

THE IMPORTANCE OF BASIC EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PRE-SCHOOL PERIOD

OKUL ÖNCESİ DÖNEMDE BULUNAN ÖZEL GEREKSİNİMLİ ÇOCUKLARDA TEMEL EĞİTİMİN VE FİZİKSEL AKTİVİTENİN ÖNEMİ

¹Sabahat YİYİT*

¹Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi, Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Yüksekokulu, Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Öğretmenliği Bölümü, Burdur, Türkiye
*sabahatyigit8@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Pre-school period is the period that children show rapid development in terms of cognitive, motoric and psychological aspects. Thus, some development features of children with special needs in pre-school period are behind the children developing normally. This situation reveals the necessity of giving importance to education of children with special needs. Some educational practises are realised in addition to classical educational activities for children with special needs. One of them is physical activity practises. Research findings in literature show that participation in physical activity support other development areas in children with special needs. This study focusses on the importance of basic education and physical activity for children with special needs.

Keywords: Special education, pre-school period, physical activity

ÖZET

Okul öncesi dönem çocukların fiziksel, bilişsel, motorsal ve psikolojik açıdan hızlı gelişim gösterdikleri bir dönemdir. Bu nedenle okul öncesi dönemde bulunan özel gereksinimli çocukların birçok gelişim özellikleri normal gelişim gösteren yaşlılarının gerisindedir. Bu durum, okul öncesi dönemde bulunan özel gereksinimli çocukların eğitimlerine önem verilmesi zorunluluğunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Okul öncesi dönemde bulunan özel gereksinimli çocukların gelişim özelliklerinin desteklenmesinde klasik eğitim faaliyetlerine ek olarak bazı uygulamalar yapılmaktadır. Bu uygulamardan birisi de fiziksel aktivite çalışmalarındır. Literatürde yer alan araştırma bulguları özel gereksinimli çocuklarda fiziksel aktiviteye katılımın birçok gelişim alanını desteklediğini göstermektedir. Yapılan bu çalışmada da okul öncesi dönemde bulunan özel gereksinimli çocuklarda temel eğitimin ve fiziksel aktivitenin önemi üzerinde durulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Özel eğitim, okul öncesi dönem, fiziksel aktivite

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INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs consist of children with a disability in a certain part of their bodily functions due to a number of reasons developed from birth or later. Children with special needs are subject to some classifications depending on the level of the problem and the type of the problem. In this context, the children with the type and level of disability are included in the educational programs that match their individual characteristics. The important point is that children with special needs are needed to be able to determine the types and levels of disabilities well. Demirbilek (2013) stated that the types of disabilities are divided into different categorizations and accordingly, their disability is evaluated in a wide range from speech, sight, hearing disorders to orthopedic problems and mental disability.

Early childhood education programs in special education have emerged in the United States in the 1930s. Special education programs of early childhood in Turkey is not still widespread. Educational services for special education usually start in primary school. For this reason, it can be said that special education services for children under six years are limited. As there

are limited special education services for early childhood, most of the families with special needs children can not reach education institutions. This situation affects children with special needs negatively in terms of developmental aspects. Because children who do not participate in special education programs during early childhood are faced with various difficulties in adapting to their peers and in school life (Doğru & Saltalı, 2011).

Special education services for the early childhood have been practised in schools or homes in Turkey. Counselling Research Centers are in charge of general orientation of special education services for early childhood. In addition, special education services for early childhood include children aged between 0-36 months. Children who are supposed to be included in pre- school or primary education should be enrolled in educational institutions even if they have any disabilities. In addition, enrollment priority is given to pre-primary education institutions for children special needs who have completed 37 months (Gökçay et al., 2011).

Early childhood special education programs consist of some practices aimed at supporting the development of children. It is aimed to develop especially motor, cognitive and social skills of children in education programs. As children grow older, educational programs become more academically structured (Seçer et al., 2010).

According to the data in literature, it is observed that children with special needs should be directed to educational programs in early childhood period, but it is seen that education programs in our country are inadequate for children in pre- school period.

The Importance of Basic Education in Children Special Needs in Early Childhood

The aim of basic education in early childhood is to provide children with physical, mental and emotional development. In addition, children's achievement of good habits and preparation for the primary education are among the aims of basic education services in early childhood (Baran et al., 2007). In Turkey, other objectives of the special education services provided for the training of individuals with special needs can be listed as followed;

1. To provide the necessary education for a business and a profession in order to contribute to social life of the individuals with special needs,
2. To be able to meet the individual needs of individuals act on their own and to reduce their dependencies on someone,
3. To develop appropriate training programs for individuals with special needs and to prepare them for upper education levels (İmrak, 2009).

One of the most common methods used in the education of children with special needs is inclusive education. In the inclusive education, children with special needs are educated in the same classes as their peers with normal development. While students with special needs in the inclusive education are educated in the same classrooms as their peers with normal development, other developmental problems continue to be developed with additional methods (Kargın, 2004). Inclusive education has various benefits. Through inclusive education, children with special needs can gain a large portion of human behavior. As children with special needs recognize the behaviors of normal-growing children around them, they begin to use these behaviors over time. Therefore, children can learn many behaviors

appropriate to the expectations of other people in society through inclusive education. (Ulutaşdemir, 2007).

Early childhood comes as the most rapid development of physical, motoric and psychological aspects in human life. It is known that children with special needs have less talent and skills than their normally growing children. In addition, disability types and disability levels of the children with special needs and their growing environment can affect the developmental qualities negatively. For this reason, it is a great necessity for children with special needs to receive basic education services especially during early childhood. In addition, in the later stages of education of children with special needs who do not receive appropriate education and not suitable for the level of disability in early childhood, having more greater social and communicative problems with individuals growing normally will be inevitable.

The Importance of Physical Activity Children Special Needs in Early Childhood

Basic motor skills such as walking, running and leaping are the basic movements that enable children to successfully participate in play and physical activity, which must be earned in early childhood. Studies have shown that children with Down's syndrome have lower motor skill levels than their normally growing peers. For this reason, it is necessary to determine the motor development levels of children with Down syndrome and to direct them to activities that support motor development. Similarly, it is important for the development of children to evaluate the development of gross motor skills in children with mental disabilities and to direct them to appropriate activities (Nalbant et al., 2010). In children with cerebral palsy, physical activity and recreational activities are among the most used methods besides rehabilitation purpose and medical and surgical operations (Günel, 2007). In this context, there are various tasks needed to fulfilled by various social institutions, especially the families, for the guidance of children with disabilities (Gürses, 2007).

Today, the sedentary lifestyle is increasing, especially due to technological developments. Children are among the groups most affected by the sedentary lifestyle. Participation in physical activity in childhood has important functions such as growth and development, having an active lifestyle, preventing some future health problems and preventing excessive weight gain. In addition, sports activities are very important in supporting the physical development of children (Çelik and Şahin, 2013). Considering that disabled children are growing in a limited environment (Çalışkan, 2011) and that the sports areas for disabled people are inadequate (Sonuç, 2012), taking necessary precautions to acquire physical activity habits especially for children with special needs in early childhood support the growth and development of children.

At the beginning of children with special needs comes educable children with mental disabilities. It is stated that well-designed free time and physical activity activities support children's psychomotor development in studies conducted on children with mental disabilities. In addition, it is stated that these activities will increase children's adaptation to the environment, develop from physical, social, emotional and self-esteem levels. In addition, it is emphasized that children should be included in inclusion training with partner groups in order to overcome the shortcomings of the motor development in children with mental disabilities (Bayazıt et al., 2007). Also it is stated that sports activities have a great importance in increasing the quality of life of individuals mental disabilities (Şahin& Işıtan, 2010).

Participation in physical activity is very important for the participation of children with special needs in social life. In this context, it is very important to enrich basic education

programs and inclusive education with physical activity for students with special needs (Şahin, 2011). Because individuals with special needs require sports and physical activities as healthy peers (Sahin & Işıtan, 2010).

The primary purpose of participation in sports for disabled individuals is to improve the adaptation levels into society. In this context, sports activities that affect the general development of children positively are also very important for children with disabilities (Koparan, 2003). Especially in autistic children, it is known that sports therapies are used for rehabilitation purposes in all age groups, and that sports therapies support psychological, emotional, social, psychological and motoric development of autistic children with disabilities (Atalay & Karadağ, 2011). In the study conducted by Namlı (2012) on autistic disabled individuals, some characteristics of autistic disabled individuals who did or did not do sports, including autistic children in early childhood, were compared. At the end of the study it was determined that some physical characteristics of the autistic disabled individuals participating in physical activity developed and various behavior problems decreased. Yenel and Erol (2011) found that autistic children can move freely in sporting events and be happy thanks to sporting activities.

In a study conducted by Şirinkan et al. (2011), the effects of educational games on physical development and gross motor skills of educable children with mental disability in early childhood were examined. For six months , educational game activities were applied to the participants in accordance with their developmental characteristics. At the end of the study, it was determined that children with special needs had a significant improvement in the speeding, jumping, bouncing, slipping, ball hitting, ball throwing and ball dribbling skills.

The study by Goodway & Branta (2003) examined the effects of motor training on motor development in children with special needs in early childhood. Children with special needs in early childhood period and children who participated in the study were divided into two as experiment and control groups. The experimental group was taught basic motor skills for 12 weeks in accordance with the disability and age levels. During this period, the control group continued to their normal life. At the end of the study, when compared with the control group, it was determined that the experimental group had a significant improvement in some motor skills.

In conclusion, it can be said that participation in sports has various benefits for children with disabilities as well as children with normal development. For this reason it would be beneficial for families with children with special needs to direct their children to appropriate sports events. In addition, local governments should construct parks and playgrounds for children with disabilities and take new measures to encourage children to participate in the growth and development of children with special needs.

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