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Teacher and Student Behaviors in Inclusive Classrooms*

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Abstract
In this study, I examined general education teachers' classroom behaviors and as well as academic engagement, off–task and problem behaviors of students with special needs. The sample group of this study comprised 54 general education teachers working at local primary schools in Eskisehir, Turkey and their 54 students with mild intellectual disabilities. Teachers' and students' behaviors were observed and recorded on a data collection form designed according to the time-sampling method. Observations took place in each of the 54 classrooms, in four different lessons, for a total of 120 min in each classroom during the spring term of the 2011–2012 academic year. Results indicated that students with mild intellectual disabilities showed academic engagement in 58.58%, off-task behavior in 34.11%, and problem behaviors in 7.31% of the lessons. During those lessons, teachers' academic communication with students with mild intellectual disabilities 7.50% of the observation time, while approval of their behaviors was at 0.13% and disapproval of their behaviors was 0.27%. The behaviors of students with mild intellectual disabilities and the academic communication of teachers with them significantly changed according to the placement of these students in the classroom and the teachers' adjustments in the instructional program toward them.

Keywords: Inclusion • Mild intellectual disabilities • Student behavior • Teacher behavior • Academic engagement • Problem behavior

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Inclusion can be defined as students with special needs participating in education within the same settings with their non-disabled peers and benefiting from support services as needed (Odom, 2000). Inclusive education is becoming widespread in Turkey and in the world. Although participation of students with special needs in general education classrooms increases day by day, research has found that general education teachers' views towards students with special needs are generally negative (Hines, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Uysal, 2004). Teachers stated that students with disabilities had more behavior problems than their peers and that these created more difficulties in maintaining class order, with teachers suggesting that these students should be placed in separate classrooms (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; McClean, 2007; Mitchem & Benyo, 2000). Moreover, students with disabilities required special attention and time for dealing with behavior problems and engaging them in lessons (Daniels, 1998; Niesyn, 2009). However, whether with or without special needs, all students' behaviors are directly related to teachers' behaviors (Greenwood & Carta, 1987) as teachers leading order in the classroom can increase students' success.

Increasing students' engagement in classroom activities is considered to be one of the most effective tools for managing student behaviors (Jordan et al., 2009; Munk & Repp, 1994; Niesyn, 2009). Students' level of engagement in academic activities is an important factor effecting their learning and success. Studies showed a strong relationship between learning and engagement in academic activities (Baker, Clark, Maier, & Viger, 2008; Berliner, 1984; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). Therefore, teachers can decrease behavior problems and unproductive time by keeping students busier on class work (Anderson & Brophy, 1979; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Evertson, 1989).

Approval and reinforcement are other tools used in managing students' behaviors. Studies emphasized that teachers need to approve students' behaviors for increasing students' appropriate academic and social behaviors and decrease inappropriate behaviors (Brophy, 2006; Landrum & Kauffman, 2006; Swinson & Harrop, 2001); however, disapproval of students' behaviors should be the last strategy that teachers should manifest (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). Approval behavior is defined as teachers (*a*) reinforcing students' appropriate behaviors; (*b*) praising a student or students after an appropriate behavior; or (*c*) expressing satisfaction about students' class work, behavior, or performance (Gresham, 1998, 2001; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). Disapproval behavior is defined as teachers reprimanding and criticizing with a verbal or nonverbal response after an inappropriate behavior (Partin, 2010; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). Approval and disapproval behavior can be manifested as verbal or nonverbal behavior or a combination of both (Partin, 2010). Verbal approval behaviors are especially emphasized as effective aspects of successful teaching and decreasing problem behaviors (Ferguson & Houghton, 1992). In fact, teachers' use of more verbal approvals during lessons enable them to spend less time dealing with problem behaviors and, thus, more time for academic work (Brophy, 1983; Chalk & Bizo, 2004). Studies showed that teachers used more disapproval behaviors and little approval behaviors toward students with special needs (Partin, 2010; Sutherland, 2000).

In the literature, several studies examined teachers' behaviors towards students with special needs (McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993; Skrtic, 1980). Skrtic (1980) indicated that teachers showed more critical behaviors and less approval behaviors towards students with special needs. In another study, students with special needs communicated with their teachers less than their non-disabled peers did; however, teachers' behavior toward students did not vary depending on whether or not they had special needs (McIntosh et al., 1993). Two similarly designed studies revealed that the behaviors of students with special needs in general education classrooms were not significantly different than their non-disabled peers, but that teachers paid more attention to their behaviors (Brown, Odom, Li, & Zercher, 1999; Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, & Hupp, 2002).

In Turkey, a limited number of studies have focused on teacher and student behaviors in inclusive classrooms (Akalın, 2007; Çifci, Yıkmış, & Akbaba-Altun, 2001; Guner-Yıldız & Sazak-Pınar, 2012; Sucuoglu, Akalın, Sazak-Pınar, & Guner, 2008; Sucuoglu, Demirtaşlı, & Guner, 2009), and the results of these studies are generally similar. In the first study on this subject (Çifci et al., 2001), teachers were interviewed and observed in classrooms to define whether they reinforced their students' appropriate behaviors or not. The results of this study showed that teachers did not provide reinforcement to students with special needs and were largely not aware of them. In other studies, teachers gave attention to students with

special needs only during 4% (Akalın, 2007) and 5% of the observation time (Sucuoglu et al., 2008). In another study, Sucuoglu et al. (2009) observed 201 inclusive classrooms and defined the strategies used by the teachers. According to results, 38.31% of teachers worked individually for a short time with students with special needs, but only 7.46% of them made adjustments in the instruction content. In addition, 41.79% of teachers made direct contact with students with special needs during the lesson and only 27.36% of teachers reinforced at least one academic and social behavior of these students. In another study, Guner-Yıldız and Sazak-Pınar (2012) analyzed the behaviors of 45 general education teachers toward students with special needs in inclusive classrooms, and results yielded that 20% reinforced and approved them, 7% made adjustments in instructional content, and 24% placed them in front rows to reach them more easily. These results revealed that teachers' behaviors were insufficient in engaging students with special needs in the lesson and helping them to be successful.

Teachers working in inclusive classrooms can make adjustments and take certain actions for increasing the success of students with special needs, allowing them to be more engaged in class activities and decrease problem behaviors. Some examples include: adopting approval behavior toward them, setting them in the front rows, spending time with them on academic work, and making adjustments in the educational program to take their needs into account. Studies on inclusive education in Turkey are generally about teachers', parents' and administers' views toward inclusion and students with special needs, but some have focused on teachers' and students' behaviors in inclusive settings (Akalın, 2007; Çifci, Yıkmış, & Akbaba-Altun, 2001; Guner-Yıldız & Sazak-Pınar, 2012; Sucuoglu, Akalın, Sazak-Pınar, & Guner, 2008; Sucuoglu, Demirtaşlı, & Guner, 2009). In this study, behaviors of general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms and academic engagement, off-task behaviors and problem behaviors of students with disabilities in their classrooms in Turkey was investigated. With this purpose, I answered the following research questions:

1.What is the rate of academic engagement, off-task behaviors, and problem behaviors of students with mild intellectual disabilities during the lesson time?

2.What is the rate of general education teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors towards students with mild intellectual disabilities during the lesson time? What is the rate of the teachers' engagement with these students in academic communication during this time?

3.What is the rate of general education teachers' making adjustments in their instructional program for students with mild intellectual disabilities? What is the rate of the teachers placing these students in front rows in the classroom to reach them more easily?

4. Do the behaviors of the students with mild intellectual disabilities change according to the teachers' behaviors?

Method

Sample Group

The sample group of the study consisted of 54 general education teachers in local primary schools in Eskisehir, Turkey and 54 students with mild intellectual disabilities in these classrooms. Because of non-diagnosed students in first grade, the study was conducted in 11 second-grade classrooms, 10 third-grade classrooms, 15 fourth-grade classrooms, and 18 fifth-grade classrooms in local schools in the Odunpazari and Tepebasi municipalities of Eskisehir. The selection criteria of classrooms was the inclusion of a student with mild intellectual disabilities, as diagnosed by a Guidance and Research Center, and the voluntary participation in this study of the general education teacher and the parents of the student. All the qualifying teachers and families from primary schools in the city center of Eskisehir agreed to participate and were, thus, assigned to the sample group.

Thirty-five female and 19 male general education teachers, whose age ranged between 28 and 57 (average 39.7), participated in this study. Thirty-eight of the teachers graduated from the Primary School Teaching Program in Education Faculties, 4 of them from other programs in Education Faculties, and 12 of them from other faculties. Student participants consisted of 20 female and 34 male students whose age ranged between 8 and 13 (average 10.2).

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form and Questionnaire: In the study a demographic information form was used to collect data about teachers' and students' age and gender.

Observation Form: An observation form was developed by the researcher and used to record teachers' and students' behaviors in inclusive

classrooms. The form was developed according to time-sampling recording techniques. Time-sampling recording is a technique based on dividing observation time into equal intervals and recording whether behavior was done or not as "+" or "–" at the end of each interval (Alberto & Troutman, 2006).

In this study, teachers and students were observed in one-minute intervals. Behaviors of students with mild intellectual disabilities were marked as one of the following options: (*a*) academic engagement, (*b*) off-task behavior, and (*c*) problem behavior. Teacher behaviors were marked as: (*a*) academic communication with students with mild intellectual disabilities, (*b*) approval behavior toward students with mild intellectual disabilities, (*c*) disapproval behavior toward students with mild intellectual disabilities, and (*d*) other behaviors. Academic engagement of students with mild intellectual disabilities was defined as writing, listening to teacher or peer, asking questions, answering questions, seeking help by looking at her/his peer's notebook, showing her/his notebook to teachers, copying in her/his notebook from what is written on the board, and reading aloud or silently. The students' off-task behavior was defined as behavior that does not disturb others nor interrupts lessons but which also cannot be coded as academic engagement behavior or problem behavior. These behaviors included: looking around, looking outside through the window, playing with pencils, or attending to other things irrelevant to the lesson. Problem behaviors were defined as behaviors that interrupt the lesson, disturbing or distracting the teacher or other students, such as: talking to friends irrelevant to the lesson, talking aloud, disturbing friends, hitting friends, taking her/his friends' possessions without permission, walking in the class, standing up without permission, or acting against the teachers' instructions.

The following teacher behaviors toward students with mild intellectual disabilities were marked as academic communication with students: asking questions to the student, listening to the student's answer or question, giving a lesson to the student, explaining a subject, answering a question, or giving homework or a task related to the lesson. Teachers' approving students with mild intellectual disabilities after an appropriate behavior or stating a satisfaction with students behavior/performance verbally or nonverbally were marked as "approval of student with special needs". Reprimanding or criticizing students with mild intellectual disabilities after inappropriate behavior was marked as "disapproval of student with special needs". Behaviors other than these (academic communication with other students, approval/disapproval of other students, and attending to other things irrelevant to the lesson) were marked as "other behaviors".

It was also noted on the observation form whether teachers made adjustments or not for students with mild intellectual disabilities and whether or not they placed them in at the front of the classroom. It was noted as "appropriate" if the teacher placed the student in one of the first rows of the classroom and as "inappropriate" if the student was placed toward the back row.

Procedure

Observations were done in the spring term of the 2011-2012 academic year in 54 primary schools' second, third, fourth, and fifth-grade inclusive classrooms in which there were students with mild intellectual disabilities. Data was collected in each classroom, with at least three-day intervals between observations, in 4 different lessons for total of 120 minutes. 18 observers conducted the observations during 216 lessons in 54 classrooms in Turkish and Social Studies courses.

Observers were chosen from voluntary freshmen students studying in the Special Education Department of Eskisehir Osmangazi University who successfully completed a 6-hour observer training program. During the program, examples of lesson videos were watched and student and teacher behaviors were explained, while instructions were given for observing and completing the observation form. During the training, students were given 3 lesson video samples and asked to watch the videos and complete the form. The observation form completed by the researcher after watching videos was compared to the candidates' forms and the reliability criteria was greater than 85%. According to this criteria and results of 3 video analyses, 15 students reached 85% and over reliability criterion. Those 3 candidates who did not reach the criteria failed to have the reliability level for only one of the videos. Therefore, another video was given to those 3 candidates and observation forms were completed based on the new video. The rest of the candidates have also reached to the required reliability level and the training was completed.

During the study the researcher pursued and controlled the reliability of the observations. With this purpose, the researcher conducted parallel

observations for 53 of the 216 observed lessons. Reliability analysis of these observations yielded an average of 95.42% reliability coefficient (range, 85%-99%) between the forms completed by the researcher and the observers. Additionally, the researcher held regular meetings with the observers on the last day of the every week to check the observations.

For the data analysis, percentages were calculated of teachers' and students' behaviors in each of the lessons and the total of the lessons. The data was analyzed with descriptive techniques and *t*-test methods to compare group means.

Results

What is the Rate of Academic Engagement, Off-task Behaviors and Problem Behaviors of Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities during the Lesson Time?

Results of the analysis showed that the rate of academic engagement of students with mild intellectual disabilities during the lesson was 58.58%; off-task behavior was 34.11%, and problem behavior was 7.31%.

What is the Rate of General Education Teachers' Approval and Disapproval Behaviors towards Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities during the Lesson Time? What is the Rate of the Teachers' Engagement with these Students in Academic Communication during the Lesson Time?

The rate of teachers' engagement to academic communication was 7.50% and approval behavior was 0.13% and disapproval behavior was 0.27% during the lesson. Besides, teachers showed other behaviors for 92.1% of the lesson.

What is the Rate of General Education Teachers' Making Adjustments in their Instructional Program for Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities? What is the Rate of the Teachers Placing these Students in front Rows in the Classroom to Reach them more Easily?

Observations yielded that teachers did not make adjustments in instructional program in 184 (85.19%) of 216 observed lessons, and students with mild intellectual disabilities only worked on appropriate tasks in 32 (14.81%) of the observed lessons. Also, students with mild intellectual disabilities were placed in the back rows in 91 (42.13%) of 216 observed lesson while they were in the front rows (or in an "appropriate place") in 125 (57.87%) cases.

Do the Behaviors of the Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities Change according to the Teachers' Behaviors?

According to the *t*-test results, academic engagement of students with mild intellectual disabilities sitting in the front desks was meaningfully high ($t[214] = 1.97$, $p = .05$). However, and the impact of making adjustments in the instructional program on academic engagement of students with mild intellectual disabilities was not significant ($t[214] = 1.67$, $p > .05$). (Table 1)

Table 1
Impact of Placement in the Classroom and Making Adjustments in Program on Academic Engagement of Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities, t-test Results

	N	Average	S	Sd	*T*
Student place is appropriate	125	60.98	19.07	214	1.97*
Student place is not appropriate	91	55.30	23.14		
There are adjustments	32	64.28	20.26	214	1.67
There are not adjustments	184	57.59	21.04		

*$p < .05$

According to the *t*-test results, the impact of placement in the classroom on the problem behavior of students with mild intellectual disabilities was significant ($t[214] = 2.58$, $p < .05$), however, the impact of making adjustments in the program did not significantly impact their problem behavior ($t[214] = .78$, $p > .05$). See Table 2.

Table 2
Impact of Placement in the Classroom and Making Adjustments in Program on Problem Behavior of Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities, t-test Results

	N	Average	S	Sd	*T*
Student place is appropriate	125	5.11	8.51	214	2.58*
Student place is not appropriate	91	10.32	20.21		
There are adjustments	32	9.19	18.66	214	0.78
There are not adjustments	184	6.98	14.07		

*$p < .01$

In the analysis of *t*-test results, the impact of placement in the classroom ($t[214] = 2.117$, $p < .05$) and making adjustments in program ($t[214] = 8.01$, $p < .05$) was significant on the academic communication of teachers with students with mild intellectual disabilities (Table 3).

Table 3
Impact of Placement in the Classroom and Making Adjustments in Program on Academic Communication of Teachers with Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities, t-test Results

	N	Average	S	Sd	*t*
Student place is appropriate	125	8.52	9.15	214	2.117*
Student place is not appropriate	91	6.09	7.06		
There are adjustments	32	17.16	12.04	214	8.01**
There are not adjustments	184	5.82	6.27		

*$p < .05$, **$p < .00$

According to *t*-test results, making adjustments in the instructional program ($t[214] = 2.721$, $p < .05$) significantly impacted off-task behaviors of students with mild intellectual disabilities (Table 4).

Table 4
Impact of Making Adjustments in Program on Off-task Behaviors of Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities, t-test Results

	N	Average	S	Sd	*t*
There are adjustments	32	26.53	14.27	214	2.721*
There are not adjustments	184	35.43	17.50		

*$p < .01$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to reveal a profile of behaviors of teachers and students with mild intellectual disabilities in inclusive classroom in Turkey, defining whether these students manifested changed behaviors according to their teachers' behavior.

According to the first set of findings of the research, students with mild intellectual disabilities showed academic engagement behavior at the rate of 58.58%, off-task behavior at 34.11%, and problem behavior at 7.31%. The results showed that these students engaged in academic tasks little more than half of the lesson time, and showed off-task behavior and problem behavior in the remaining time. This situation can be interpreted as an indicator of teachers not sufficiently engaging these students in classroom activities. Studies revealed that there are more academic engagement behaviors and less problem behaviors in the classrooms that are managed efficiently (Anderson & Brophy, 1979; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Evertson, Emmer, Sanford, & Clements, 1983). Akalın (2007) indicated that teachers' academic behaviors increased students' academic behaviors. It is important that teachers complaining of students' problem behaviors (Daniels, 1998; Jordan et al., 2009; McClean, 2007; Mitchem & Benyo, 2000; Niesyn, 2009; Uysal, 2004) realize the decreasing effect it has on making students engaged in the lesson.

Stimulating students' engagement in the lesson is both a task for the teacher and a necessity for providing classroom order. Students with or without special needs who are not engaging in classroom activities tend to manifest disruptive behaviors in classroom. In order to more fully engage students with special needs in the lesson, teachers should implement the following techniques: placing students with special needs near the teachers, making academic contact with the student, approving students' desired behavior, and making adjustments in the instructional program for the student. In Turkey, studies conducted in inclusive classrooms indicated that teachers were insufficient in getting students with or without special needs engaged in classroom activities (Akalın, 2007; Çifci et al., 2001; Guner-Yıldız & Sazak-Pınar, 2012; Sucuoglu et al., 2008; Sucuoglu et al., 2009). For example, Çiftci et al. (2001) indicated that teachers did not give rewards to students with special needs; Sucuoglu et al. (2008) pointed out that teachers focused on students with special needs only for 5% of the observation time. A second study by Sucuoglu et al. (2009) showed that only 7.46% of teachers working in inclusive classroom made adjustments in instructional content according to students needs and 27.36% of teachers rewarded at least one academic or social behavior in a lesson. Results of another study indicated that 7% of teachers working in inclusive classrooms made adjustments for students with special needs and 24% of teachers placed the special needs students at front desks to reach them more easily (Guner-Yıldız & Sazak-Pınar, 2012). In this study, teachers' academic communication with students with mild intellectual disabilities was observed in only 7.50% of the lesson time and their approving behavior toward them was only observed in 0.13% of the lesson. Furthermore, in 42.13% of the 216 observed lessons these students were placed in the back rows of the classroom, and teachers only prepared appropriate homework/task for these students in 14.81% of the lessons. These findings not only exemplified ineffective implementations in classrooms but also supported findings of related studies in literature.

It is known that effective teaching implementations are important in increasing engagement behavior of students with special needs (Bulgren & Carta, 1992).

The findings of this study supported this proposal. In this study, the engagement behavior of students who were placed in the front rows was meaningfully high; teachers' academic communication was meaningfully high with students in the front desks and when making adjustments in the instructional program. Similarly, problem behaviors and off-task behaviors of students in the front desks who were provided adjustments in the instructional program with level-appropriate-content were meaningfully low. These results showed the impact of teacher implementations in the classroom on the behaviors of students. It is known that effective teachers used lesson time efficiently, engaged students in the lesson, rewarded students' desired behaviors, and presented effective teaching to students with special needs (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Evertson, 1989; Jordan et al., 2009). The results of this study indicated that the success of students with mild intellectual disabilities in inclusion classrooms is strongly related to teachers' behaviors.

In conclusion, teachers should be aware of the strong relationship between the behaviors of students with special needs and their own behaviors. Teachers can decrease problem behaviors by increasing engagement behaviors while those working in inclusive classrooms can receive support for effective teaching methods via in-service programs. Also, Turkey's Ministry of National Education can organize training programs for well-equipped teachers. However, maybe more primarily, they should constitute the belief that teachers can provide effective teaching to their students with special needs. The people and institutions determining education policies are responsible for instilling teachers with this belief. Based on these findings, future studies may be conducted on eliminating prejudice against student with special needs in inclusive settings by defining students' behaviors correctly and defining classroom behavior of teachers and its effects on students' success.

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