THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM ON ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The Purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a social skills training program for adolescents on increasing skills relating to solving social problems and understanding others' feelings during the 7th grade period (children aged 13 years). A total of 114 students (55 female, 59 male) from "Bogazici Educational Center" participated in the study during the 2012-2013 academic year. The Social Skills Inventory (pre-test) was given to 114 students of mixed gender. Twenty volunteers with lower social skills, according to the inventory, were randomly selected and divided into experimental and control groups. A social skills training program was only taught to the experimental group for eighteen weeks. Each session lasted about an hour and a half. After the training, the same inventory was conducted on both the experimental and control groups as the post-test. It was found that the program significantly affected their social problem-solving skills and understanding of others' feelings. Results of posttest scores of the students and their scores after 8 months indicated that the Social Skills Training Program for adolescents maintains its effects.

Keywords: Social Skills Training Program, Social Competence, Social Problem Solving, Understanding Others' Feelings.

Introduction

Family and social environment are important factors which affect development of social competence and social skills. In this research, it is aimed to enhance low social skills of students in a positive way. Social environments including parents, teachers and friends play an important role in the acquisition of social skills. When adolescents interact with adults and other adolescents, they consequently encounter various examples of positive and negative behavior. Positive or pro-social behaviors include sharing, cooperation, and collaboration, waiting one's turn, and reasoning through discussion, while negative or anti-social behaviors include physical and oral aggressiveness. The behavior models that adolescents encounter in their environments affect their acquisition of these skills (Bayhan-San &Artan, 2004; Erden&Akman, 1996; Selcuk, 1996). Children learn the basis of a behavioral scheme when they are very young. However adolescence period is the time when these behaviors are reinforced. The behaviors acquired during this period are believed to be important in one's future life. That is why it is important that adolescents obtain social competence during the adolescence period. A training program will strengthen the social skills of adolescents during the adolescence period and improve their strategies for solving social problems, interacting with other children, and skills for understanding others' feelings (Johnson, 2000; Webster-Stratton, 2006; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). A social skills training program for adolescents has been prepared based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). This theory focuses on modeling, imitating, observing, and reinforcing behaviors, which have been found to have significant effects on learning these behaviors. In the program appropriate and inappropriate behavior models are shown to children, and are explained in terms of the consequences of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Bacanli, 2002; Green &Piel, 2002; Morgan, 2004; Senemoglu, 2003). The general aim of the social skills training program is to provide adolescents with pro-social solutions instead of ineffective anti-social solutions to deal with the problems they encounter in their daily lives which can lead them to find an alternative way to act when faced with a social problem (Adams &Wittmer, 2001; Erwin, 1994, 2000; Erwin, Kathryn & Purves, 2004; Ogulmus, 2006; Omeroglu&Kandır, 2007).

On the other hand, when studies are examined, it is seen that lack of social skills causes low academic success. Moreover there are proofs revealing that social and psychological functions are significant determiners. As a result of the study it is found that problems like dropping out of school, low academic

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success, anti-social behavior, alcoholism, and adulthood psychosis are related to lack of social skills (Ogilvy, 1994).

Research conducted indicate that one of the basic reasons of not being able to develop friendship and feeling alone of the children who are not accepted enough or rejected by their peers is due to their lack of enough social skills (Yavuzer, 2000; Erwin, 2000; Margolin, 2001).

Social skills training is an educational process in which some specific techniques are used like role playing practiced for developing social functions, modeling, and giving homework and it also involves exercises for increasing awareness (Bulkeley& Cramer, 1990, 451).

In this study the 18 weeks Social Skills Training Program for adolescents was administered to 13-year-old students in order to develop their social skills, comprehension of others' feelings, and skills in relation to solving social problems.

Methods

A pretest/posttest control group design was used in this study. Before the pretests were administered and Social Skills Training Program for adolescents took place, the principals and class teachers of the center where the research was being carried out were interviewed and convenient periods of time for the administration of the tests and program were determined. After the pretests were completed the experimental and control groups were determined. The principals, class teachers and the adolescents' parents that were chosen as the experimental group were informed about the training program through interviews and their permission was obtained. The teacher of the experimental group was also included in the training and the support of parents was obtained through letters and meeting at regular intervals. In order to test the permanence of the Social Skills Training Program for adolescents, the students in the experimental and control groups were contacted 8 months later at the same center where they were attending and permission was obtained to re-administer the posttests. There was no loss of sample during 8 months. The Mann-Whitney-U and Wilcoxon tests were used to analyze the results. The results showed no significant difference between the experimental group pre-test and control group pre-test. Therefore the social skills level in the experimental and control groups were similar before conducting the social anxiety management training program. Also there was no significant difference between the control group pre-test and control group post-test. The control group wasn't exposed to any treatment; therefore, the students' social skills level in the control group didn't change. There was a significant difference between the experimental group pre-test and posttest. The hypothesis of this study suggested that the social skills training program would increase secondary school students' social skills.

Design

To determine the effectiveness of the Social skills Training Program for adolescents, the "Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters" inventory was administered to the adolescents in the experimental and control groups before and after the training program. The pretest scores for the adolescents in both groups were compared using t tests for independent variables. The comparison indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest scores of both groups and that the groups were homogeneous. The children in the experimental group then took part in the Social Skills Training Program for adolescents for two hours per a week over a period of 18 weeks, after which the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups were compared.

Instruments

In this study, students' social skills were measured by the inventory developed by Matson, Rotatory and Hessel in 1983 which is called "MESSY" Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters. This scale is a five-pointslikert-type scale comprised of total 47 items which is prepared for evaluating social skills of children between the ages of 12 and 14. The scale, which is developed by Matson, Rotatory and Hessel in 1983, measures verbal and nonverbal social and aggressive behaviors. There are student and teacher forms of the scale. Student form is comprised of 62 items and teacher form is comprised of 64 items. The form adapted to Turkish is 62-item student form. This scale has 5 dimensions totally. These are: 1) appropriate social skills 2) inappropriate assertiveness 3) impulsivity 4) self-confidence 5) jealousy/introversion (Bacanli and Erdogan, 2003). Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY) is adapted to Turkish by Erdogan (2002). The studies of adaptation of the scale into Turkish are conducted with 89 male and 91 female, totally 180 students between the ages of 12 and 14. Findings show that this assessment scale is sufficiently valid and reliable in assessing social skills of children between the ages of 12 and 14. As a result of the factor analysis it is seen that items of the scale combine around two factors unlike the original scale. Items lower than .30 factor loads have been dismissed and ultimately 47-item version is developed. The first factor is named as "Negative Social Behavior" and the second one is named as "Positive Social Behaviors" (Bacanlive Erdogan, 2003).

Bacanli and Erdogan (2003) used Social Skills Scale and Teacher Rating Scale for similar scale validity and it is examined if there is a relation between these two assessment scale and Matson Evaluation of Social Skills. Findings indicate that there is a weak relation between Negative Social Behaviors and Social Skills Scale but there is a moderate relationship between Positive Social Behaviors and Evaluation of Social Skills. Bacanli and Erdogan (2003) determined safety coefficient of test-retest of Matson Evaluation of Social Skills as .70 for Negative Behavior Subscale, .74 for Positive Behavior Subscale and .77 for total point. It is found that item total score correlation of the 41 item in the scale is over .30. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale are .68 for Negative Social Behavior Subscale, .74 for Negative Behavior Subscale, and .85 for total. Scoring of the scale is done as: totally inappropriate for me 1 point, not very appropriate for me 2 points, a little appropriate for me 3 points, quite appropriate for me 4 points, and totally appropriate for me 5 points. The lowest point to get from the scale is 47, and the highest point to get is 235. There are two sub dimensions in the scale which are positive social behaviors and negative social behaviors (Bacanlive Erdogan, 2003). For the sampling of this study, Croanbach alpha internal insistency safety coefficients of Matson Evaluation of Social Skills Scale are analyzed. Internal consistency coefficients are .81 for "Negative Social Behavior", .83 for Positive Social Behavior, and .94 for Social Skills total point.

Participants

One hundred and fourteen students (55 female, 59 male) from "Private Bogazici Educational Center" in "Istanbul" participated in the study during the 2012-2013 academic year. The Social Skills Inventory (pre-test) was given to 114 students of mixed gender. Twenty students with lower social skills, according to the inventory, were randomly selected and divided into experimental and control groups. Training was only given to the experimental group for eighteen weeks. Each session lasted about two hours. After the training, the same inventory was conducted on both the experimental and control groups as the post-test.

Constructing Training Program

Program is designed based on social learning theory with the aim of teaching secondary school students (11-24 ages) necessary social skills like establishing friendship, expressing emotions, handling aggressive behaviors, and adaptation to class environment through scenarios. Social Skills Training Program includes instruction, rehearsal, and feedback/reinforcement processes (Erkan and Kaya, 2009).

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

In testing hypothesis, Mann-Whitney U-Test was used for unrelated measures in SPSS program, and Wilcoxon signed-rank test for related measures. Whitney U-test examines if the points gained from two unrelated sample shows a significant difference from each other. This test is used frequently in experimental studies with few subjects in unrelated measure. Wilcoxon signed-rank test is used to test meaningfulness of the difference of the points belonging to two related measurement sets and preferred frequently in the inter-group studies with few subjects in social sciences (Buyukozturk, 2002).

In this research, because the number of subjects participating to the research was a few, Mann Whitney U-test was used to compare pretest and posttest results of experimental and control groups, and Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare pretest and posttest scores of the groups within themselves. In testing the hypothesis of the study .05 was taken as statistical significance level.

Findings

In this part, findings about the hypothesis of the study are included.

For related sampling Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to examine if there was a meaningful relationship between Evaluation of Social Skills Scale pretest and posttest average scores of experimental group and its results were indicated in Table-1.

Table 1: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results for Evaluation of Social Skills Scale Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Experimental Group

Pretest/Posttest	N	Ranking Average	Rank sum	Z	P
Negative Ranking	0	,00	,00		
Positive Ranking	9	5,00	45,00	-2,666	,008
Equal	1	-	-		

As it is seen in Table-1, a significant difference was found between Evaluation of Social Skills Scale pretest and posttest average scores of experimental group (z=-2.666, p<.05). It means that the applied training program increased the social skills level of the experimental group.

For related sampling Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to test if there was a significant relationship between Evaluation of Social Skills Scale pretest and posttest average scores of control group, and its results are indicated in Table-2.

Table 2: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results for Evaluation of Social Skills Scale Pretest and Posttest Scores of Control Group

Pretest/Posttest	N	Ranking Average	Ranking Sum	Z	P
Negative Ranking	2	3,00	6,00	-1,955	,051
Positive Ranking	7	5,57	39,00		

Equal	1	-		-	

In Table-2 there was no significant difference between Evaluation of Social Skills Scale pretest and posttest average scores of the control group (z=-1.955, p>.05). It means that the social skills level of the control group which was not exposed to any training remained unchanged.

These findings indicate that social skill levels of students who participated in social skills training program is higher than students who did not participate. So, the hypothesis which claims that applying social skills training program will increase social skill levels of the students is confirmed.

Discussion

In this part, findings related to the effect of Social Skills Training Program on social skills levels of 7th grade students are discussed and interpreted. As a result of the comparison of pretest and posttest scores of experiment and control groups it is seen that hypothesis of the study is confirmed, which is: "there will be an increase in social skill levels of the students to whom Social Skills Training Program is conducted compared to the students to whom this program is not conducted". While there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group, this difference is not seen in the pretest and posttest scores of control group, which indicates that applied Social Skills Training Program is effective.

It was observed that in the beginning of the group process, members of experiment group avoided participating in exercises requiring role-play. However, after second session it was seen that students were more eager to participate in the exercises, but one of the students was reluctant until eighth session. Even though the student was told he needed to do exercise and it was necessary for group work, reluctance of the student continued. We could not obtain a result from individual interviews, and after interviewing with the family, it was determined that the problem was originating from his father. Two students who were in the same class since the first grade of primary school had poor communication before participating in the group program, however it was realized that cohesion was established between these two students.

Findings of this study indicate that social skill training is effective in increasing the level of social skills. It is thought that conducting experimental studies involving controlling placebo effect based on group interaction will be beneficial to specify more explicitly the effect of social training program on social skills.

Having social skills makes it easy to establish friendship with others. Having weak social relationships makes it impossible to establish friendship. With regard to these, it can be said that having social skills is a very important condition in establishing friendship. Children accepted by their peers have more comprehensive and high level social skills. Their social skills attracts other children towards them and children get more pleasurebeing with them (Thompson ve ark, 2002).

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