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Primary School Teachers' and Teacher Candidates' Attribituons Toward Students with Dyslexia

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Abstract

This study examined patterns in teachers' attributional responses to dyslexia. Teachers from elementary schools in Turkey (n=32) and preschool teacher candidates from a state university (n=32) participated in the study. Using written vignettes, four hypothetical male students were described, of two identified with dyslexia, and the other two had no dyslexia. Teachers were to assume each child had just taken a typical classroom writing assessment and failed to write correctly. Four categories of teacher responses were examined: reward or punishment (RP), anger (A), pity (P), and future expectations (FE). Patterns of significant difference in teachers' and teacher candidates' responses were not found. Attributional characteristics of elementary teachers and preschool teacher candidates' responses are discussed.

Keywords: dyslexia; teacher's attitudes; pity; anger; future expectation; reward; punishment; willingness;

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1. Literature Review

According to one cross-national study (Clark & Artiles, 2000), teachers from elementary school have an attitude towards students with and without learning disabilities. Attitude means the individual's prevailing tendency to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object (person or group of people, institutions or events). Attitudes can be positive (values) or negative (prejudice). (Barros & Elia, 1998) Beyond this, Clark (1997) claims that teacher attitudes are affected from several factors. These factors generally includes three types of information of student; a statement of student ability (high or low), typical effort (high or low), and disability status (with Learning Disability or without Learning Disability).

Learning disabilities (LD) can be defined as "The disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations" (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2012, p:138). Students having learning disabilities experience more difficulties in schools contrary to other students. Even though many teachers have no idea about the concept of "Learning Disability" in Turkey, "Learning Disability" is the largest disability group among other disabled groups. (Doyran & Canca, 2013)

In Clark's research conducted in 1997, attitudes of teacher are classified as evaluative feedback (reward or punishment), emotional reactions (anger and pity), and expectations of future failure. That is, cross national patterns in teachers react to student's ability and efforts, which responses to children disability status. According to similar research, at 97 elementary school teachers rated their response to students' test failures of them with or without "Learning Disability". (Clark, 1997). In several cases, teachers demonstrate more pity, more reward methods, and higher expectations of future failure towards students with "Learning Disability", when compared with achievement of ability and effort of students without "Learning Disability". Teachers' these attitudes may be interpreted as low ability signals, confronting problems about students' self-esteem, sense of competence and achievement motivation.

Similarly, in another study, Weiner and Kukla (1970) who have also studied the way in which psychology students, assuming the role of teachers, distributed evaluative feedback to hypothetical students completing a test. College and high school student participants were provided with information about a series of hypothetical students' ability (high or low), effort (mentioned as "motivation"; high or low), and degree of success or failure on a classroom test, then were asked to assign reward or punishment appropriate to each student's outcome.

"Teacher affect and response can send negative messages that are often interpreted as low ability cues, thus affecting can be understood as low-ability cues, thus affecting students' self-esteem, sense of competence as learners, motivation to achieve." (Clark, 1997, p: 67). Therefore, it appears that teachers suppose ability and effort as determinants of success. In this context, ability and effort act as determinants of success or failure. Overall, Weiner and Kukla (1970) found that participants were more inclined to reward than to punish with both effort and ability affecting appraisal of achievement behavior.

According the general inferences of the data discussed above, two distinct patterns were defined. First, low-ability students with low effort towards the given task received less punishment than high-ability and low-effort students. Second, of particular importance to this discussion, low-ability, high-effort (motivation) students received more reward than high-ability, high-effort students. Weiner and Kukla (1970) attributed this finding to a "cultural belief that the individual who is able to overcome personal handicaps and avoid failure is particularly worthy of praise".

Likewise to the articles above, in his "naive analysis of action," Heider (1958) tells us about two factors which partially the determinants of the teacher attitudes. He talks about two variables; one is

he labeled as "power", which indicate whether a goal "can" be attained. The second determinant of action identified as motivation, or "trying." These two factors are the same factors as Weiner and Kukla (1970) found as 'ability' and 'effort'. Heider postulated that both "can" and "try", respectively power and motivation, are necessary to reach a desired goal. Success at an achievement goal may be attributed to unusual effort and/or special ability, while failure might indicate a lack of motivation and/or ability. From up till now, researches we mentioned above have examined, in general, the students' motivation and ability (or 'can' and 'try') while performing a test; and, teachers' responses to the student situation. According to the researches, the results reveal that within this simulation setting, both motivation and ability influence the appraisal of achievement behavior and have an impact on the teachers' perceived attitudes.

To conclude, the concept of attitude is one of the basic topics in studying organizational behavior, because behavior is very much related to attitude. Teachers' attitudes also change according to the physical/ mental/ psychological situations of the students. However, in some cases, it is implicated that teachers also change and lower their expectations towards students based on learning disability (LD) status of the students. Clark (1997) says in her research that classroom teachers may feel anger toward a child whom they perceive as having failed an important test due to a lack of effort, particularly if the child is of high ability, yet they feel pity toward a child who has failed because of his or her low ability. In the case of the expending low effort, teachers suppose that the child is deliberately in charge of the outcome, and thus feels anger, whereas teachers who perceive the child to be of low ability as being unable to control the outcome and thus feel pity towards the child with less ability. Consequently, teachers will punish the low-effort child more and reward less, but they will reward the low-ability child more and punish him or her less. This research will examine teacher responses according to the students' current motivation and ability situation given in a simulated case setting.

2. Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to examine the compare between attitudes of preschool teachers and primary teachers towards children with or without "Learning Disability". Our main research question is that:

* **Research Question:**

Is there a difference between children with dyslexia and children without dyslexia on teacher attitudes such as anger, pity, reward/ punishment system and future success expectation?

* Four detailed research questions guided the study:

1. What feedback would you give this child?
2. How much anger do you feel toward this child?
3. How much pity do you feel toward this child?
4. How is likely it this child will fail again?

Hypotheses:

According to research questions, there are many hypotheses for this study. These are;

- i. When teachers practice reward and punishment system, teacher will be more flexible to behave child with dyslexia compared to others.

- ii. When children cannot understand the topic, anger that teacher shows will be less observed children with dyslexia.
- iii. When children fail at paper work, teachers will be more pitiful to children with dyslexia.
- iv. Teachers' future expectations about the success of dyslexia students are less compared to the others.
- v. It is seen that teacher candidates use the reward system to children with dyslexia when they are successful and also use the punishment system to the children with dyslexia when they are unsuccessful compared to teachers.
- vi. When the children with dyslexia don't understand the topic, teacher candidates' anger is less, compared to teachers.
- vii. Teacher candidates show more mercy when the children with dyslexia fail at paper works compared to teachers.
- viii. Teacher candidates have more expectations about the success of the children with dyslexia at the future compared to teachers.

3. Method

Participants

Participants are defined as university students at an Education Faculty in a state university (senior students) and primary school teachers. The study has **64 participants** that are both teachers and teacher candidates. Moreover, participants represent equal distribution: 32 primary school teachers and 32 university students. Informed consent of each participant was taken.

Children with "Dyslexia" Unwilling children	Children with "Dyslexia" willing children	Children without "Dyslexia" Unwilling children	Children without "Dyslexia" willing children
Number of participants: 8 candidates 8 teachers	Number of participants: 8 candidates 8 teachers	Number of participants: 8 candidates 8 teachers	Number of participants: 8 candidates 8 teachers

We divided them into four groups according to vignettes that are given on research; 16 participants for the willing child with dyslexia, 16 participants for the unwilling child with dyslexia, 16 participants for the willing child without dyslexia, and 16 participants for the unwilling child without dyslexia.

Instruments

Vignettes were prepared as instruments of this study. Our instrument includes three pages. The first page of it contains explanation of the task, directions for completing the task, and a statement guaranteeing the anonymity of participants. Four short vignettes/ stories were included in the

instrument. Each vignette describes a first-grade male student who fails a given writing task. Two types of causal properties were presented in each vignette: student's effort in the classroom in doing task (high or low), and being dyslexic (whether student is dyslexic or not). Use of four different vignettes the variables mentioned above permits teacher candidates and teachers to respond to all these variable combinations.

“Ali is in his first grade and second semester. You, as the class teacher, taught all sounds of the alphabet to children and now you are making some extra activities on the phonological awareness of children. Children started to reading. Ali, has lower academic abilities compared to others. Especially he slogs on the writing assignments. He cannot segment the sounds correctly and skip some of them. He generally does not make his homeworks completely. He is uninterested towards the assignments in the classroom and homeworks. He cannot complete his homeworks without the help of his parents. When he book the word “İstanbul” that you wrote on the blackboard, he writes as “İztondul”. Even though you talk with him and encourage him to write the correct word, he cannot correct his mistake.”

One vignette/ story is presented on each page. Then, on the last page, participants are given to response items. After reading the story, teacher candidates and teachers are asked to indicate their emotional (anger vs. pity) and behavioral (reward vs. punishment) responses and the expectations of future failure. Then they are asked to give responses by marking/ answering the questions on the given rating scale.

A ten-point scale is used for the reward/ punishment anchor points clearly differentiated between positive and negative feedback. (greatest reward: +5; greatest punishment: -5). Seven-point scale is used for anger, pity, and expectancy of future failure. The anger and pity scales' anchor points run from very little (1) to very much(7), and the expectancy scale from very unlikely (1) to very likely (7). Participants are instructed to mark the one point on each scale that most accurately represented their responses to each hypothetical case. The scales used were **originally developed by** Weigner and Kukla(1970).

Procedures

Application of this survey approximately took one month. Participants completed the questionnaire almost within 20 minutes. Consent of the all participants was received by means of the Informed Consent Form. This survey did not include any personal information about participants who fulfill the survey and participants' information was not shared with anybody. The data was collected from participants by the way of convenient sampling and a state university as well as surrounding primary schools. Participants were randomly selected, but not randomly assigned into groups as to vignettes' contents. In addition, the study was limited with observation and the study included only survey, not classroom observation.

4. Results

In the beginning of the analyzing data process, reliability analysis was measured between the questions such as reward/punishment questions (RP1 to RP5), pity questions (P1, to P4), anger questions (A1 to A4) and future expectations questions (FE1 to FE6). According to reliability statistics of reward/punishment questions, reward punishment subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = ,374$). The results for reward punishment subscale were found not highly reliable enough. According to reliability statistics of anger questions, anger subscale consisted of 4 items ($\alpha = ,709$). The results for anger subscale were found highly reliable. According to reliability statistics of pity questions, pity subscale consisted of 4 items ($\alpha = ,640$). The results for pity subscale were found highly reliable. According to reliability statistics of future expectations questions, future expectations subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = ,775$). The results for future expectations subscale were found highly reliable. A two-way analysis of variance was conducted on the influence of two independent variables (dyslexia and

willing) on the attitudes of anger for teacher candidates and teachers. Dyslexia type included 2 levels (with dyslexia and without dyslexia). Willing type also included 2 levels (willing and non-willing).

RATINGS OF ANGER

In terms of attitudes of anger, we examined attributional patterns of teachers and teacher candidates. The main effect of being dyslexic for children in terms of anger evaluation of teachers and teacher candidates was not significant. The results are shown below.

For teacher candidates, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = .064$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for dyslexia was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 2,42$, $SD = 1,007$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 2,51$, $SD = .79$) on the 7-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = .139$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 2,52$, $SD = 1,003$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 2,40$, $SD = .78$) on the 7-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = .008$, $p > .05$.

For teachers, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = .458$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 2,64$, $SD = 1,375$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 2,95$, $SD = 1,166$) on the 7-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = .114$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 2,79$, $SD = 1,264$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 2,71$, $SD = 1,22$) on the 7-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = .458$, $p > .05$.

RATINGS OF PITY

Comparing to teachers and teacher candidates, the main effect of being dyslexic for children in terms of pity evaluation of teachers and teacher candidates was not significant. For teacher candidates, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = .207$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 4,51$, $SD = 1,674$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 4,73$, $SD = 1,078$) on the 7-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 1,115$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 4,38$, $SD = 1,305$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 4,90$, $SD = 1,475$) on the 7-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = .559$, $p > .05$.

For teachers, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 4,264$, $p < .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 4,98$, $SD = .858$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 5,67$, $SD = .994$) on the 7-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 1,066$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 5,50$, $SD = .926$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 5,15$, $SD = 1,02$) on the 7-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = .141$, $p > .05$.

RATINGS OF FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

In terms of attitudes of future expectations, the main effect of being dyslexic for children in terms of future expectations evaluation of teachers and teacher candidates was not significant. For teacher

candidates, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = .379$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 5,19$, $SD = 1,134$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 4,95$, $SD = ,796$) on the 7-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 3,509$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 4,77$, $SD = 1,068$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 5,422$, $SD = ,739$) on the 7-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = ,163$, $p > .05$.

For teachers, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 4,705$, $p < .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 3,97$, $SD = 1,112$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 4,63$, $SD = ,786$) on the 7-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = ,200$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 4,23$, $SD = 1,22$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 4,37$, $SD = ,766$) on the 7-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was significant, $F(1,28) = 9,817$, $p < .05$.

RATINGS OF REWARD/ PUNISHMENT

In terms of attitudes of reward punishment, the main effect of being dyslexic for children in terms of future expectations evaluation of teachers and teacher candidates was not significant. For teacher candidates, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = ,660$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 5,90$, $SD = 1,01$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 5,63$, $SD = ,731$) on the 10-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = ,325$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 5,84$, $SD = ,988$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 5,68$, $SD = ,762$) on the 10-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = ,461$, $p > .05$.

For teachers, the main effect for children with dyslexia yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 2,037$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect of dyslexia was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was with dyslexia ($M = 5,98$, $SD = 1,064$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was without dyslexia ($M = 6,48$, $SD = ,929$) on the 10-point scale. The main effect for willing yielded an F ratio of $F(1,28) = 1,650$, $p > .05$ indicating that effect for willing was not significant. Those are the groups who read the profile of student who was willing ($M = 6,01$, $SD = ,964$) and the group who shows the profile of student who was not willing ($M = 6,46$, $SD = 1,044$) on the 10-point scale. Moreover, the interaction between dyslexia and willing was not significant, $F(1,28) = ,861$, $p > .05$.

5. Discussion

Firstly, participants believed that in spite of having willingness, if a student with dyslexia could not complete the given writing assessment that student has lower level of academic abilities and IQ. It is important that there is a significant difference between that student showing willingness with dyslexia and the student showing willingness without dyslexia. Even though students have willing (one has dyslexia and the other doesn't have), when they cannot succeed the given writing task, teachers (more compared to teacher candidates) think that student with dyslexia has lower level of academic abilities and IQ. From this result, it can be asserted that teachers do not know that people with different learning disability types have average to higher level of IQ (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2012). We were expecting a significant result in terms of especially teachers' anger, pity, reward/ punishment

and future expectations attitudes within the group itself (teachers who read the vignette of dyslexic child and teachers who read vignette of non-dyslexic child). However, except pity and future expectation ratings, the results were not the same as were waiting.

Contrary to research results conducted by Clark (1997) who found that teachers have the least anger, greatest pity toward willing student with dyslexia (LD), in this study, student profiles did not affect teachers' anger, pity level. It can be attributed that teachers may not want to disclose their real feelings. Moreover, we conducted our research with a limited number of data (n=64). This may also another factor why anger and reward/ punishment ratings were not found significant. With a larger data and more clear questions of survey the results would be found significant.

6. Limitations

There are several limitations for this study. Firstly, this study was primarily limited by its sample size. Secondly, teachers filled questionnaires in a very limited time because of their break time, for this reason when teacher answer the questions, they hurried up.

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