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Investigation of the Relationship Between Mothers' Attitudes Towards Disabled Individuals and Their Children's Acceptance Levels

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Abstract

Early childhood is a critical process that plays a key role in the shaping of individuals, and therefore, societies. Important duties fall to parents so that this process can be managed successfully. Parents directly or indirectly relay their attitudes toward many topics not only with their childrearing attitudes but also through the interaction with their children. The child starts certain preliminary acceptance both about himself/herself and others through the interaction between mother and child. The child is most likely to use this preliminary acceptance that he/she requires especially in early childhood throughout his/her life as a mental template. In this context, it is aimed to investigate the relationship between mother's attitude toward disabled individuals and their children's acceptance levels. Data were collected from 60 mothers of 3-5-year-old children by using Demographic Form, Attitude toward the Disabled Scale and The Acceptance Scale for Kindergarten- Revised. According to the research findings, there was a positive and moderate relationship between family attitudes, family life, and efficacy subdimensions. There was no relationship in the educational environment, working life and interpersonal relationships subdimensions.

Keywords: Mothers, Attitude Towards Disability, Early Childhood, Acceptance

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Young children are expected to develop their social skills through their interactions with their peers in their early childhood education (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). Children are positively or negatively affected by the communication they establish with their peers (Bierman, 2004). Negative peer relationships in early childhood have been found to be associated with negative behavioral outcomes such as class participation, peer rejection and problems with teachers in the future (Holmes, Kim-Spoon, & Deater-Deckard, 2016; Ladd et al., 1999).

In early childhood, parents are one of the important socializing tools of children. Parents can transfer their attitudes to their children through interaction. This situation also manifests itself in the specific needs of individuals and disabilities (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Peck, Carlson, and Helmstetter (1992) observed that children with parents who believe that mainstreaming is good for children with disabilities are more agreeable for peers with special needs, are more aware of the needs of other people and are more comfortable when people with disabilities are around. Similarly, Okagaki, Diamond, Kontos and Hestenes (1998) found that children with parents who encouraged their children to support their peers with special needs were more likely to interact with peers with special needs in the pre-school class. There are many factors that affect children's peer relations. One of the most important of these is the family. Guyer et al., (2015) found in one of their research that family relationships are related to children's peer relations. The relationship between parents and their children's attitudes towards disabled individuals is influenced by the child's age (Rosenbaum, Armstrong & King 1988). Parents are important factors on children's interaction with their peers in early childhood.

1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

Establishing relationships with peers in early childhood is an important developmental goal (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). In early childhood, peer interaction is important for supporting social skills, cognitive skills, academic skills, emotion regulation, and mutual communication skills (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Guralnick, Neville, Hammond, & Connor, 2007; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Martin, Fabes, Hanish, & Hollenstein, 2005; Malecki & Elliot, 2002). Positive peer interaction in the pre-school period supports children's readiness to school, academic and social skills, emotional regulation and cognitive development (Deater-Deckard, Pike, Petrill, Cutting, Hughes, & O'Connor, 2001; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Spangler Avant, Gazelle, & Faldowski, 2011). Peer relations serve as a stepping stone in the development of social skills as a model for the emergence of new relationships as cognitive and emotional resources (Klima & Repetti 2008). Peer relations will provide children lots of experience and opportunity to develop social relationships. In other words, the interaction that children have with their peers influences many life experiences, including social and emotional skills (Berndt, 1996). Through these interactions with peers, children develop their behaviors, skills, and experiences in a wide range of contexts.

Early childhood is a critical process that plays an important role in shaping the individual and therefore the societies. Parents have important tasks to be able to manage this process well. One of the important theories of developmental psychology, attachment theory suggests that children's relationships with their mothers from an early age are a lifelong guide (Bowlby, 1969). The result of this relationship is thought to be a mental scheme given the theory of the inner functioning model. This intrinsically functioning models shape the expectations of the individual towards herself/ himself and her/his environment. It provides a mental template that helps the person determine how much s/he deserves to be loved, how much s/he can trust both to the environment and to the world. In other words, if the mother-infant relationship progresses in a positive way, such as the baby's feeling of safety, the elimination of needs, the expectation of emotional closeness, the baby will feel that it is important to consider herself/himself worthy of being loved and approved, and at the same time, and will perceive others and the world as a positive place. Rees (2007) states this secure base forms the basis for the development of positive models for oneself and others, and these models are conceptualized as 'internal working models' or 'mental presentations.' While the key point of the inner working models of the world is creating expectations about who the binding figurine is, where it can be found and how it will react, the key point of the self-functioning internal working models is the representation of whether it is acceptable for the binding figurine itself. While the internalized representations of oneself are important in the acquisition of a persistent, realistic and positive identity, representations about others have a critical prescription for the establishment of persistent interpersonal relationships. In addition to these, the internal working models have a decisive influence on what kind of information individuals will tend to pay attention to, how they will interpret events in the world, and what they will remember and forget. In this context, it can be said that the parent-child relationship provides a template for the lifelong interpersonal relationships for children. Parents, directly and indirectly, transfer their attitudes about many issues, not just about childrearing attitudes, through the interaction they have with their children. Through the interaction between the mother and the child, the child is beginning to make some

assumptions about herself/himself and others. Especially in early childhood, these preliminary assumptions given by the child are highly likely to be used as a mental template for life.

Within the classroom, including early childhood period, children with special needs from early ages, and children without special needs are co-educated. Differences can be seen when peer relations with children with special needs and children without special needs are examined. For example, even if children with normal development become friends with children with special needs (Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002), they prefer them less as playmates compared to their normally growing peers (Brown, Odom, Li, & Zercher, 1999).

There are several factors for building peer interaction with children with special needs. For children with normal development to interact with their peers with special needs, it is thought that in addition to the perceptions of the competence of the individual with special needs, the context is also important (Diamond & Hestenes, 1996; Diamond & Hong, 2010; Diamond & Tu, 2009; Magiati, Dockrell, & Logotheti, 2002). In addition, the characteristics of the child, the peers with disabilities, and the class are examined on the acceptance of the peers with disabilities in general are important factors (Boer, Pijl, Post & Minnaert, 2013). How often the children meet with their peers also has a significant impact on the positive attitudes of children toward peers with disabilities (MacMillan, Tarrant, Abraham & Morris, 2014). Besides, children with special needs may not interact sufficiently with children without disabilities as they may not be prone to initiating social interactions (Odom, Zercher, Li, Marquart, & Sandall, 2006). Therefore, it can be said that the attitudes of children with normal development to their peers with special needs may play a critical role in the increase of social interaction between children with special needs and children with normal development in the pre-school education institutions.

In addition, it has been shown that attitudes towards individuals with disabilities can be differentiated according to culture (Nikolaraizi & Reybekiel, 2001). It is clear that the existing studies are directed towards Western cultures (Nikolaraizi & Reybekiel, 2001; Okagaki, Diamond, Kontos & Hestenes 1998). Similar studies are needed for Eastern cultures. In this research, it is thought that it is useful to determine the perceptions of the mothers who have children in the pre-school period and the levels of their children's peer acceptance. The study aims to examine the relationship between the attitudes of the mothers towards the disabled individuals and the acceptance levels of their children.

2. Method

The research was designed as a relational survey model. The participants were sampled with the convenience sampling method which is a purposive sampling method. Convenience sampling method suggests that the sample is selected from accessible and applicable units due to limitations of time, money, and workforce (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2009).

2.1 Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 60 children who attended different preschool institutions in the central district of Muğla in the academic year of 2016-2017 and their mothers. 61.7% (n = 37) of the children participated in the study consisted of male, while 38.3% (n = 23) of them were female children. Age of the children varies between 60 and 87 months and the mean age is 75.06 months (SD = 7.18). While 81.7% (n = 49) of the children have integration students in the school, 18.3% (n = 11) of them did not have any integration student. 10% (n = 6) of the mothers graduated from primary school; 8.3% (n = 5) graduated from middle school; 30% (n = 18) graduated from high school; while 45% (n = 27) have a bachelor's degree and 5% (n = 3) graduated from post-graduate program.

2.2 Data Collection Tools

60 children with no special needs who are in their early childhood and their mothers participated in the research. Demographics of the mothers were obtained with the "Demographic Information Form" developed by the researchers. The Acceptance Scale for Kindergarten- Revised (ASK-R) was used for assessing the children's levels of accepting disabled individuals. The scale was first developed by Favazza and Odom (1996) and revised by Favazza, Philipsen, and Kumar (2000) for its final version. It was adapted into Turkish by Tekin-Ersan, Ata, and Kaya (2017). There are 15 items on this one-factor scale. The scale is applied to children face-to-face. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .91 and its test-retest reliability coefficient is reported as .78.

In the study, *the Attitude Scale for the Disabled* was used to measure the attitudes of the parents towards the disabled individuals. The Likert type scale was developed within the project named "How does society perceive disability?" (2009) conducted by Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People with Kaner, Öğülmüş, Büyüköztürk and Dökmen. There are 6 sub-dimensions and 43 items, including attitudes towards the educational environment, interpersonal relationships, working life, family life, personal traits and competence-independent living subscales at the scale. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .90. Finally, two personal information forms were used to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants, the children, and the parents.

2.3 Data Collection

The data of the study were collected from the schools in Mugla during the academic year of 2016-2017. Participation in the research was voluntary. Schools and families have been informed and approvals were received before the research. In the study, the data for determining the attitude of the mothers were obtained by sending the data collection tool in the form of a paper to the families and then the forms were collected. For the data to determine the level of acceptance of the children, an individual test was applied to the children. Accordingly, cooperation has been achieved by verbal approval of the child. Then the questions were read to the child in an appropriate class (sound, light, etc. in the school) and the responses were recorded by the test practitioner. This test applied to children lasted approximately 10 minutes. Pre-school teachers were the source for filling demographic information for the child. The test practitioners for testing the children were selected from pre-school prospective teachers who had previously been trained and experienced in applying the test.

2.4 Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data, participants' scores on the tests were included. Subsequently, the obtained data were examined according to their skewness and kurtosis values, which showed normal distribution. Comparisons between variables in the study were calculated by Pearson momentum correlation coefficients.

3. Results

In this section, in accordance with the aim of the research, mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and the acceptance levels of children towards disabled individuals; followed by relationship between the mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and the acceptance levels of the children are presented. Table 1 contains descriptive findings regarding the mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and their children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities.

Table 1: Descriptive findings regarding mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and their children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities

Scales	Sub-dimensions	$\bar{x}$	SD	n
The Attitudes of Mothers Towards Disabled Individuals	Educational environment	13.55	1.53	
	Interpersonal relationship	40.00	3.62	
	Working life	39.78	3.60	
	Family life	10.43	2.15	60
	Personal traits	29.83	3.31	
	Competence	47.71	4.17	
	Total	185.93	12.08	
Children's Acceptance Levels for Children with Disabilities		20.80	4.04	60

According to Table 1, the mean scores of the educational environment subscale were 13.55 ($SD = 1.53$), the mean scores of interpersonal relationships subscale were 40.00 ($SD = 3.62$) mean scores for working life subscale were 39.78 ($SD = 3.60$), mean scores for the family life subscale were 10.43 ($SD = 2.15$), mean scores for the personality traits subscale were 29.83 ($SD = 3.31$), mean scores for the competence subscale were 47.71 ($SD = 4.17$) and the total mean scores of mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals were 185.93 ($SD = 12.08$).

Table 2: Relationships between mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and their children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities

	ASK-R Total	Mothers' Attitudes Total	Educational Environment	Interpersonal Relationships	Working Life	Family Life	Competence
ASK-R Total	1	.38**	.22	.08	.12	.42**	.30**

$^{**}p < .01, ^{*}p < .05$

Table 2 shows the relationships between mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and their children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities. There appears to be a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between the children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities and mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals ($r = .38$, $p < .05$). There is a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between the children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities and family life ($r = .42$, $p < .01$). Finally, the children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities were found to be moderate, positively and significantly related to competence ($r = .30$, $p < .05$). However, no significant relationship was found between the children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities and the educational environment, interpersonal relationships and working life sub-dimensions.

4. Discussion

In this research, it is aimed to examine the relationships between mothers' attitudes towards disabled individuals and their children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities. According to the research results, there is a moderate and positive relationship between mothers' attitudes and their children's acceptance levels. While the children's acceptance levels for children with disabilities are related to family life and competence in a moderate and positive way, there is no relation in the educational environment, working life and interpersonal relationships sub-dimensions.

Regarding the results, there are different findings in the literature. Some studies have suggested that there is no relationship between parents' attitudes and their children's' acceptance levels (Roberts & Lindsell, 1997; Rosenbaum, Armstrong & King, 1988) while others have suggested positive relationships (Okagaki, Diamond,

Kontos & Hestenes, 1998; Peck, Carlson & Helmstetter, 1992). Studies in the literature show that the studies and the participants are mostly from different cultures.

The influence of parents in creating stereotypes and attitudes that occur in early life is seen as an important component (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Attitudes that parents have can affect the approach, acceptance level or attitude of children towards disabled individuals. It has been suggested that families transmit their attitudes and approaches to their children as a model, or by talking about other people, or in the presence of negative attitudes, by preventing or hindering the opportunity for children to meet disabled individuals (Dunn, 1993). In this study, the relationship between the attitudes of the families and the level of acceptance of the children can be explained by this transfer. According to Hong, Kwon, and Jeon (2014), the types of attitudes of families can also influence whether or not they will be transferred to children. In this study, the relationship between the family life, including the relation of the disabled individuals to the family and the competence sub-dimensions, including the relation with the society can be interpreted as the transfer of the attitudes of the parents more intensely to their children in these areas but the transfer in the other areas is less or not realized.

This study was conducted with children in the early childhood period (Mean age: 75.06 months) and their families. Participating children do not consist of very young children and also, they are not at their late ages as in the uppermost parts of early childhood. This helps us to explain the results of the study more accurately. Children are not affected by the attitudes of their parents at very young ages, but as their age increases, they are affected more by their family attitudes (Rosenbaum, Armstrong & King 1988). This can be explained both by the opportunities for parents to teach their children and by the level of children's understanding. Authors suggest that this study may be conducted with participants from different age groups in the future studies to get a better understanding of age on attitudes.

The number of participants in this study is one of the limitations of this research. So, increasing the numbers of participants may be suggested for future research. In addition to this, it can be suggested to repeat the study with different sample groups. As to the authors, another important point is teacher attitudes. It is thought that the inclusion of teacher attitudes as well as family attitudes in further studies is expected to contribute to the literature. Interventions in early childhood need to be established so that students without special needs and those with special needs can receive education, both groups benefit from it at the highest level and the level of acceptance for individuals with disabilities in the society is increased. This study suggests that families as a component should be included in the interventions. In addition to making the family's attitudes towards disabled people more positive, they need to be supported on how to transfer positive attitudes to their children. In addition, the inclusion of this issue in the family trainings within the scope of pre-school education and the support of the families in this regard may bring positive results

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