time with individuals with disabilities made them happy, helped them overcome their prejudices, made them realize that there was no difference between them and individuals with disabilities, increased their understanding and empathy towards individuals with disabilities and improved their empathetic skills. Similar findings are observed in the literature, where interactions with individuals with disabilities, participation in activities with them, or having experiences with them are seen to create positive differences in students' attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Canpolat & Akyol, 2023; Panagiotou et al., 2008). Lloyd et al. (2017) noted in their study, where they implemented a disability awareness program for students, that the program increased the students' levels of empathy and awareness towards their peers with disabilities. Üstündağ et al. (2023) reported in their study with university students that students in programs involving contact with

individuals with disabilities have more positive attitudes towards those with disabilities. McKay et al. (2023) conducted a Paralympic School Day event with high school students and highlighted that, at the end of the event, the students' interaction with disabled athletes increased their awareness.

Another finding of this research constitutes the main theme of "Creating Disability Awareness". University students expressed the need for education to raise awareness about disabilities in society, the organization of projects and events where other members of society can participate alongside individuals with disabilities and the development of social activity opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Social relationships can flourish and take root through activities. Kırılıoğlu and Keskin (2023) emphasized in their study with disabled university students that their social relationships can be enriched through friendships and participation in activities. Participation in events strengthens friendships and plays an important role in planning future events. Carter et al. (2014) reported in their study that the opportunity for disabled children to engage in sports with their peers encompasses both social and emotional aspects of making new friends, which in turn fosters awareness. Saripek and Demir-Saripek (2023) noted in their study that when social opportunities are provided to individuals with disabilities, their communication skills improve and their ability to integrate into society becomes more effective.

CONCLUSION

In this study, university students described individuals with disabilities as people who live restricted lives, are excluded by society, feel isolated and face numerous problems in various areas. However, when students spent time with individuals with disabilities and participated in activities with them, they realized that these individuals were not actually different from themselves and that spending time with them provided many benefits. Changing societal perceptions of disability and promoting inclusion and equality through public awareness is crucial. In this context, education should start from the foundation. From a young age, children should be taught to accept the presence of individuals with disabilities and remember that everyone is a potential candidate for disability. During university years, regardless of the field of study, students should be given opportunities to engage with individuals with disabilities through extracurricular activities or projects. This will not only help individuals with disabilities feel less

isolated and more integrated into society but also enable participants, as expressed in the study, to develop empathy towards people with disabilities and become more aware of disability issues. As with any research, this study has its strengths and limitations. While reviewing the literature, it was observed that although there are many studies on disability, there was no similar study where disabled individuals participate in an activity together with their non-disabled peers. The literature emphasizes the need for social integration to raise disability awareness. In this research, the fact that students were together with disabled individuals, communicated with them, participated in a dance event and established the foundations of friendship supports the ideas advocated in the literature. Additionally, the opportunities for disabled individuals to socialize, participate in a performance and the various gains university students achieve regarding disability can be listed as strengths of the study. It is hoped that this research will contribute to science by guiding future studies. The limitations of this study include the inability to conduct it with a larger sample size and the limited time available. More comprehensive research could be conducted, ensuring longer-term interactions with disabled individuals. University students from disciplines outside the health field could be brought together with individuals with different types of disabilities to gather their views on the subject.

Ethics Statement

To conduct the research, approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University with meeting number 2023-8 and decision date October 3, 2023.

Author Contributions

The author was involved in the implementation of the research, data collection, literature review, research design, organization and writing stages.

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