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Original article

HEADMASTER AND TEACHER OPINIONS FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETES PROGRAM

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Abstract*

Aim. It was aimed to determine the observations of the headmasters and kindergarten teacher, who sent their special students to this program, about the program and their opinions about the changes on the students after the Young Athletes Program which is an activity of Special Olympics Turkey.

Methods. Qualitative research approach was used in this study. In the study, the interwoven single case design out of the case study designs was utilized. The study group was selected through purposeful sampling method. In this context, the study group of the researchers consists of 1 headmaster and 1 kindergarten teacher from a primary school in Ankara in fall semester of 2016. Research data were obtained through a semi-structured interview form that gives participants the opportunity to freely express their thoughts on a particular topic. Content analysis was used in the data analysis.

Results. When examined the research findings, 5 themes were obtained. It was determined that the pedagogical formation given for special education is inadequate. Positive, different expectations and worried expressions were seen in the first opinions before participating in the Young Athletes Program. The opinions on the first day of the program were associated with the affective expressions and the materials used in the program. Positive and limited aspects were identified in general opinions on the program. It was figured out that the program supports the development of special students in various fields.

Conclusions. It was concluded that the headmaster and kindergarten teacher who participated in the research had the awareness of the Young Athletes Program's positive achievements on special children and that these achievements are effective in mental development, skill development, social development and spiritual development.

Keywords: Special Olympics Turkey, Young Athletes Program, adapted physical activity, intellectual disability

Introduction

As in the education of all children, in the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities it is aimed to enable them to lead a life without depending on others in the future, to become self-sufficient and integrate with society (Cavkaytar, 2000). In this context, mobility training programs arranged intentionally and meaningfully affect positively all developmental aspects of children with intellectual disabilities (Kınalı, 2003). Considering the effects of participation in sportive activities, which are designed purposefully and meaningfully, in the positive psychological, social and motor areas on the individuals with intellectual disabilities, İlhan et al. (2015) stated that positive effects created through physical education and sport shouldn't be ignored in the special education environments of children with intellectual disabilities.

This is because sports enable individuals with disabilities to develop physically, psychologically,

and socially, facilitating their integration into society (Savucu and Bicer, 2009).

Many organizations and non-governmental organizations are engaged in activities for children with intellectual disabilities to meet sports and to lead a dynamic life. One of these organizations is "Special Olympics". This global organization is represented in many countries around the world. The Special Olympics Turkey performs various activities in order to enable special individuals with intellectual disabilities, the number of whom was about 15,000 by the year 2015 in 68 cities, to be engaged in sport and integrate into society. Special Olympics Turkey aims to take the individuals who need a special education out of the narrow boundaries of their neighborhood and drawing them into the flow of life and bringing them together with other individuals in sports and social areas, giving them the opportunity to be useful and productive individuals who are respected in society provide participation in social life, providing

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them regular training and competition opportunities in various sport branches, enabling them to develop their physical conditions, motor skills and talents, displaying their courage, tasting the happiness of achievements and providing them to join the social life by strengthening community relations with various activities except sports (URL 1). For this purpose, one of the programs of the Special Olympics Turkey, which performs various activities around the country, is the Young Athletes Program. The Young Athletes Program is an educational game oriented program aimed at improving the basic motor skills that brings together the children with special education needs and children with normal development between the ages of 2 and 7. The program aims to develop children's basic motor skills as well as to remove the prejudices at an early age and to develop the skills of being together in the society (URL 2).

This program was carried out in Gazi University Sports Science Faculty in 2016 with the participation of 6 special children and 6 partner children aged 6-7 from a primary school in Ankara. The program lasted for 8 weeks, 32 hours and was conducted under the supervision of specialist teachers with 18 volunteer students studying in 3rd and 4th class at Gazi University Physical Education and Sport Teacher Education.

Throughout the Young Athletes Program, the primary school headmaster and kindergarten teacher were in the program with their students from the beginning to the end of the program as observers. Within the scope of this program, exercises were performed in company with games in order to provide special students to interact with normal students and to increase their quality of life. Increasing the quality of life of individuals with intellectual disabilities is possible with integrating these individuals with society at the highest level.

In order for the integration to be at the highest level, it is necessary for the individual with inability to be provided with the living conditions himself / herself, without needing others' help or support or minimizing their needs for others (MEB, 2011). It is important to evaluate the education and life services offered to individuals with intellectual disabilities in a wide range containing mental, physical, social and mental health. For this reason, it is also important that the level of awareness of the individuals with intellectual disabilities, the school administrators and the kindergarten teachers in the education and life services towards the effect of participation in sportive activities on the development of special individuals. To the extent that, Gür (2001) stated, in particular,

that awareness levels of the social circle should be prioritized in participation in physical education and sports activities, which contribute positively to all developmental characteristics of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The Aim of Study

In this research, with reference to fact that variables such as consciousness level, awareness and attitude of the headmasters and the teachers, who are regarded as the most important actors of the educational institutions, towards the students with different development are determinative in the special education life of the students, it was aimed to determine the headmaster and kindergarten teacher's observations, opinions and the future oriented projections about the special children who participated with their students following the Young Athletes Program which is an activity of Special Olympics Turkey which has become widespread and is organized with the cooperation of university and non-governmental organizations and who followed the students from beginning to end.

Methods

This section includes research model, study group, data collection, data analysis, and validity and reliability.

Research Design

Qualitative research approach was used in this research. As the statement of Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011), qualitative research allows the possibility to see the phenomenon from the point of view of the relevant individuals and to reveal the social constructs and processes that constitute these points of view. In the research; interwoven single case design from case study designs was utilized (Yin, 2003) which is expressed as a definition and analysis of a sample, phenomenon or social unit in an intensive and integrative way (Merriam, 2013).

The data were obtained by interview technique which is frequently used in the qualitative research model. The main purpose of using the interview technique is not to test a hypothesis but trying to understand the experiences of other people and how they make sense of these experiences. For this reason, the focus is on other people's stories, descriptions and thoughts (Seidman, 1991). In this context, semi-structured interview technique was used in the research. In this technique, the researcher prepares an interview protocol in advance that includes questions that he plans to ask (Türnüklü, 2000).



Research Group

In the qualitative data collection process of the research, a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2014), which appeared in the qualitative research tradition and was used frequently and allows to study deeply the cases, was followed. Purposeful sampling allows for in-depth study of situations that are considered to have rich knowledge (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2000). In this sample, the criteria that are considered important for selection are determined. The sample selected according to these criteria is considered to be able to represent the population with all its qualities (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). In this context, the study group of the research consists of 1 headmaster and 1 kindergarten teacher. As a matter of fact, both the headmaster and the pre-school teacher followed the students who participated in the adapted physical activities during the program process.

Data Collection

The research data was obtained from the headmaster and kindergarten teacher from a primary school in Ankara during the fall semester of 2016. In this study, a semi-structured interview form proposed by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) and that gives participants the opportunity to freely express their thoughts on a particular topic was prepared. In this context, an extensive literature survey regarding Young Athletes Program was conducted, 5 general themes were determined and a semi-structured interview form with 23 questions was prepared together with the sub-questions as a data collection tool in order to create the conceptual framework and to prepare the interview questions qualitatively. After the interview instruction's pilot experiment, the content and format of some questions were changed and the data collection process was passed.

The aim of studying the headmaster and pre-school teacher participating with the students in the Young Athletes Program and following the students from beginning to end was explained and it was expressed that the obtained data would only be used for scientific research, and appointment was made for them. In the interviews held within the Volunteer Policy, participants were told at the beginning of the interview that they could end the interview when they requested and their IDs on the obtained data wouldn't be deciphered. In the interviews with the participants, recordings were made with the permission of the participants to avoid data loss. Interviewing times range from 45-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was performed in the data analysis. Content analysis is the process of quantizing (digitizing) people's sayings and writings according to clear instructions (Patton, 2014). At the heart of this approach there is the categorization of written and spoken words (Cited by Balcı, 2011 from Simon and Burstein). In the analysis of the data, the interview records obtained from the participants were transferred to the writing. Then the codes were gathered according to their common features to reach themes, categories and sub-categories. In this context, themes were determined within the scope of the conceptual framework based on literature, interview questions and sub-questions, and the quantification method of qualitative data was used.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability, considered as one of the most important criteria of scientific research, are the two most important measures used most commonly in research (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In this research, 'validity' was provided by quoting exactly from the participant's opinions, from which the themes and categories were obtained (Patton, 2014). In order to increase the internal validity (credibility) of the data collection tool, a conceptual framework about the subject was formed as a result of scanning the related literature while developing the interview form. In order to increase the internal validity of the data collection tool, the research process and what was done in this process were tried to be explained in detail. In this context, the model of the research, the study group, the data collection, the data collection process and the data analysis were deeply expressed. Analysis results that the researcher made to ensure the reliability of the research were reviewed, criticized and approved by experts working in the Faculty of Sport Sciences and the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Gazi University. Afterwards, with three researchers outside of the study, the researchers' own category and subcategories were compared. In the comparison, numbers of consensus and dissensus were determined and reliability of the research was calculated by using Miles and Huberman (1994) formula of $Reliability = \frac{Consensus}{Consensus + Dissensus}$. In qualitative studies, when a 90% or more conformity between expert and researcher evaluations provides a desirable level of reliability. In the present study, dissensus were revealed about three codes. In the reliability study conducted specifically for this study, a compromise (reliability) was achieved at the rate of 92%.



Results

This section includes the findings and interpretations obtained as a result of the content analysis of the interviews with the participants.

Opinions with the highest and lowest frequency in the direction of the data obtained from the participants were included.

Table 1: Opinions on Special Education Pedagogical Formation

Theme	Categories	Sub-Categories
Pedagogical formation training taken in the field of special education and its sufficiency	Taking Special Education Pedagogical Formation	I partially took the pedagogical formation (Kindergarten Teacher) I didn't take the pedagogical formation (Headmaster)
	Sufficiency of Taking Special Education Pedagogical Formation	Insufficient (Kindergarten Teacher, Headmaster)

In Table 1, the participants' answers to the questions regarding the special education pedagogical formation they took in past were handled under the theme of "pedagogical formation training taken in the field of special education and its sufficiency". This theme was handled in 2 categories. These are "taking special education pedagogical formation" and "sufficiency of taking special education pedagogical formation". Two subcategories related to the category of "taking special education pedagogical formation" were obtained. This category consists of the subcategories of "partially took" and "didn't take pedagogical formation".

Kindergarten teacher's opinion on the sub-category of 'partially took' is; "in university, I

partially acquired it under the name of special education lesson"

Headmaster's opinion on the sub-category of 'didn't take the pedagogical formation' is; "in past, I didn't take this pedagogical formation lesson"

One insufficient sub-category regarding the category of "sufficiency of taking special education pedagogical formation" was obtained. Kindergarten teacher's opinion on this sub-category is; "naturally, this lectured lesson isn't sufficient"

Headmaster's opinion on the insufficient category is; "in our times, children that need special education weren't allowed to go outside. Therefore, these kinds of events weren't seen. For this reason, we didn't take the training. But I find the special education pedagogical formation lessons given today insufficient."

Table 2. First Opinions Before Young Athletes Program

Theme	Categories	Sub-Categories
Thoughts Before Young Athletes Program	Positive Thoughts	Not having commercial purpose
		Trust
	Different Expectations	Not having political goal
Being a hand that reaches the special students		
Thinking that there will be painting, music training etc.		
Concern	Concern	Thinking that it won't achieve its objective
		The fear of what if I can't control the students

In table 2, participants' opinions on this program before participating in Young Athletes Program were handled under the theme of "Thoughts Before Young Athletes Program". According to this, 3 categories were obtained. These are "positive thoughts", "different expectations" and "concern". 5 sub-categories regarding the category of "positive thoughts" were obtained. These are; not having

commercial purpose, trust, not having political goal and being a hand that reaches the special students.

Kindergarten teacher's opinion on the sub-category of not having commercial purpose is; "the first thing that came to my mind when our headmaster told me about this program was the question of whether or not we would give money for this. It is awesome that there isn't any money demand of this program"



Headmaster's opinion on the sub-category of not having commercial purpose is; "the fact that this program hasn't any commercial purpose gives our institution a different confidence"

2 sub-categories regarding "different expectations" were obtained. These are "thinking that there will be painting, music etc. trainings and thinking that it won't achieve its objective".

Kindergarten teacher's opinion on the sub-category of thinking that there will be painting, music etc. trainings is; "I thought that this program would be mainly in the form of activity such as painting, music etc. I didn't know that this would be held in sports hall. I thought that they would be socialized with friends and play together."

Headmaster's opinion on the sub-category of thinking that it won't achieve its objective is; "even though I am hopeful about this program, I would be lying if I say that I don't have the thought of this program will achieve its objective."

One sub-category regarding the category of "concern" was obtained. This is "The fear of what if I can't control the students".

Kindergarten teacher's opinion on the sub-category of the fear of what if I can't control the students is; "I was very eager to participate in the program but I had a concern of what if I can't control of students and anything happen to them".

Table 3. Impressions Regarding The First Day of Young Athletes Program Practice

Theme	Categories	Sub-Categories
Impressions Regarding The First Day of Young Athletes Program	Affective Expressions regarding Practice	Excitement Happiness Admiration Astonishment
	Impressions regarding Materials in Practice	Parkour Layout Material Variety Material Choice T-Shirts

In Table 3, the first day impressions of the headmaster and kindergarten teacher who participated as observers in the program were investigated under the theme of impressions regarding the first days of Young Athletes Program. There were 2 categories related to this theme. These are "affective expressions regarding practice" and "impressions regarding materials in practice". 4 sub-categories regarding the category of "affective expressions regarding practice" were obtained. These are excitement, happiness,

admiration and astonishment Kindergarten teacher's opinion on the sub-category of excitement is; "I was excited on the day when we came for the program, but I got more excited after an hour when I saw that my students enjoyed and felt like they were home."

Headmaster's opinion on the sub-category of excitement is; "I was thinking that it would be a beautiful organization, but to be honest I didn't think that this would be that much. First day, I felt the excitement for this organized situation."

Table 4. General Opinions for Young Athletes Program

Theme	Categories	Sub-Categories
General Opinions on Young Athletes Program	Positive Aspects of Young Athletes Program	Equipped expert team Performing under the roof of official institution Self-sacrifices of volunteer students Patient team work
	Limited Aspects of Young Athletes Program	Providing positive impact on special children Ending in a short period of time Not being able to deliver the program to all schools Participation of only certain number of students

In Table 4, general opinions on Young Athletes Program were examined in 2 categories. These are

"positive aspects of Young Athletes Program" and "limited aspects of Young Athletes Program". 5 sub-categories regarding "positive aspects of Young



Athletes Program” were obtained. These are equipped expert team, performing under the roof of official institution, self-sacrifices of volunteer students, patient team work and providing positive impact on special children.

Kindergarten teacher’s opinion on the sub-category of equipped expert team is; “knowledge of you - teachers, the way you approach to them and the style of guiding the volunteer students gave me a great confidence. You are the kingpin of this program for me”.

Headmaster’s opinion on the sub-category of performing under the roof of official institution is; “performing this sports organization under the roof of official institution is the beautiful aspect of this program”.

The category of limited aspects of Young Athletes Program has 3 sub-categories. These are ending in a short period of time, not being able to deliver the program to all schools and participation of only certain number of students.”

Table 5. Opinions Regarding Effects of Young Athletes Program on Special Children

Theme	Categories	Sub-Categories
Achievements of Young Athletes Program Over Special Children	Mental Development	Desire to attend the lesson
		Attention span
		Academic Success
		Contributing to Lesson
	Skills Development	Skills of self-care
		Development in bouncing putty activities
		Increase in desire to participate in program
	Social Development	Desire to participate in game
		Holding friends’ hands
		Speaking with friends
Spiritual Development	Decrease in obsessions	
	Decrease in aggressive attitude	
		Increase in desire to take responsibility

In Table 5, achievements of Young Athletes Program over children were investigated and 4 categories regarding this theme were obtained. These are “mental development”, “skills development”, “social development” and “spiritual development”. 4 sub-categories regarding the category of “mental development” were obtained. These are “desire to attend the lesson, attention span, academic success and contributing to lesson.

Kindergarten teacher’s opinion on the sub-category of desire to attend the lessons is; “my student Osman didn’t want to attend the lesson and tried to escape somewhere else and dealing with different stuffs before the program. But after the program I observed that he was very eager to attend the lesson”.

Kindergarten teacher’s opinion on the sub-category of attention span is; “Osman could manage to direct his attentions for a short period of time, and I was very tired of this situation of him, even I was about quitting the job... I couldn’t believe that this program would affect positively his attention span that much”.

It was revealed that category of skills development has the sub-categories of Skills of self-

care and Development in bouncing putty activities; category of social development has the sub-categories of Increase in desire to participate in program, Desire to participate in game, Holding friends’ hands and Speaking with friends; category of spiritual development has the sub-category of Decrease in obsessions, Decrease in aggressive attitude and Increase in desire to take responsibility.

Discussion

In this study, it was tried to determine the opinions of the headmaster and kindergarten teacher on the Young Athletes Program, which was done in cooperation with Gazi University, Sabancı family and a primary school in Ankara.

A theme was obtained as a result of the analysis of the opinions of the participants regarding the special education pedagogical formation they took in past, who are the first sub-problem of the research. This theme is in the form of taking special education pedagogical formation training and its sufficiency. Accordingly, the categories were built in the form of "Taking special education pedagogical formation" and "Sufficiency of taking pedagogical formation". In the special education pedagogical formation, participants stated that they partially took the special



education pedagogical formation and did not take any pedagogical formation training for this area.

In the category of sufficiency of taking pedagogical formation, participants specified that the amount of special education pedagogical formation given was insufficient. Dedeoğlu et al. (2014) in their researches named "Thoughts and Suggestions of the 3rd and 4th Grade Students studying in Special Education Department Teacher of Mentally Handicapped and individuals graduated from this department about Their Own Departments, Raising Teacher and Faculties of Education", it was determined that even the students of the special education department considered the special education lessons they took during undergraduate degree as inadequate.

In the theme in which the second sub-problem of the research that the first opinions were compared before the Young Athletes Program, there categories were obtained. These categories are; "positive thoughts", "different expectations" and "concern". Participants in the category of positive thoughts, it was mentioned that The Young Athletes Program doesn't have commercial purpose, it created a trust in participants, the program doesn't have political goal and it is a hand that reaches the special students. In the category of different expectations, it was stated that the participant had predictions that in Young Athletes Program, educations such as picture, music, etc. would be given and that they had the expectations that program couldn't achieve its objective.

In the category of concern, one of the participants mentioned that he was worried about what if he couldn't control the students. In the theme of the first day impressions of Young Athletes Program which is another sub-problem of the research, two categories were obtained. These are "Affective expressions regarding practice" and "impressions regarding materials in practice". In the affective category regarding practice, the participants stated that they were excited, happy and felt admiration and astonishment because of the self-sacrifices throughout program for the week they joined the Young Athletes Program. In the category of impressions regarding materials in the practice, participants mentioned the parkour layout, material variety, material choice and the positive effects of t-shirts, which was given to the Young athletes included in the program, on the children's in the Young Athletes Program. The fourth sub-problem of the research was examined under 2 categories under the theme of General Opinions about the Young Athletes Program. These categories are "The positive aspects of Young Athletes Program" and "The limited aspects of Young Athletes

Program". In the category of positive aspects of Young Athletes Program, participants mentioned the quality of the equipped expert team, the positiveness of this program being made under the roof of the official institution, the voluntary student's self-sacrifice in the program, the patient work and the positive effects on special children. In the category of limited aspects of Young Athletes Program, participants stated that it is a limitation of this program to be completed in a short period of time, not being able to be delivered all schools and participation of only a certain number of students can participate in this program. The last sub-problem of the research was organized into four categories under the theme of Opinions on the Effects of Young Athletes Program on Special Children. These are "mental development", "skills development", "social development" and "spiritual development". in the in the category of mental development, , participants stated that after the Young Athletes Program, there was an increase in desire of special students to participate in the lesson, the attention span was extended, their academic success increased and they started contributing to the lesson. Sanioglu (1992) stated that according to some scientific researches, physical activities develop their intelligence at the level of capacities of children with intellectual disabilities at the best level.

In the research of İlhan et al. (2013) titled "The effect of special physical education and sports program on the quality of life with the children with mental retardation" it was found that the sportive activities increased the mental development which is parallel to the research findings. In the category of skill development, participants mentioned that after the program, self-care skills developed in special students and their manipulative skills increased in the activities of playing with bouncing putty. In the studies of İlhan et al. (2015) titled "The Effect of Special Athletics Training to Self-Care Skills' Level On Mentally Retarded Children", parallel to results of this research, it was determined that 12 trainable children with intellectual disabilities aged 7-12 taking special education were divided into 2 groups as application group and control group, a special module program was applied to application group throughout 25 weeks; as a result of conducted analysis, compared to control group there was an increase in self-care skills in terms of points of self-care and cleaning, and putting on and taking off clothes which are sub-dimensions of self-care skills of application groups. In the category of social development, participants stated that after the Young Athletes Program, there was an increase in desire of special students to



participate in classroom games, desire to hold their friends' hands and demands for talking with their friends. İlhan (2008) also found similar findings in his work titled "The Effect of Physical Education upon the Socialization Levels of Mentally Handicapped Children". İlhan (2009) stated in his research entitled "Evaluating The Conscious Levels Of Parents On The Effects Of Physical Education And Sport Activities On Their Handicapped Children During Special Education", physical education and sportive activities would contribute to the social development of children in process of special education. Babkes (1999) also evaluated the levels of socialization of individuals with intellectual disabilities who actively play sports and peers who don't play sports, and stated that individuals who play sports showed more social behavioral characteristics than those who don't play sports. In the category of spiritual development, participants mentioned that the frequency of obsessions and displaying aggressive attitudes of special students decreased and their desire to take responsibility increased. As parallel to this research, Yarımkaaya et al. (2016) found that physical education and sports activities might have a positive effect on the spiritual adaptation levels of children in their research entitled "Investigation of the Effect of Physical Education and Sports Activities."

Conclusion

In our country, serious developments have been seen in recent years, such as the strengthening of relations with society, the inclusion of disabled people in everyday life together with normal development individuals. However, the problem that special education lessons aren't given sufficiently during the undergraduate degree is frequently mentioned. As a result of giving special education lessons insufficiently, it was determined that teacher candidates feel inadequate about how they will behave and lecture when they meet special students, and they are accordingly entering into shocks about this subject. During the undergraduate semester regarding this problem, it might be suggested that the lessons regarding special education may be distributed in semester and included into education.

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<http://www.soturkiye.org.tr/haberler/minik-sporcular-projesi-turkiyenin-dort-bir-yanina-yayiliyor> sitesinden alınmıştır.