



Research Article

Social Skills Training in Potentially Gifted Children

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Abstract

In this study it was aimed to eliminate the possible social problems that could be experienced by potentially gifted children by improving their social skills with social skills training during preschool term. In this research Coloured Progressive Matrixes Test was applied to children aged between 60-72 months old. The trainer observed children who scored more than the group mean within a structured observation which included activities that Coloured Progressive Matrixes aimed to evaluate. Before enrolling children to the social skills training, in order to identify the level of their present social skills development Social Skills Evaluating Measurement was applied to their families and teachers. After, the training programme Social Skills Evaluating Measurement was applied again the families and the teachers. Following month after the training Social Skills Evaluating Measurement was reapplied to test if gained skills was permanent. After permanence practice families and teachers were interviewed based on the questions that Social Skills Evaluating Measurement included. The results of study showed that according to the families in terms of social skills there were no difference between two times; however, it was identified that the level of the social skills of children who formed the group were merged in. On the other hand according to the teachers, children showed improvement in academical support skills category which was one of the four category. Examination of the permanence test showed that according to the families' children preserved their social skills levels; and according to the teachers it was identified that social skill levels of children were developing.

Keywords

gifted children, social skills training, preschool

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Introduction

Being gifted involves being talented in the fields of literature, art, sports or science. Regarding the research conducted in the world, it is seen that these researches focus on understanding and improving the mental potentials of gifted individuals. However, gifted individuals can be superior not only cognitively but also in terms of many other skills. While these skills of the individuals are supported, it is also important to support social skills in order to provide the environment for the development of talents. A child with superior talents may see himself different from other children, may have difficulty in establishing relationships with his/her peers, and may feel different in relation to low self-esteem. This perceptual difference can cause children to experience many social emotional problems (Morawska and Sanders, 2009).

In this study, Social Skill Training created to support the social skill development and the social skill levels of the gifted children will be included along with the research findings related to this training program.

Giftedness

The concepts of superior talent and superior intelligence have been defined in various forms in various historical periods. From these two concepts, the theorists have defined superior intelligence as being talented in the science and technical fields, and the superior talent as being talented in fine arts (Dağlıoğlu and Suveren, 2013).

According to Renzulli, known for his work on superior mental potential; those whose intelligence is above 130 in general, those who have the ability to create new ideas and apply them to the solution of new problems, namely those who are creative, and those who have the supreme motivation to take a job from beginning to end, namely those who have the superior ability to shoulder jobs-tasks are defined as having superior mental potency (cited by Davaslıgil, 2004).

In Turkey, giftedness is defined as "intelligence, creativity, art, sports, leadership capacity, or individuals who perform at a higher level compared to their peers in specific academic fields" in the Special Education Services Directive published by the Ministry of National Education (The Ministry of National Education, 2006). In the Directive of Science and Art Center (BİLSEM), it is considered as "Children / students identified by specialists for performing at a higher level in their specific academic fields compared to their peers or in specific academic fields of intelligence, creativity, art and leadership capacity (The Ministry of National Education, 2007).

This feature, which is so distinctive that it cannot be defined solely by the intelligence section score, requires a unique approach also in the diagnosis phase. Studies conducted on the identification of gifted children foresees that gathering information from various sources to be very useful primarily at early ages. It is

suggested to use formal and informal evaluations together, that is, the use of scales which are standardized and have certain norms, survey-scales to determine relevance, interview records, developmental evaluations, anecdotal records, observations, study examples and forms reflecting the opinions of parents and teachers (Dağlıoğlu and Suveren, 2013).

Social Skills

Being the skills acquired in childhood and affect the individuals' levels of adjustment and life satisfaction throughout their lives, social skills are defined as the ability to understand the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of one's self and others, and to behave in accordance with this understanding, in interpersonal relationships (Marlowe, 1986). When examining social skills, researchers prefer to analyses by separating them into dimensions. This separation is done in various ways according to the functions and levels of social skills. In this study, however, four dimensions measured by the Preschool Social Skills Assessment Scale developed by Ömeroğlu et al. was used as the base. The first of these dimensions is the initial skills. Initial skills are skills that children can easily learn and are the basis for the acquisition of other social skills. Academic support skills, being the second dimension, are skills to support children's academic skills and facilitate adaptation to primary school life. The third dimension, friendship skills, is the children's skills to develop positive peer interaction. Their skills to manage their emotions is the fourth dimension including the skills of recognizing and controlling their emotions (happy, sad, angry, etc.) (Ömeroğlu et al., 2014).

The development of social skills is explained by the Social Learning Theory. According to this theory, children start to learn social skills by establishing relationships with their parents; then brothers, peers and other adults join this social group; and social skills develop accordingly (Çetin et al., 2003). In studies conducted on children with insufficient social skills have emphasized that the social relations of children who do not have adequate social skills will be at risk during their lifetimes, and that children with inadequate social skills may encounter various problems in their interpersonal relationships, emotional areas, school lives and professional achievements throughout their lifetimes (De-rosier And Lloyd, 2011, O'Brennan, Bradshaw and Sawyer, 2009, Perren and Alsaker, 2006, Salmivalli, 2010).

When the definition and dimensions of social skills are examined in detail, the importance of supporting these groups, which are likely to have a compatibility problem, in terms of these skills is understood.

Social Development of Gifted Children

The fact that gifted individuals have their own unique characteristics such as mental awareness, moral and emotional advancement increases the likelihood of having problems in social life. It is the information available in the field literature that not

being able to laugh at the same things, not being able to talk on the same subjects and not being able to share the same awarenesses with their peers hurt gifted children and individuals, and may lead them to social isolation (Köksal, 2007).

Silverman (1993) underlines that responding to the unique emotional needs of gifted children is vital in order for these children to live their emotional and social development phases in a healthy way.

When examining the social development of gifted children, it should not be overlooked that they exhibit non-simultaneous development patterns, and it should not be forgotten that they cannot simultaneously access the emotional maturity required by their cognitive performance.

In the light of this information, it was aimed to support social skills development of gifted children with a social skills development support program that would be prepared.

Method

In the study, the social skill levels of the gifted individuals were examined by the pre-test post-test model. The dependent variable was the social skill level; the independent variable was the training.

Participants

Participants were selected by means of sampling method among children who were attending a kindergarten attached to a public institution and whose chronological ages were 60-72 months. Among the children who had high scores in the Coloured Progressive Matrices Test, four children, two girls and two boys, were selected as the result of the observations. Children who had any psychiatric or neurological disorders and who were using drugs that might affect their cognitive functioning and behaviors were not included in the study.

Table 1.*Demographic Information of Children Participating in the Training Program*

| | | N | % |
|----------------------------|---------------|---|-----|
| Sex (N=4) | Girl | 2 | 50 |
| | Boy | 2 | 50 |
| Sibling Situation (N=4) | Have Siblings | 4 | 100 |
| | No Siblings | - | 0 |
| Mother's Education (N=4) | Undergraduate | 2 | 50 |
| | Graduate | 2 | 50 |
| Mother's Proficiency (N=4) | Engineer | 3 | 75 |
| | Teacher | 1 | 25 |
| Father's Education (N=4) | Undergraduate | 4 | 100 |
| | Graduate | - | 0 |
| Father's Proficiency (N=4) | Engineer | 3 | 75 |
| | Attorney | 1 | 25 |

As seen in Table 1, two of the children were girls and two of them were boys, and all of them had siblings. All children's fathers and two children's mothers had an undergraduate degree, other two children's mothers had a graduate degree. Three mothers and three fathers were engineers, one mother was a teacher, and one father was an attorney.

Data Collection Tools

General Information Form: The form in which demographic information such as the number of siblings of the child along with education, occupation and employment status of the parents was recorded.

Coloured Progressive Matrices Test: Progressive matrices created by Raven in 1948 were used in several forms (Raven et al., 1998). The Coloured Progressive Matrix Test was developed for preschool, mental retardation or elderly situations. It consists of three parts, each consisting of 12 items. Each item consists of 3*3 matrices of meaningless shapes. On every page of the test book, there is a one-part-missing shape-matrix problem with six options, one of which completes the missing

part. Shapes that form a matrix are arranged from left to right or from top to bottom according to a rule, and when filling the gap, the child must grasp every rule and choose the appropriate item from the options. Each section has a difficulty level that the child can easily solve the first item, and the difficulty levels of the subsequent items are gradually increasing. The easiest first ones require differentiation, while the hard ones require analogy, permutation, alternative patterns and logical connections (Raven et al., 1998). The correct answers are recorded as "1" score, the total score of each section and the overall total are obtained. The reliability and validity study was carried out by Karateke (2016). Test retest reliability was found to be .60 as a result of Karateke's work. In the analyses carried out for the construct validity, the triple factor structure in accordance with the literature was shown and it was found that this structure explained 31.55% of the variance in accordance with the literature (Karateke, 2016).

Structured Observation Form and Materials: The features measured by the Coloured Progressive Matrices Test were the skills of visual perception, judgment, and attention. An observation form was developed by the researcher so that the effect of these properties measured by the test on the performance of the children in the activities could be determined through observation. In the course of the development of the form, eight achievements and twenty-eight indicators were formed from behaviors desired to be observed, benefiting from the Preschool Education Program, which was published by the Ministry of National Education in 2013. The formed achievements and indicators were used as form items. Later on, nine activities were planned, and materials were developed by the researcher in order to demonstrate these achievements and indicators. The nine planned activities were distributed in three observation sessions, with three sessions being equal to each other.

The Structured Observation Form was submitted to the views of academicians working in the area of child development and giftedness for the evaluation of its content validity (Karateke, 2016). It was finalized in line with feedback.

Preschool Social Skills Assessment Scale (PSSAS): Being developed by Ömeroğlu et al. to determine the social skill levels of the children between the ages of 36-72 months in preschool period in accordance with Turkish culture, the scale provides information on the level of social skills of a child by comparing with peers of the same age and sex. It has two forms, parent and teacher, and contains 49 items. This scale assesses social skills in four dimensions: initial, academic support, friendship and managing emotions. As a result of comparing the sum of the scores received for the dimensions and the overall sum of the scores, information about the child's level of social skills is obtained. Psychometric evaluation and norm studies of the scale were done. In the internal consistency analyses, it was determined that

in terms of age groups and subtests, the internal consistency coefficients of the scale were within the range of .84-.95 and that the model data correspondence was statistically provided according to the results of confirmatory factor analysis carried out in order to determine its validity (Ömeroğlu et al., 2014).

Social Skill Training Program

In the scope of the research, it was a program prepared in order to prevent probable social skill induced problems in the lives of gifted children in accordance with the level of children aged 60-72 months. The training program consisted of 36 sessions. The program included activities in Turkish, Art, Drama, Music, Movement, Game, Science, Mathematics, Reading and Writing Preparation, with 19 achievements and 62 indicators. Transitions between activities had been planned according to the passive-active balance. In the program, the details such as all the event directives, the training environment and the material were clearly planned, and some activities where children were to demonstrate their creativity were designed to be flexible.

Data Collection Process

Coloured Progressive Matrices Test was applied to each child individually in the morning hours when their mental functions were more fluent, for the identification of children eligible for inclusion in the training program among the 60-72 months old children who were attending the kindergarten in which the study was being conducted. The 18 children who were above the group average according to the test results were taken into observation form activities. After three days of practice, the group average was calculated from the scores obtained by the children in the practice, and the four children above the average were included in the training program study group.

The parents and teachers of the children who were included in the training group were required to fill in the PSSAS as the pretest. Subsequently, a 36-session training program was applied; with the completion of the program, the parents and teachers were again required to fill the PSSAS as a final test. Within the scope of retention practices, one month after the last test application, PSSAS was filled again. After retention practices, short-time and face-to-face interviews were conducted with parents and teachers about educational impact. In these interviews, 39 questions formed by using PSSAS and education program achievements and indicators were asked.

The demographic data and test scores obtained were analysed with descriptive statistical analysis methods using SPSS for Windows statistical package program. The scores obtained from face-to-face interviews were evaluated at the case level.

Findings and Discussion

PSSAS was applied to parents and teachers of four children who were admitted to the Social Skills Training Program, before the program started and after the program ended. Descriptive statistics were applied to the data obtained from these pretest and post test scores and are presented in the relevant tables. In addition, the social skills levels of the children were evaluated by comparing the group averages with the PSSAS norm table.

Table 2.

PSSAS Parental Form Pre-Test Post-Test Application Scores Group Average and Standard Deviation Values

| PSSAS Sections | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|
| | M. | sd. | M. | sd. |
| Initial Skills | 49,25 | 4,50 | 49,25 | 2,63 |
| Academic Support Skills | 48,00 | 5,35 | 48,50 | 4,12 |
| Friendship Skills | 51,25 | 4,35 | 51,00 | 2,94 |
| Emotional Management Skills | 42,00 | 4,90 | 42,00 | 0,82 |

Comparing the mean scores of the answers obtained from the answers given by the parents with the norm table of the scale, it was seen that before the social skills training, the children were between 25% and 50% segment, in the dimensions of initial, academic support, friendship and managing emotions. The children in this percentage need to be supported by additional educational opportunities, as their social skills development is slower than their peers. When the post-test applications were examined, it was observed that the children's scores of the PSSAS did not change but the standard deviation values decreased in terms of the initial skills, academic support skills, friendship skills and skills to manage their emotions. Although the group averages remained the same, it was observed that there was a decrease in the standard deviation values.

This could be interpreted as the fact that the performances of those with low social skills in the dimensions of the initial skills, academic support skills, friendship skills and skills to manage their emotions were closer to the other children with high social skills, i.e., the group was homogenized. The conclusion that this effect may also be caused by education could be reached. In the study of Uysal and Balkan (2015) with 131 preschool children, even if the children's mothers did not receive any education, after the children participated in the social skills training by themselves, some subscales of social skills dimensions and social skills total scores differed from children who did not receive social skills training. According to this study, social skills training led children's social skills to approach the group average. This result showed similarity to the result of Uysal and Balkan's work.

Table 3.

PSSAS Teacher Form Pre-Test Post-Test Application Scores Group Average and Standard Deviation Values

| PSSAS Sections | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|
| | M. | sd. | M. | sd. |
| Initial Skills | 56,50 | 2,38 | 54,25 | 7,54 |
| Academic Support Skills | 52,75 | 6,55 | 54,50 | 7,19 |
| Friendship Skills | 56,75 | 7,80 | 58,00 | 6,68 |
| Emotional Management Skills | 50,00 | 6,68 | 49,75 | 6,50 |

In Table 3 presented above, average and standard deviation values obtained from the PSSAS scores filled by the teachers before and after the training are seen. When these average scores were interpreted with the scoring chart of the PSSAS, it was found that the children were above 75% in terms of their initial skills and they showed a development in line with their peers at this dimension. In terms of their skills of academic support, friendship and managing their emotions, it was seen that they were in 50th to 75th percentile band, slower than their peers in these dimensions, and it seemed appropriate to support them. When the final test applications conducted after the end of the social skills training program were examined, it was found that after the training, the children were between 50% and 75% in terms of initial skills, friendship skills, skills to manage their emotions, and in terms of academic support skills, children showed a development of over 75% of the norm group. These results showed that the training program brought the level of social skills of the children participating in the group to a level of 75% in the academic support dimension, a level consistent with age, from 50% to 75% (required to be supported). Academic support skills identified as a change in social skill levels of the group before and after the training included achievements such as listening, responding to questions asked, observing directions, taking the floor, expressing thoughts, completing a job. It was thought that the activities related to academic support skills were given more room in the classroom environment and that the skills required to be earned through education were reinforced. For this reason, it was assumed that academic support skills developed more rapidly than the friendship skills and the skills to manage emotions. Now, work done in the field of social skills has been combined with the idea that the common influence of the skills and the environment determined the level of social skills (Neihart et al., 2015).

Table 4.

PSSAS Parent's Form Post-Test and Retention Practice Scores Group Average and Standard Deviation Values

| PSSAS Sections | Pre-Test | | Retention Test | |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|----------------|------|
| | M. | sd. | M. | sd. |
| Initial Skills | 49,25 | 2,63 | 49,75 | 4,65 |
| Academic Support Skills | 48,50 | 4,12 | 46,00 | 5,23 |
| Friendship Skills | 51,00 | 2,94 | 51,75 | 4,79 |
| Emotional Management Skills | 42,00 | 0,82 | 43,50 | 5,32 |

The average and standard deviation values obtained from parents at the end of the training and after one month from the end of the training are shown in Table 4. When these scores were examined according to the PSSAS norm table, it was seen that one month after the training program, children who participated in the training program maintained their social skills levels in the dimensions of initial skills, academic support skills, friendship skills and skills of managing their emotions. This data was consistent with the retention criterion in other social skills training studies.

Table 5.

PSSAS Teacher Form Post-Test and Retention Practice Scores Group Average and Standard Deviation Values.

| PSSAS Sections | Pre-Test | | Retention Test | |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|----------------|------|
| | M. | sd. | M. | sd. |
| Initial Skills | M. | sd. | M. | sd. |
| Academic Support Skills | 54,25 | 7,54 | 58,00 | 3,37 |
| Friendship Skills | 54,50 | 7,19 | 56,25 | 5,56 |
| Emotional Management Skills | 58,00 | 6,68 | 61,75 | 4,03 |

The average and standard deviation of the scores obtained from the PSSAS answered by the teachers revealed that one month after the completion of the training program, the children's group averages showed a development of 75% and above when compared to norm group, in terms of initial skills, academic support skills, friendship skills and skills of managing their emotions. This level indicated that the development of the child's social skills was at an adequate and expected level. This data, obtained from the teachers could be interpreted that the effect of the training program on children's social development was permanent, and the effect continued in a time-spreading manner.

It was found that in the interviews about the impact of parents and teachers' educational program on children's social development, parents and teachers expressed that they observed a development in children in terms of self-expression and self-confidence.

When the developmental characteristics of gifted children were examined, it was seen that they came to the world with a different talent background than their normally developing peers. In a study by Yoo and Moon (2006) examining the language development of gifted children in the preschool period, it was shown that the children's language acquisition was earlier, and consequently, their awareness and socialization levels were higher. In the same study, gifted children were found to be playing collaborative games, choosing elder playmates and seeking adult friends (Yoo and Moon, 2006). This and similar research data suggested that the inherent potentials of gifted children could positively influence their social skills development and could raise the theory that there would be no shortcomings. However, in the current study, in the direction of findings from both the family and the teachers, pretests revealed that the social skill levels of participating children needed to be improved. This finding, along with some contradictions to studies conducted with superior talented individuals, emphasized that the talent alone was insufficient, as underlined in research on social skills, and the indirect role of the environmental influence on education and social development.

When the research findings were examined, it seemed like that there was an inconsistency in parents and teachers' answers, especially in PSSAS responses. In a study conducted by Dağlıoğlu and Suveren with preschool children, for identifying gifted children they examined the consistency of the views of parents and teachers with the children's performance. In the light of their findings, Dağlıoğlu and Suveren had found that teachers made more consistent assessments of children's performances according to their families (Dağlıoğlu and Suveren, 2013). The contradiction between parent and teacher was also seen in this research. Accordingly, the information received from the teachers indicated the effectiveness of the training program.

When looked at the application of retention of education, it was observed that the persistence of all social skills continued but there was no statistical decrease or increase. The constant level of social skills could also be interpreted as the continuation of the effect of training. Although there was no statistically significant difference, it was seen that average scores of the children in the dimensions of initial skills, academic support skills, friendship skills, and skills of managing their emotions increased according to the information obtained from the teachers when the group average was examined. This could be interpreted as the increase might continue in the effect of training over time. In the study conducted by Durualp and Aral (2010), in which an experimental group and a control group was used, it was seen that at the end of the training, the levels of social skills of the experimental and control group differed. It had been identified that the results of the retention test of the study were the same as the scores of the final test, meaning, the effect of training continued. This finding was similar to the conclusion that the effect of training was maintained.

It was stated that social skills training was an effective method for the development of social skills in studies conducted in Turkey and in the world regarding social skills training. Three groups were formed in the social skills training study conducted by Uysal and Balkan (2015) which examined social skills and self-concept levels of children who did and did not receive social skills training. The first group consisted of children receiving social skills training only, the second group's parents received education on child development while the children were receiving social skills training, and the third group consisted of children who were not intervened. As a result of the study, it was found that at the end of the training program, the social skills levels of the children differed significantly from the control group, and in the retention study, the post-test and retention scores did not differ. In this study, according to the information gathered from families and teachers through scales and interviews, it was seen that there was a permanent change in the social development levels of children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, Social Skill Training was given to four children, who were 60-72 months old in preschool period, and who were found to be potentially gifted, using assessment tools in the scope of the study. Children's social skills levels were compared before, during and one month after training. According to the results obtained in these comparisons; the level of social skills before the training of the children was not sufficient and the first effect after the training was that the study group was homogenised in terms of social skill levels, i.e., children's performances converged. Another effect of training had been on academic support skills. When we looked at the retention of training, it was seen that children maintained their post training levels and at the same time they continued to develop in terms of social skills spread over time. Opinions from parents and teachers had shown that children were making progress on issues such as self-expression and self-confidence.

Social skills, which is a collective of learned behaviors, is a type of skill that enhances adaptation skills throughout an individual's life and affects achievement and satisfaction in each area. As it is a learned behavior, it is thought that it will be valuable for the child to meet appropriate learning experiences at early ages. Revealing that the talent potential of children with high talent potentials does not reduce their chances of having problems with their social skills will increase the quality of life of gifted children by giving appropriate support.

Conducting a research with 40 children receiving preschool education who were aged four to five years old, Özdemir-Topaloğlu (2013) applied "Activity-Based Social Skill Training" to the experimental group of the sample which they had separated into experimental and control groups, two days a week and eight hours a day for 10 weeks. As a result of the training, it had been determined that there was

an effect of training on sub dimensions of aggressiveness and hyperactivity but there was not any effect on other sub dimensions. This finding was in line with the fact that in the current research the effect of training was not in all areas but in some sub dimensions. It had been observed that the retention of the effect of the training continued due to the findings obtained from the practice regarding the retention of the training. As a result of the face-to-face interviews with the parents and the teachers, it was determined that there was a development in children's self-confidence and self-expression skills as a result of the training. In the study of Verduyn et al. (1990) with school children aged 10-13 years, the effect of the school-based social skills program was examined. Children were assessed before, during and after six months of training. As a result of the research, significant changes were observed especially in the self-esteem of the young children, similar to the current research, and it was determined that the children who participated in the training took part in more social activities. In terms of retention measures, it was found that the effect of education continues as in the current research. According to the results of the present study conducted to increase the social skill levels of the gifted children in preschool period, it was revealed that provided social skills training had an effect on children's social skills levels. The fact that there was no significant difference between the social skills levels of children aged 60-72 months and the social skills of children aged 73 months, identified in a study conducted by İnci and Deniz (2015), also showed the importance of conducting the current research in the preschool period.

As a result of the study, it was suggested that the neglected development areas other than the cognitive development areas should be investigated in gifted children, and the social skills training program should be provided in the preschool periods as a support for young gifted learners.

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