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The Outcomes of a Social Skills Teaching Program for Inclusive Classroom Teachers*

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Abstract

In this study, the effectiveness of a Social Skills Teaching Program (SSTP) prepared for inclusive classroom teachers was investigated. The SSTP gauged (1) teachers' expectations related to social skills of students with special needs, (2) their knowledge levels related to teaching social skills, and (3) their use of social skills teaching techniques. Twenty-nine (29) teachers participated in this study, 12 of whom were assigned to an experimental group and the other 17 were assigned to a control group. This SSTP was prepared for teachers and comprised four sessions which lasted a total of six hours. A pretest-posttest control group design was used in order to assess the effectiveness of the SSTP as well as to collect data. To accomplish these goals, a Social Skills Rating System -Teacher Form, a Social Skills Teaching Knowledge Test, and a Teacher Behaviors Observation Form were used. The results showed that this SSTP was effective on the teachers' outcomes, and that these effects were maintained after having completed the training.

Key Words

Inclusion, Teacher Training, Social Skills Teaching, Social Skills Training Program, Students with Special Needs.

Increasing the social skills of students with special needs in general education classrooms is a desired result of mainstreaming (Gresham, 1983; Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumn, 1996), and while academic skills are important in making the decision to place a student into general education classrooms, social skills are equally important in affecting the success of mainstreaming (Gresham, 1983). Because general classroom teachers are the ones who know the social behaviors of their students best and who know which social skills their students need to develop, they play a key role in supporting social behaviors and teaching necessary social skills (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001; Schepis, Ownbey, Parsons, & Reid, 2000). Teachers can use various strategies and can organize activities which encourage social interaction and, by taking the responsibility to teach social skills directly, can also foster social skills which enable friendship and peer interaction in the classroom (Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro, & Peck, 1995). There is evidence in literature indicating that when social skills are taught in the classroom, students' problem-solving skills, (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Shure & Spivack, 1980), interaction skills (Lewis et al., 1998), and cooperation skills increase, and problem behaviors displayed by these

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students decrease (Brigman, Lane, Switzer, Lane, & Lawrence, 1999). Previous studies examining teachers' opinions and knowledge regarding social skills have revealed that teachers generally assume that teaching social skills is not their duty. Instead, they believe that these are skills that should be taught by parents and many teachers perceive themselves as facilitators of social relationships (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001). Moreover, they report that they have limited information on and experience in how to teach social skills because of the emphasis placed on teaching academic skills during their pre-service education (Bradley & West, 1994). In fact, they emphasize that their first responsibility is to teach academic skills (Bain & Farris, 1991), stating that they do not have sufficient time to teach these skills in their classrooms (Maag & Webber, 1995). With this being said however, teachers certainly do accept that social skills are very important for all students so they may interact with their peers, and if sufficient support were provided regarding how to teach social skills in mainstream settings, students could be aided in enhancing and using these skills in their classrooms (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009). Considering teachers' opinions, developing programs which teach social skills by focusing on their importance and also facilitating improved teaching skills may be deemed worthwhile. Thus, instructors would then have the necessary information and skills thereby rendering them able to teach such skills to students both with and without special needs in mainstream classrooms (Malone, Straka, & Logan, 2000).

In previous studies, the effects of social skills training programs on teachers' awareness of student behaviors (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000), their knowledge of teaching social skills (e.g., making and maintaining friendships) (Marchant & Siperstein, 1997), and their ability to teach skills like modeling, rehearsing, rewarding, and prompting (Miller, Wienke, & Savage, 2000; Schepis et al., 2000) have been examined. In addition, teachers' opinions about the use of teaching techniques taught during their training have also been assessed. A group of researchers accepted teachers' increased knowledge, self-confidence, and perception about teaching social skills as the criteria to assess the efficacy of these types of programs (Barton-Arwood, Murrow, Lane, & Jolivette, 2005; Courtney, 2007; Marchant & Siperstein, 1997; Miller et al., 2000) while others assessed the effects of teacher training programs in terms of both teacher and student outcomes (Coombs-Richardson, Al-Juraid, & Stuker, 2000; Han, Catron, Weiss, & Marciel, 2005; Schepis et al., 2000). The results of these studies reveal that teacher training programs are effective in providing teachers with knowledge about social skills teaching and enabling them to use these skills in the daily classroom routines. (Barton-Arwood et al., 2005; Coombs-Richardson et al., 2000; Courtney, 2007; Han et al., 2005; Marchant & Siperstein, 1997; Miller et al., 2000; Schepis et al., 2000).

When the literature is reviewed, it is apparent that a number of factors might affect the outcomes regarding the teachers' ability to learn as well as the techniques used in their classrooms, both in terms of their effectiveness and which techniques are feasible. The primary motivating factor is that teaching techniques are being used in order to train teachers. The results of training programs which limit focus on transferring information in a didactic manner (Sexton et al., 1996) show that teachers are unable to take the information they have learned and implement it in classroom settings (Crow & Synder, 1998; Dildy, 1982; McNamara, Toran, & Ahearn, 2009; Malone et al., 2000; Mitchem & Benyo, 2000; Sexton et al., 1996). Therefore, the importance of developing training programs for teachers which provide not only information but also experience for teachers in terms of how to use such techniques and teaching strategies in classrooms should be emphasized (Crow & Snyder, 1998). There is also evidence showing that teaching techniques used during the course of teacher training plays an important role in the effectiveness of programs with regard to both teacher and student outcomes (Lerman, Tetreault, Hovanetz, Strobel, & Garro, 2008; Mitchem & Benyo, 2000).

The content of the training programs is the other important factor that might exert an effect when examining the results related to both the knowledge and skills of teachers (Barton-Arwood et al., 2005; Coombs-Richardson, Al-Juraid, & Stuker, 2000). For example, the treatment fidelity of a teaching program, which includes direct teaching methods consisting of techniques such as modeling, rehearsing, and providing feedback, is higher (Rose & Church, 1998 as cited in Han, Catron, Weiss, Marciel, 2005). In addition, teacher programs which include practical and replicable strategies that can be used in classrooms are more effective. Moreover, it is stated that if the content of the training programs is determined based on the needs, interests, and expectations of teachers, the efficacy of the programs is more likely to increase (Courtney, 2007; McNamara et al., 2009; Sexton et al., 2006). In several studies, it has been stated that because teacher expectations have an important effect on students and are themselves important variables in predicting student success (Alvidrez &

Weinstein, 1999; Harris, Rosenthal, & Snodgrass, 1986; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek, & Guillet, 2002), social skills programs for students should be developed based on the expectations of particular teachers (Lane, Wehby, & Barton-Arwood, 2005). Furthermore, more teachers are willing to participate in training sessions which emphasize short-term programs (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2007) consisting of step-by-step information (Mitchem & Benyo, 2000). This results in improved teaching skills. Several studies have indicated that training programs which last for short periods of time are effective in developing teachers' knowledge of social skills and teaching abilities (Schepis et al., 2000; Barton-Arwood et al., 2005). In addition, programs which provide teachers with consistent and continuous experience pertaining to the use of these types of techniques in classrooms (McNamara et al., 2009) enable teachers to learn how to teach social skills without disrupting the instructional process (Crow & Synder, 1998).

In light of all this information, it seems necessary to develop training programs whose goals are to increase both the knowledge and instructional skills of teachers so that they can therefore teach the necessary social skills to students both with and without special needs in general classrooms. Therefore, in this study, the researchers aimed to examine the effectiveness of a short-term social skill training program consisting of basic and easy-to-use teaching techniques, interactive exercises, and video examples to improve knowledge, teaching skills, and teacher expectations. To be able to reach this general purpose, assessing and responding to the following questions was attempted: (*a*) does the SSTP make a difference on the expectations of inclusive classroom teachers with regard to the social skills of students with special needs?, (*b*) does the SSTP make a significant difference in teachers' knowledge levels regarding the teaching of social skills? and (*c*) does the SSTP make a significant difference in the teachers' use of the social skills instruction techniques for students with and without special needs?

Method

Study Group

The participants of this study were inclusive grade 1-2 classroom teachers who work in public elementary schools in the city of Bolu, Turkey. All teachers volunteered to participate in the social skills training program. Of the twenty-nine (29) teachers, 12 teachers who were able to participate in the training program during the research period were assigned to the experiment group. The remaining 17, who wanted to receive the social skills training later because of their tight schedule, were assigned to the control group. Although the majority of the teachers in the groups had no previous training related to working with students with disabilities or with mainstreaming and inclusion, they were still responsible for teaching all students in their classrooms. Only a few teachers had taken undergraduate courses on special education and mainstreaming during their pre-service education, and the remainder had participated in short-term in-service courses conducted by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Three-fourths of all the teachers in the study had graduated from educational faculties and the others, although they had no regular teacher training, were certified as elementary school teachers by the MoNE based on several courses and seminars they had attended.

The characteristics of the experiment and control groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Characteristics of Participants

Experiment Group				Control Group			
		(n)	(%)			(n)	(%)
Age	26–35	4	33	**Age**	26–35	5	29
	36–45	7	58		36–45	8	47
	> 46	1	9		> 46	4	24
Gender	Female	7	58	**Gender**	Female	10	59
	Male	5	42		Male	7	41
Grade Level	1st Grade	7	58	**Grade Level**	1st Grade	9	53
	2nd Grade	5	42		2nd Grade	8	47
Education	Education faculties	10	83	**Education**	Education faculties	12	71
	Other (certified teachers)	2	17		Other	5	29
Knowledge About Mainstreaming	University	1	9	**Knowledge About Mainstreaming**	University	5	29
	In-service	3	25		In-service	2	12
	None	8	66		None	10	59

Students with special needs are classified as mainstream students by Guidance and Research Centers (GRC) and have been diagnosed with, among other things, mild mental retardation, emotional and behavioral disorders, and/or learning disabilities. Because one of the purposes of the study was to determine whether the teachers used social skills teaching strategies for students both with and without special needs, a student without special needs from each classroom was selected as the average student. This term was defined as a student who had not been referred to a hospital or GRC for any learning and/or behavioral difficulties. Additionally, according to their teachers, their academic performances and behaviors were at the average level of their particular classroom.

Instruments

In order to gather data in this study, the Social Skills Rating System-Social Skills Scale (SSS), Social Skills Teaching Knowledge Test (SSTKT) and Teacher Behavior Observation Form (TBOF) were used.

Social Skills Rating System-Social Skills Scale (SSS): This instrument is one of the three subscales of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) developed by Gresham and Elliot (1990) in order to determine the social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence of preschool and elementary school students by using parent, teacher, and child ratings. The teacher form of the SSS used in this study consists of three subscales: cooperation, assertion, and self-control (Gresham & Elliot, 1990). Teachers rate the occurrence and importance of specific social skills of students both with and without disabilities by using the SSS, and they can develop appropriate intervention based on the assessment results for those who are identified as having social skill problems. In this study, the importance dimension of the SSS was used, and teachers were asked to rate each skill's importance for classroom success as follows: for social skills deemed as unimportant, a score of zero (0) is given, for those viewed as important one point (1) is given, and for those seen as very important or critical for the success of a school, two points (2) are given (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

The translation and adaptation study of the scale into Turkish was done by Sucuoğlu and Özokçu (2005), and a factor analytic study of the Turkish form demonstrated that the SSS maintained the same three-factor construct as the original scale. However, certain items were present in different factors. Moreover, one item, whose factor loading was less than .30, was excluded from the scale. Thus, in the Turkish form of the SSS, the cooperation factor consists of 12 items, the assertion factor of 10, and the self-control factor of seven items. For the Turkish form, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .96 for the total score of the scale; and for the assertion, self-control, and cooperation subscales, the values were found to be .91, .93., and .84, respectively. Analyses showed that the Turkish form of the instrument was valid and reliable to be used to assess the social skills of students from preschool through third grade (Sucuoğlu & Özokçu, 2005).

Social Skills Teaching Knowledge Test (SSTKT): The SSTKT was developed by Sazak Pınar (2009) in order to assess the knowledge levels of instructors with special needs students in their classrooms regarding teaching social skills. It has 13 multiple choice and five short answer questions which assess general knowledge and teaching techniques concerning various social skills, such as modeling, rehearsing, rewarding, and prompting. In each multiple-choice question, a problem situation is defined by using short vignettes, and the teachers are asked to choose one of the four choices to explain the situation. Correct answers are given one point. For the short answer questions, teachers are asked to read the problem situation, make yes or no choices, and defend their choices based on their knowledge and experiences related to teaching social skills. A correct answer is worth one point, and an additional point is awarded for the correct explanation, making a possible total of two points. The total possible points range from 0 to 23 for the entire test.

Teacher Behavior Observation Form (TBOF): The TBOF was developed to assess to what extent teachers use social skills teaching techniques in their classrooms and whether the usage of these techniques changes according to whether a student has special needs or not. Over the course of developing the observation form, the literature was reviewed and any observation forms found were examined (Wallin & Harbor, 2001). The TBOF includes rehearsing, modeling, prompting, and rewarding; all of which are techniques commonly used in teaching science, the social sciences, and other similar courses. To facilitate the implementation of the TBOF and to gather accurate data about teacher behaviors, each technique was described in an objective and observable way. The behaviors of three inclusive classroom teachers who were not participants in our study were then assessed using the TBOF, and

necessary corrections were made in the descriptions of the techniques. The scores were coded by allotting one point for each social skills teaching technique used by the teachers during class, whether to a special needs student or not. In other words, the number of times each technique was used by the teachers was counted, and the total score of the teachers for both students with and without disabilities was calculated.

The teacher behaviors were assessed by two independent observers who were graduate students in the Special Education department. They were trained in three sessions, each of which lasted between one and a half to two hours, about the definitions of the teacher behaviors (techniques). Training of the observers was carried out by the first author using the TBOF until a consensus regarding teacher behaviors was reached between both the observers and the researcher. Teachers were observed during one academic class, and their behaviors (social skill teaching techniques) toward all of their students were observed separately.

Procedure

The implementation process consisted of the following stages: The development of a social skill teaching program, a pilot study, and then implementation of the program.

Through the course of developing the SSTP for the inclusive classroom teachers, any existing teacher training program with a focus on teaching social skills in the literature was reviewed, and the skills to be included in the programs along with the characteristics of effective training programs were identified (Barton-Arwood et al., 2005; Gresham, 1997; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Miller, Lane, & Wehby, 2005; Sucuoğlu & Çifci, 2001). The next step was to observe the 14 elementary teachers who had students with special needs in their classrooms in terms of whether they emphasized social skills during instruction and whether they used pertinent teaching techniques in any of their classes. In addition, the needs of the instructor related to teaching social skills were also investigated by using semi-structured interviews. The data gathered through observations and the interviews indicated that teachers did not teach social skills and did not use teaching strategies such as rewarding appropriate social behavior, prompting, and modeling. However, the teachers stated that they wanted to learn how to teach these skills and use the specific strategies in their classes so as to support the social skills of all of their students. Finally, modeling, rehearsing, prompting, giving cues, and rewarding were chosen as the most appropriate social skills teaching strategies to focus on during the study.

Before the SSTP was implemented, the pilot program was administered with 10 teachers who were not assigned to either the experiment or control group. These teachers who volunteered for the study were working in one elementary school in Bolu and had students with special needs in their classrooms. To evaluate the SSTP, teachers were asked to complete the Training Program Assessment form which included questions about the program content and implementation so that they might state their opinions and suggestions for the program in terms of its understandability, presentation, and length. In light of the teachers' feedback and suggestions, necessary changes in the SSTP were made, and the program was finalized.

It was planned that the length of the teacher program was to total six hours divided into four sessions lasting one and a half hours each. Each of these training sessions included presenting information, watching videos and doing exercises based on real-life examples (classroom videos), and discussions. For this purpose, 19 previously recorded classroom videos (Sucuoğlu, Akalın, & Sazak-Pınar, 2007) featuring real-life situations depicting the difficulties associated with social skills and the related problem behaviors as well as teacher behaviors were used.

In the first session of the program, the teachers were given information about definitions of social skills and the consequences for students who lack these skills, which include academic problems, difficulties in interacting with peers, and demonstrating problem behaviors. In addition, many examples related to the social skills of students with disabilities and those without were presented by the first researcher. The session ended with discussions coupled with a time allotted for questions and answers. In the second session, discussion revolved around just whose responsibility it was to teach social skills as well as both where and how they should be taught. Teaching methods and commonly-used programs were explained by giving a variety of examples. In the third and forth (final) sessions, information was given about each of the social skills teaching techniques. The teachers also watched real-life videos showing the difficulties experienced by students in terms of social skills and then discussed the proper techniques to be used as a remedy for each of the problem situations.

Before the implementation of the SSTP, pre-test data was collected from both the experiment and control groups by using the SSS, SSTKT, and TBOF. Teachers filled out the SSS and SSTKT, and their behaviors were assessed by the trained observers using the TBOF. The experiment group consisted of teachers from two different schools who were trained twice a week for an hour and a half in seminar rooms at their schools. In terms of fidelity, attention was paid to the implementation of the SSTP with the same content and the same length. Also the SSTP was implemented step- by-step format in the both schools. However, the teachers in the control group did not receive any training. After having completed the teacher training for the experiment group, all data collection procedures were repeated, and three months later follow-up data was collected.

Treatment Fidelity: To check the fidelity of the program, a graduate student in the Special Education department observed the implementation of the program in both the third and fourth sessions by using the Treatment Fidelity form, which included the training steps of the STTP. The student then indicated on the form whether or not the researcher was implementing all of the steps of the SSTP as planned. Next, the treatment fidelity coefficient was calculated by counting the planned number of steps which were implemented by the researcher in two sessions, and then dividing this number by the total number of steps in the form and then by multiplying that number by 100 (Tekin & Kırcaali-İftar, 2001). Treatment fidelity was found to be 100% for the first and third sessions.

Results

Expectations of Inclusive Classroom Teachers with Regard to the Social Skills of Students with Special Needs

To determine whether the expectations of the teachers of special needs students changed after the SSTP, the percentages of the experiment and control group teachers who had identified each skill included by the SSS as important (1), very important/critical (2), or not important (0) were calculated. The social skills marked by more than 50% of the teachers were deemed to be very important (2) and were accepted as pivotal or critical skills for success in the classroom (Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2004; Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003, 2004; Lane, Wehby, & Cooley, 2006; Meier, DiPerna, & Oster, 2006, Sazak-Pınar & Sucuoğlu, 2011). The percentages of the teachers in the experiment and control groups who viewed each skill as critical for the students with special needs, both before and after the implementation of the SSTP, are given in Table 2. In addition, the same table indicates the percentages of the teachers whose expectations were assessed three months after the termination of the program in the study follow up.

When Table 2 is examined, it should be noticed that only one skill (*The student will finish classroom assignments on time.*) was seen as critical for the students with special needs by more than 50% of the experiment group before training, whereas the control group did not view any of these skills as very important for such students. After the SSTP, the number of critical social skills rated by the experiment group increased, and 14 social skills (seven skills from assertion, four from self-control, and three from the cooperation subscales) were rated as very important/critical by more than 50% of the teachers in the experiment group. In addition, four skills were rated as important by more than 60% of the teachers. However, none of the skills were seen as critical by the majority of the teachers in the control group for students with special needs either after the training or during the follow-up. According to the follow-up data, the expectations of the teachers in the experiment group were maintained for students with special needs. All assertion skills were rated as critical by more than 50% of the teachers, and two skills were viewed as very important in the follow-up stages by 75% of the teachers.

Teachers' Knowledge Levels Regarding the Teaching of Social Skills: In order to examine whether there was a significant difference between the SSTKT total scores of the experiment and control groups before (pretest) and after the program (posttest), the Mann-Whitney U test was used due to the fact that the data of the study did not meet the assumptions of the ANCOVA and ANOVA Tests. The results of the analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3.
Mann Whitney U Test Results of the Difference in the Mean Ranks of Pre and Posttest SSTKT Scores of the Experiment and Control Groups

Group	N	*Mean Rank*	*Sum of Ranks*	*U*
Pretest for the Experiment Group	12	15.88	190.5	91.5
Pretest for the Control Group	17	14.38	244.5	
Posttest for the Experiment Group	12	23.5	282	.00*
Posttest for the Control Group	17	9	153	

$p>.05$, *$p<.05$

Table 2.
Distribution Percentages for Teachers Who Scored Each Item As Very Important (2) for Students with Special Needs Before (B) and After (A) the Training and in the Follow-Up (F)

		Experiment						Control					
		B		A		F		B		A		F	
Items	**Domain**	**n**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
1. Controls temper in conflict situation with peers	S	5	41.7	**8**	**66.7**	**7**	**58.3**	5	29.4	4	23.5	3	17.6
5. Responds appropriately to peer pressure	C	4	33.3	**7**	**58.3**	**8**	**66.7**	3	17.6	2	5.9	3	17.6
8. Uses free time in an acceptable way	A	4	33.3	5	41.7	**7**	**58.3**	5	29.4	2	11.8	4	23.5
9. Finishes class assignments within time limits	A	**7**	**58.3**	**7**	**58.3**	**9**	**75.0**	2	11.8	2	5.9	3	17.6
12. Controls temper in conflict situations with adults	S	5	41.7	**7**	**58.3**	**6**	**50.0**	2	11.8	3	17.6	4	23.5
13. Receives criticism well	S	5	41.7	**7**	**58.3**	5	41.7	3	17.6	2	11.8	3	17.6
14. Initiates conversations with peers	C	2	16.7	**7**	**58.3**	5	41.7	1	5.9	2	5.9	4	23.5
15. Uses time appropriately while waiting for your help	A	5	41.7	5	41.7	**7**	**58.3**	2	11.8	2	11.8	3	17.6
16. Produces correct schoolwork	A	5	41.7	**7**	**58.3**	**7**	**58.3**	2	11.8	3	17.6	4	23.5
19. Gives compliments to peers	C	4	33.3	**7**	**58.3**	5	41.7	2	11.8	2	11.8	4	23.5
20. Follows directions	A	4	33.3	**7**	**58.3**	**7**	**58.3**	3	17.6	4	23.5	4	23.5
21. Puts work materials or school property away properly.	A	4	33.3	**8**	**66.7**	**7**	**58.3**	2	11.8	2	11.8	3	17.6
24. Responds appropriately when other children push or hit him or her.	S	4	33.3	**6**	**50.0**	5	41.7	4	23.5	5	29.4	4	23.5
26. Keeps his or her desk clean and neat without being reminded by the teacher.	A	5	41.7	**7**	**58.3**	**7**	**58.3**	3	17.6	3	17.6	4	23.5
27. Pays attention to the teacher's instructions.	A	5	41.7	**9**	**75.0**	**9**	**75.0**	4	23.5	4	23.5	7	36.8
28. Makes transitions from one classroom activity to another without wasting time or disrupting the class.	A	4	33.3	**8**	**66.7**	**7**	**58.3**	3	17.6	3	17.6	3	17.6

Note: Frequencies which are indicated in bold belong to social skills which were scored as very important (2) by more than 50% of the teachers for students with special needs.

As seen in Table 3, although there was no significant difference between the mean ranks of the pretest SSTKT scores of the experiment and control groups, a significant difference between the posttest scores of the two groups was found (pretest for the experiment and control group U=91.5, *p=.63,* post test for the experiment and control group U=.00, *p=.00).* Additionally, the posttest mean rank of the experiment group was higher than the posttest mean rank of the control group. This finding demonstrated that the SSTP was effective in increasing the knowledge of the instructors about social skills teaching.

In order to examine whether there was a significant difference in the SSTKT total scores of the experiment and control groups before and after the training, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used with the results being shown in Table 4.

As seen in Table 4, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test results indicate that there was a significant difference between the SSKTK pretest-posttest scores of teachers in the experiment group (z= 3.79; *p=.00*). However, no significant difference was found between the SSKTK pretest-posttest scores of teachers in the control group (z= 1.75; *p=.08*). Accordingly, the SSTKT total scores of the teachers in the experiment group changed after participating in the SSTP; therefore, it can be inferred that the SSTP was effective in increasing the knowledge levels of the teachers regarding social skills teaching.

Table 4.
Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results Related to the Significance of the Differences in the SSTKT Total Scores of Teachers Before and After the Training

Posttest-Pretest	**N**	***Mean Rank***	***Sum of Ranks***	***Z***
Experiment Group Negative Ranks	0	0	0	3.79
Experiment Group Positive Ranks	12	6.5	78	
Ties	0	-	-	
Control Group Negative Ranks	4	3.38	13.5	1.75
Control Group Positive Ranks	7	7.50	52.5	
Ties	6	-		

*$p<.05$, $p>.05$

To test the significant difference between the posttest and follow-up SSTKT scores of the experiment and control groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was used, and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.
Mann-Whitney U Test Results Related to the Significance of the Differences in the Mean Ranks of the SSTKT Total Scores of Teachers in the Posttest and Follow-Up

Group	N	*Mean Rank*	*Sum of Ranks*	*U*
Experiment group posttest	12	23.5	282	.00
Control group posttest	17	9	153	
Experiment group follow-up	12	23.46	281.5	0.5
Control group follow-up	17	9.03	153.5	

*$p<.05$, $p>.05$

As shown in Table 5, for the teachers in the experiment group, there was a significant difference between the posttest and follow-up mean ranks while there was no significant difference between the posttest mean ranks and follow up mean ranks of the teachers in the control group (experiment and control group posttest U=.00, *p=.00,* experiment and control group follow-up U=.5, *p=.00).* The mean rank of the experiment group was higher than the mean rank of the control group in the follow-up stage.

When Figure 1 is examined, it is clearly seen that there was no significant change in the pretest, posttest, and follow-up scores of the control group. However, the SSTKT scores of the experiment group increased after the training, and this increase was maintained two months after the training was completed. Teachers' mean scores of the SSTKT before and after the program and in the follow-up are shown in Figure 1.

Teachers' Use of the Social Skills Instruction Techniques for Students with and without Special Needs

Social skill teaching techniques used by the experiment and control group teachers in one class were observed three times: before, after, and two months after the SSTP. To compare the frequencies of each teaching technique used by the teachers toward both groups of students, observational data was gathered for each group of students separately. Afterward, the mean frequencies of each technique used by the teachers during each stage were calculated. Because none of the teachers in the experiment or control group used any of the techniques to teach or support social skills during instruction before the SSTP, there was no attempt to examine whether there were significant differences between the three groups of observational data. The mean frequencies of teaching techniques are given in a stacked column graphic (Figure 2) which displays the results of multiple queries stacked on top of one another, either vertically or horizontally. Using a stacked bar chart is an effective way to present the absolute values of data points represented by the segments of each bar as well as the total value represented by data points from each series stacked in a bar.

According to the stacked column graphic, the experiment and the control groups did not use any social skills teaching techniques before the training. After the training however, teachers in the experiment group used the rewarding ($\overline{X}$ =4,25), prompting ($\overline{X}$ =4), and modeling ($\overline{X}$ =2,6) techniques for the student with special needs. For the students without special needs, they used the same techniques of prompting ($\overline{X}$ = 6,25*),* rewarding ($\overline{X}$ = 5,8), modeling ($\overline{X}$ = 3,8), and other prompts ($\overline{X}$ = 0,2), but at a higher frequency.

The data collected after training showed that teachers in the experiment group used rewarding ($\overline{X}$ = 2.6), prompting ($\overline{X}$ = 1.6), modeling ($\overline{X}$ = 0.9), and rehearsing ($\overline{X}$ = 0.6) techniques for the students with special needs; whereas for the students without special needs, they used rewarding ($\overline{X}$ =

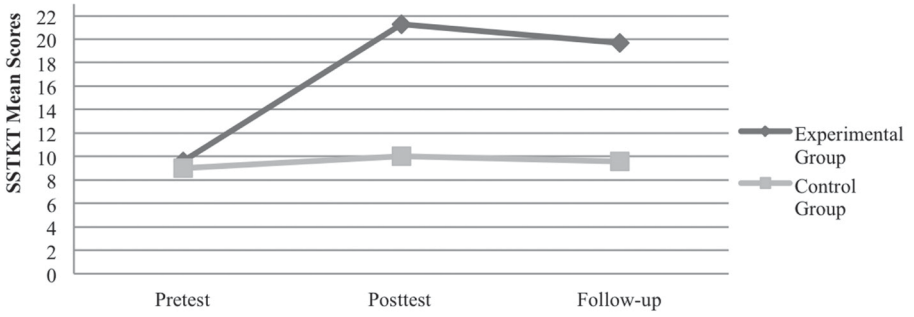

Figure 1.
SSTKT Mean Scores of Teachers

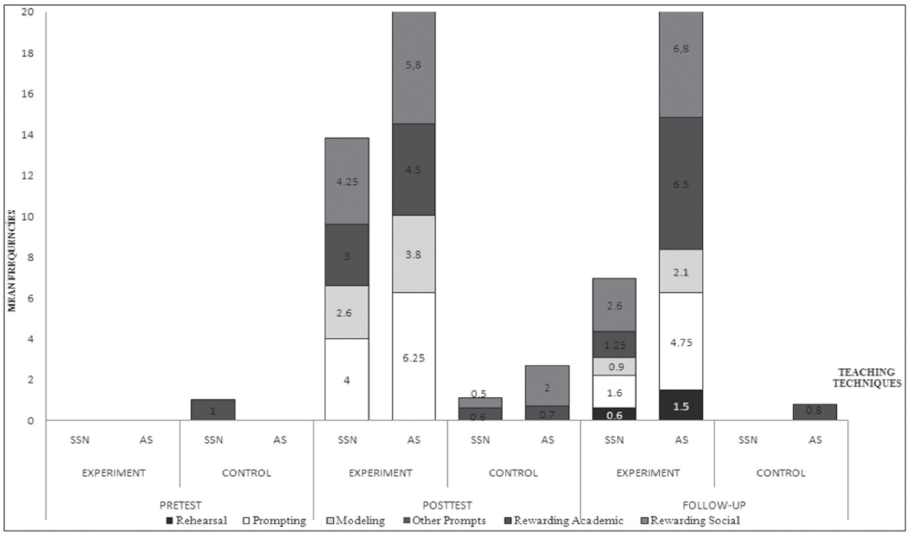

Figure 2.

Mean Frequencies of Teachers' Use of Social Skills Teaching Techniques

6.8), prompting ($\overline{X}$ = 4.75), modeling ($\overline{X}$ = 2.1), and rehearsing ($\overline{X}$ = 1.5) techniques. On the other hand, teachers in the control group only used rewarding ($\overline{X}$ =0.5) for the students with ($\overline{X}$ =0.5) and without special needs ($\overline{X}$ = 2). In the follow-up stage, it was seen that teachers in the control group used the rewarding technique only for the students without special needs ($\overline{X}$ = 0.8) while the teachers in the experiment group used social skills teaching techniques more often. This finding shows that the SSTP is effective in increasing the teachers' use of social skill teaching techniques for all students, whether they have special needs or not.

Discussion

In this study, the purpose was to examine the effectiveness of a social skills teaching program with regard to the teachers' expectations regarding the social skills of students with disabilities, the teachers' knowledge levels associated with teaching social skills, and the use of social skills teaching techniques for those who have students with special needs in their classrooms.

Firstly, the effects of the SSTP on the expectations of teachers were examined. Before the training, only one of the social skills in the SSS was seen as critical for the success of the school for children with special needs by more than 50% of the experiment or control groups, and none of the skills were viewed as critical for students with special needs. This finding seems to be consistent with the findings in other study examining teacher expectations in Turkey (Sazak Pınar & Sucuoğlu, 2011). In their study, Sazak Pınar and Sucuoğlu (2011) examined the expectations of general education classroom teachers concerning children with mental retardation. The results of this study indicated that teachers who were working in general education and special education schools rated none of the social skills in the SSS as critical/very important for experiencing success with special needs students. However, in the current study, after the training, the majority of the teachers (more than 50%) in the experiment group rated 14 social skills in the SSS as critical for students with special needs. In addition, four skills were accepted as being pivotal for school success by approximately three-fourths of the teachers. It is thought that the positive change in the expectations of the teachers for students with special needs was because the SSTP increased the knowledge of the teachers regarding this subject. It can be inferred that after the SSTP, the teachers benefitted from the training by learning the definition of social skills, their functions, and their connection with academic success and problem behaviors. When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that some research studies have revealed similar results (Barton-Arwood et al., 2005; Marchant & Siperstein, 1997; Malone et al., 2000). For example, Marchant and Siperstein's (1997) study reported that after the training program, teachers were more aware of the social characteristics of the students

and their role in teaching social skills. It can be said that in this study, the SSTP raised the expectations of teachers in the area of social skills by increasing their knowledge related to teaching these skills so that they began to view them as being crucial for the students' success in school.

When the 14 social skills rated as critical after training are reviewed, it is clearly seen that these skills are almost identical to the social skills viewed as critical for the students without special needs (Sazak Pınar & Sucuoğlu, 2011). Therefore, it can be inferred that the SSTP decreased the differences between the social skills expectations of the teachers for students with and without special needs. This finding seems to be important for the implementation of mainstreaming in elementary schools. In several studies, the attitudes of teachers toward students with special needs and the implementation of mainstreaming have been generally negative (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995), and these negative attitudes affect the teachers' opinions and expectations (Bender & Smith, 1990). Moreover, it has been stated that informing teachers about mainstreaming and students with special needs may lead to a change in their attitudes (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Therefore, it can be said that the SSTP positively affected the opinions of teachers in regard to the importance of social skills as well as their view of students with special needs. This finding is consistent with those in previous studies (Barton-Arwood et al., 2005; Coombs-Richardson et al., 2000; Marchant & Siperstein, 1997; Miller et al., 2000) which revealed that after social skills training, teachers obtained greater awareness of the characteristics of students with special needs, they understood the difficulties they experienced in social interaction, and they were more accepting of these students in their classrooms. In addition, they communicated with these students more frequently, acquired more information related to special education, and changed their negative attitudes toward mainstreaming as well as their opinions concerning students with special needs.

This study has revealed that, after teacher training, approximately 50% of the teachers (range: 41.7%-75%) in the experiment group rated the assertion skills (seven skills) as being very important. In addition, three cooperation and four self-control skills were also viewed as being critical for the success of students with special needs. This finding seems to be opposed to the findings of previous studies related to students without disabilities. Studies of teacher expectations at the elementary and secondary levels indicated that they view self-control and cooperation skills as equally important for success, yet also perceive assertion skills as less important for students (Hersh & Walker, 1983; Kerr & Zigmond, 1986). In addition, in two previous studies, it was revealed that almost none of the assertion skills were viewed as being very important (Lane, Givner et al., 2004; Lane, Pierson et al., 2004). It was also emphasized that teachers might perceive the assertion skills as disturbing, and they might try to minimize these skills to promote harmony in the classroom (Lane, Givner et al., 2004). In addition, Meier et al. (2006) revealed that teachers viewed the skills of cooperation and self-control as being more important than assertion when examining students' ability to function in the classroom. Conversely, in our study, it was surprising that although inclusive classroom teachers complained about the behavior of students with special needs and the management of inclusive classrooms in Turkey (Kargın, Acarlar, & Sucuoğlu, 2003), they did not value self-control and cooperation skills which facilitate behavior management and instruction. There are many different variables which affect the expectations of social skills: students' gender, ethnic characteristics, age, social skills, physical attributes, and the expectations of teachers in reference to family characteristics (Baron-Arwood et al., 1985; Solomon et al., 1996 as cited in Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). For example, being a student with special needs is accepted to be an important variable affecting teacher expectations (Levin, Smith, & Arluke, 1982). From this point of view, the difference between the findings of this study and those of previous studies may be explained in that there were actually students with special needs in the classrooms.

With respect to the effect of the program on the knowledge level of teachers related to social skills teaching, the results indicated that there were significant differences between the means of the knowledge test scores of the teachers before and after the program. Differences were also found when examining the after- program scores and follow-up scores. The authors believe that the increase in the knowledge levels of the instructors regarding social skills teaching may have resulted from several factors. Firstly, teachers had previously never undergone this type of training, and according to the results of the interviews, they had no knowledge and experience related to the teaching of these skills. Secondly, they mentioned that they desired to learn how to teach basic social skills such as raising hands, asking for permission, and listening

to the teacher – all which are necessary for success in every classroom. After having been informed about social skills via the SSTP for the first time, the teachers discovered the importance of teaching social skills to all students, especially for those with special needs. Thirdly, it may be suggested that the effectiveness of the program was because it was developed by targeting the information teachers needed in their own professional practice. Lastly, the SSTP included social skills teaching techniques which can be easily implemented in a short period of time as well as demonstrating how to use these techniques in the classrooms in a step-by-step format using clear language with various exercises and real-life examples. Therefore, it is thought that these specific characteristics of the program contributed to the increased knowledge about how to teach social skills.

The last and the most important finding of this study is related to whether the teachers in the experiment group used the social skills teaching techniques in their classrooms. During the observation, it was determined that before the training, teachers in both the experiment and control groups used none of the social skills teaching techniques with their students during instruction. However, after the training, teachers in the experiment group were using the social skills teaching techniques in their classrooms with all of their students. The follow-up stage showed that teachers continued using these techniques. Interestingly, after the training, they were using the rehearsal technique during the follow-up session, which they had not used prior to the training. In summary, it was found that the SSTP was effective in increasing the teachers' knowledge and helping them use the skills they learned in a practical way in the classroom. This effect was then maintained until, at least, the follow-up stage.

The findings, consistent with those of previous studies, also indicated that the SSTP was effective in promoting teachers to use social skills teaching techniques. Existing studies emphasized that programs focusing on teaching these techniques were effective in that the teachers subsequently began to use the social skills teaching techniques during instruction (Marchant & Siperstein, 1997; Miller et al., 2000, 2005; Salisbury et al., 1995; Schepis et al., 2000). For example, Schepis et al. (2000) stated that if the techniques of helping, reinforcing, and giving feedback are used in the course of teacher programs, the teachers' use of the social skills teaching techniques in their daily classroom routine will increase. In this study, the results of in-class observations showed that the ratio of teaching techniques used by the teachers before training was 55%; whereas after the program, this ratio increased to 92%. Some of the teachers stated that they found the training program very functional because they had not only learned useful information, but had also gained valuable experience by participating in exercises related to the implementation of the teaching techniques, including role playing, in-class observations, and feedback. Because of the characteristics of the SSTP mentioned above, the researchers believed that, after receiving training, the teachers would begin to use these social skills teaching techniques for both students with and without special needs.

In this study, the teachers' use of modeling and rewarding techniques after the training is thought to be an important finding. While Gresham (1997) indicated that the most effective social skills teaching techniques were modeling, rehearsing, and rewarding, Miller et al. (2005) stated that among these techniques, modeling was the most important. They suggested that with modeling, students not only observe the correct/appropriate skills, but that they also have the opportunity to implement the desired behavior without fear of being excluded and making mistakes. Similarly, rewarding is one of the important techniques that facilitates the students' learning of new skills (Gresham, 1997). It is thought that the SSTP would enable teachers to learn and use modeling and rewarding in the teaching of social skills which, in turn, would contribute to the acquisition and use of these social skills by students both with and without disabilities.

Existing studies focusing on the expectations of teachers with regard to social skills suggest it is necessary to examine whether teachers reward social skills which they find important (Lane, Givner et al., 2004; Lane, Pierson et al., 2003, 2004; Lane et al. 2006). If the teachers reward social skills, this may be effective in shaping the behaviors of the student, in encouraging students to display these behaviors more often, and in decreasing or preventing problem behaviors (Lane et al., 2005; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). Therefore, if teachers reward appropriate social skills, students will hold them to be very important and will continue to use them in their daily lives (Lane, Pierson et al., 2004). Several studies have investigated whether teachers were rewarding positive behaviors of all the students in the classroom (Beaman & Whedall, 2000; Harrop & Swinson, 2000; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). Studies focusing on teacher behaviors have

indicated that teachers do not reward students as much as expected for their academic achievements or for the appropriate display and use of social skills (Sucuoğlu et al., 2007). Some studies have shown that teachers mostly reward academic skills, with no emphasis given to rewarding social skills. Instead, teachers would continuously criticize inappropriate behaviors (Beaman & Whedall, 2000; Harrop & Swinson, 2000; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). For example, one study (Wheldall & Beaman, 1994 as cited in Beaman & Wheldall, 2000) emphasized that teachers used negative feedback eight times more than they rewarded appropriate behaviors. In this study, the observations conducted before and after the SSTP as well as in the follow-up revealed that although the teachers rewarded certain academic achievements, they did not praise the proper display of social skills by any of the students before the SSTP. After the training, rewarding the behaviors of the experiment group increased and, according to the teachers, the social skills were used more frequently by the students during classes. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the SSTP was effective in helping teachers recognize and reward social skills. Similar findings were observed in studies by Utley et al. (2007) and Miller et al. (2005) in which the researchers found that their social skills teaching programs increased the instances of the behaviors which were more frequently rewarded by teachers.

In this study, teachers in the experiment group were asked to assess the SSTP with the Training Program Assessment form which was used during the pilot study and to explain their opinions concerning the training program in terms of content, written and visual materials, examples, duration, presentations, and discussions. Here are some examples of what the teachers said about the SSTP:

"*I learned that social skills are just as important as the academic skills, and they must always be supported,*" "*The narration of the program was very good. I think I have clearly learned all the skills.*"

"*I had never thought I had to teach my students how to raise their hands.*"

"*I learned how to teach social skills.*"

When these statements are taken into account, it is thought that the social validity (Tekin & Kırcaali-İftar, 2001) of the program is high. In other words, the purpose, content, and methodology of the SSTP were appropriate for inclusive classroom teachers.

In the follow-up data, it was found that there was a small decrease in the knowledge levels of the teachers. The researchers believed that this was a result of not guiding teachers in using the skills they had learned and not providing feedback to them about their performances during instruction. In literature, it has been frequently emphasized that coaching and providing feedback to the teachers improves their teaching skills and instructional practices as well as implementation integrity of their treatment (Duchaine, Jolivette, & Fredrick, 2011). Therefore, in future research studies, it could be beneficial to examine whether teachers' knowledge and skills related to instructing their students in how to use appropriate social behaviors would increase by providing performance feedback while they are teaching.

In this study, there were a number of limitations. The first and foremost being that the effects of the SSTP on student outcomes, namely the social skills of students both with and without special needs, were not examined. Utley et al. (2005) and Miller et al. (2005) reported that as students learned appropriate social skills, their off-task behaviors decreased and on-task behaviors increased as a result of the social skills programs in which their teachers had participated. Therefore, in future studies, the effects of the teacher training programs on both teacher and student outcomes should be examined. Another limitation of this study was that observational data was gathered in only one academic class due to the decision of the principals and the teachers. This is contrary to other research in which observational data was collected in more than one session and for a longer period of time (Han et al., 2005; Lerman et al., 2008; Schepis et al., 2000). The authors therefore suggest that in future research, data based on observation should be collected in either more than one session or in both academic and non-academic classes. By implementing this protocol, more accurate information could be obtained about which teaching techniques are being used by the teachers during instruction.

In conclusion, this study indicates that training inclusive classroom teachers with a short-term, easy-to-use program based on the needs of the teachers is effective in improving both the knowledge and skills of teachers. Since the main purpose of education in elementary schools in Turkey is to develop the academic skills of all students, including students with disabilities, the teachers, most of whom have limited information and experience related to teaching social skills, need to be supported. On the other hand, because

the number of the students in classrooms is very high and the workload of their teachers is heavy, many teachers are not willing to participate in seminars, conferences, or even workshops. In addition, most of the teacher seminars or courses are mostly based on transferring knowledge and information presented in a didactic way. Consequently, even though teachers acquire a lot of new information in seminars, they cannot use most of it in their classes. Therefore, it is believed that programs similar to the SSTP consisting of many exercises, real- life examples, and visual materials with a short implementation time can be a useful tool for training teachers so that they can support the students in terms of their social skills.

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