

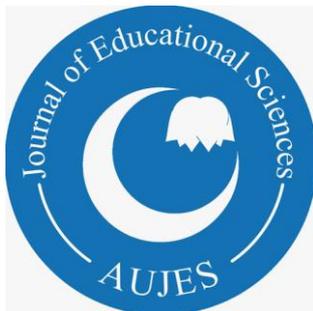
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**A Classroom-Based Training Program
Involving Preschool Children for
Developing Prerequisite Learning Skills
and Social Skills: Ready to Learn**

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A Classroom-Based Training Program Involving Preschool Children for Developing Prerequisite Learning Skills and Social Skills: Ready to Learn

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Abstract

Social skills training is a good way of intervention for preventing deficiencies in demonstrating social skills and emotional-behavioral problems, and academic deficiencies that may arise from these deficiencies. Different activities, methods, and strategies as well as different approaches from theory to practice can be included in intervention programs for social skills. This study is aimed to reveal a story-based social skills training program that is usable for preschool children in Turkey, by making promotion and performing the Turkish adaptation of a classroom-based social skills training program called “Ready to Learn” developed by Brigman, Lane & Lane (1994), the scientific effects of which have been proven. This program was developed for children aged four to seven to promote the prerequisite learning skills and social skills that are needed for school success. The program called “Ready to Learn” includes social cooperation activities to contain the use of “big books” that are read aloud, story-telling by teachers and children, activities of drawing, dramatic play, puppet, and song, activities on listening and attention, practices for understanding directions through story structures, as well as discussion and interaction. The program, which consists of a series of stories, includes five teacher strategies: (1) modeling-coaching-cueing, (2) student/child story-telling, (3) student/child story retelling, (4) positive peer reporting, and (5) encouragement council activities. Within the scope of the study, a social skills training program was gained to the literature for Turkish children in the preschool period by carrying out stages from the procedures for the provision of the program called “Ready to Learn” to the steps required by the adaptation processes. In this context, the study is envisaged to be a guide for social skills training applications and program development studies for preschool children and to provide an intellectual basis for the practices in daily life; meanwhile, it is also stipulated to be a remarkable resource for improving the problems and deficiencies experienced in the preschool period.

Keywords: Classroom-Based Training Program, Ready to Learn, Social Skills, Preschool Children.

Introduction

Socialization, which is a process of learning and teaching, starts from early infancy and childhood and continues until maturity. Socialization has a dynamic and unique structure as well as has a shaping effect on social skills. While social skills reveal the quality of the relationships and the direction of the emotional reactions, they are the skills required in ensuring social-emotional development and academic competence. Social skills are the learned behaviors that are based on social rules and ensure a child establishes proper communication with the other individuals in the society. Such behaviors are a part of mental health and predict the conditions such as school maturity, adaptation to school, and academic performance. In addition, they contribute to ensuring social adaptation and sustaining social interaction (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2013; Takahashi, Okada, Hoshino, & Anne, 2015; Ziv, 2013). It was detected that children with positive social skills in the preschool period are more successful in performing certain tasks within the educational process such as listening, following the rules, and participating in activities (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006) and exhibit better performance in situations with school (Konold, Jamison, Stanton-Chapman, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2010). While the preschool ages are a critical period for developing social skills, it is possible to observe deficiencies in the social skills of children (Kramer et. al., 2010). In the face of deficiencies in social skills, the feeling of loneliness, problem behaviors, communication problems, and school failure in the children come to the fore (Hukkelberg, Keleş, Ogden & Hammerstrøm, 2019; Powless, & Elliott, 1993; Whitted, 2011). According to Gresham (2016), deficiencies in demonstrating social skills arise fundamentally due to two reasons. The first of these is that the child does not know what the behavioral sequences he/she should exhibit are or what kind of social skills he/she should exhibit in which situations. The second is that although the child has sufficient knowledge about behavioral processes and skills, he/she has inadequacies in using them in social interactions. With the determination of social skill levels and deficiencies, taking steps to develop social skills is a representation of a solution-oriented approach. In the studies carried out at this point, a relationship was detected between social skills and variables such as social

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values, behavioral problems, social-emotional adjustment, problem-solving skills, self-regulation skills, attachment styles, learning styles, parenting styles, parent-child relationship, and the level of parent's involvement (Eğin-Işık, 2019; Hosokawa, Katsura, & Shizawa, 2015; Hosseini, Akhoundzadeh, & Hojjati, 2019; Kassim, Hutagalung, Leng, & Zakaria, 2020; Kaya & Deniz, 2019; Merrell, 1995; Montroy, Bowles, Skibbe, & Foster, 2014; Öztürk & Tortop, 2019; Samar, 2019; Tahmasebi, 2015). While these situations reveal that social skills are multidimensional skills, they also show that there is a need for a learning process that includes different types of interaction in the process of eliminating social skill deficiencies.

Various situations are emphasized within the framework of different approaches regarding how social skills are acquired. The behavioral approach explains that social skills are acquired through techniques such as role-playing, modeling, and giving feedback. In this context, while offering rewards and praise is put forward for negative behaviors, the emphasis is on using non-approving feedback such as ignoring negative behaviors. In the cognitive approach, on the other hand, while processes such as coaching, self-control techniques, and problem-solving strategies are highlighted, it is stressed out that it is necessary to be at a level of capability of understanding social skill behaviors from a cognitive perspective in social skills training. According to the social learning approach developed by Bandura, social skills are realized through observing and directly trying out the behavior of others (Cornish, & Ross, 2003; Elliott, & Busse, 1991; Newman, & Newman, 2012). While determining the needs in social skills training is considered as a priority, together with the views suggested by the educational approaches; preparation of educational programs in line with the appropriate methods, techniques, and approaches to meet the requirements is another step that should be taken at this point. In social skills training programs, methods and techniques suitable for the target group are used, and the content and system of the activities may differ depending on the method/technique used and on the scope of the approach. Children have different learning structures and various interests; thus different learning strategies, diversified activities, and different kinds of practices applications are needed in the development of social skills.

The studies conducted in social skills in Turkey include a group of studies on social skills training programs. It was determined that a minority of the studies in this scope were used together with the adaptation of training programs, which are widely used outside Turkey, to the Turkey sample, such as Incredible Years [IY; Webster-Stratton, 1990], I Can Problem Solve [ICPS; Shure, 2001] and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies [PATHS; Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2007] (Dereli, 2009; Dinçer, & Güneysu, 1997; Kaya, & Deniz, 2020; Ocak, & Arda, 2014). It was seen that some other researchers who practiced the training programs they developed based on the literature of social skills training (e.g., Durualp, & Aral, 2010; Kılıç, & Güngör-Aytar, 2017; Ömeroğlu et al., 2015; Özbey & Köyceğiz, 2019; Uysal, & Kaya-Balkan, 2015). In studies based on social skills training on preschool children, it was revealed that social skills training is effective in the development of children's skills of understanding feelings and social problem solving, social competencies, peer relations, self-esteem, social behaviors, positive play behaviors, and motivation levels (Bilir-Seyhan, Ocak-Karabay, Arda-Tunçdemir, Greenberg & Domitrovich, 2017; Dereli, 2009; Hwa-Choi, & Md-Yunus, 2011; Kaya & Deniz, 2020; Kayılı & Arı, 2016; Larose et al., 2020; Özbey & Köyceğiz, 2019; Özdemir-Topaloğlu, 2013; Sancak, 2019; Uysal, & Kaya-Balkan, 2015). In addition to these, in some studies, the effect of family participation in social skills training programs was evaluated, and it was revealed that family participation studies are important for making activities with their children by being informed about the processes for improving the parent-child relationship and family support towards their children (Boz, Uludağ, & Tokuç, 2018; Göktaş, & Gülay-Ogelman, 2016; Uysal, & Kaya-Balkan, 2015). The results of the studies on social skills training through social skills training programs developed by these researchers also emphasize that social skills can be improved using different interventions. In this line, it was determined that the training programs developed outside Turkey and used in Turkey constitute an alternative to the learning processes implemented in the country and contribute to different points from preschool education to program development.

There has been an increase in the studies on social skills that demonstrate the transition from theory to practice; meanwhile, studies emphasizing the effect of the training delivered through plays, cooperative learning, and family involvement on the development of social skills have become distinguished (such as Avcıoğlu, 2004; Boz, Uludağ, & Tokuç, 2018; Çetingöz, & Cantürk-Günhan, 2012; Durualp, & Aral, 2010; Göktaş, & Gülay Ogelman, 2016; Uysal, & Kaya-Balkan, 2015). In this framework, it has been observed in more recent national-level studies that the processes to develop social skills are addressed through different ways such as nature education (Çiftçi, 2019) and educational robotics program (Türe, 2019). In this context, it is remarkable that no study aimed to improve the social skills of preschool children through story-based processes has been found apart from the study by Baş (2011), which examines the effect of story-based education on responsibility and cooperation skills. Several studies were conducted in the international literature (Daemi, & Farnia, 2013; Esteban et al., 2010; Guglielmo, & Tryon, 2001; Nicolopoulou, McDowell, & Brockmeyer, 2006) emphasize the importance of story-based social skills training on social skills. It is a functional technique in the development of social skills since stories contain written and visual stimuli, exemplify situations related to life

and interpersonal relationships based upon different characters, manage the processes based on thinking and producing, encourage multidimensional learning, and turn out to be an activity that ensures effective and pleasant learning. Since the attention span of children is shorter and they have not yet acquired the written reading skill in the preschool period, great importance is attached to picture story-books and storytelling activities. In addition to these, there are some findings that it is also important to include processes such as multimedia story reading and questioning, interactive shared story/book reading, interactive elaborative storytelling, parent-child book reading in the story-based training for the preschool period (Farrant, & Zubrick, 2012; Noble et. al., 2020; Zhou, & Yadav, 2017) and that there is a need for various strategies for the story-based training processes to be carried out to support the development of children. It is predicted that the inclusion of studies dealing with such interactive processes at the point of developing social skills, which is one of the multidimensional skills, will contribute to the elimination of a gap in the field. Considering that the birth of many techniques in this context, such as storytelling and narration, originated at the international level (e.g., Bell, 1990; Nicolopoulou, McDowell, & Brockmeyer, 2006; Paley, 1990), it is a fact that it will be possible to adopt an innovative education approach by following up the international literature. Based on these points, social skills training programs for preschool children, whose effects have been scientifically proven, are considered highly important.

The purpose and scope of the program, which is addressed with the fact that the programs developed for preschool children have a unique nature, as well as its strategies, are noteworthy. Accordingly, explaining the purpose and scope of the program discussed in the study, explaining its strategies, understanding the structure of the program are necessary to know the useful features of the program and to carry out effective implementation processes. It will be possible to fulfill the intended purpose of the current program and to make it functional utilizing mastering the elements of the training programs used within the education services in the context of target, content, learning process, and evaluation (Anderson, et. al., 2003; Calley, 2011; Özdoğru, 2018). In the study, the theoretical foundations and scope of the social skills training program called "Ready to Learn" (for children aged four to seven with normal development), which is a program with proven effect in the international literature (Brigman et. al., 1999; Brigman & Webb, 2003), are revealed based upon the view that it can serve as a source for the studies in this direction. In this line, it is expected that the processes set forth will contribute to the program developers and guide the studies on social skills training from preschool to different childhood periods by seeing different strategies that can be used at the stages of program development.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to reveal a story-based social skills training program that is usable for preschool children in Turkey, by making promotion and performing the Turkish adaptation of a classroom-based social skills training program called "Ready to Learn" developed by Brigman, Lane & Lane (1994). In line with this purpose, the necessary stages in the adaptation studies of the training programs were followed, and the purpose and scope of the addressed social skills training program and what strategies it contained are emphasized. The information and explanations about this training program within the scope of the study are presented in the light of the relevant literature studies.

The Training Program's Procurement, Turkish Adaptation, and Preparation Processes

The study is a descriptive study conducted in the survey model. In this direction, the main source of the study is the story-based social skills training program called "Ready to Learn" developed by Brigman, Lane, & Lane (1994). The study was conducted in seven stages. All these stages are described in detail in the following.

In the first stage, social skills training programs developed outside of Turkey for preschool children were examined. In this scope, a literature review was conducted in English and Turkish languages, using key concepts such as "social skills training", "social skills training program", "preschool education program" and "social skills training in preschool period". In this framework, the training programs among the sources that were reached in the electronic or printed environments, whose targets do not include the development of social skills in any manner and/or do not include children in the preschool age group, were excluded from the examination.

In the second stage, the foundations of social skills training programs for preschool children included in the scope of the examination and their alternative features to the programs used in our country were reviewed. It was decided to address the scope of study of the social skills training program called "Ready to Learn", which was determined to be a different social skills training program in terms of the scope, methods, and techniques used, and the strategies included in its content, compared to the social skills training programs used currently at the national level.

In the third stage, the steps were followed to procure the program, which is the focus of the study. Accordingly, the required permissions to adapt the "Ready to Learn" program into Turkish language and to

ensure its eligibility for the Turkish children were received through e-mail communication with Prof. Dr. Greg Brigman, an academic member at the Atlantic University, who is one of the writers who developed the training program. Correspondingly, the program booklet and the materials in this context were reached via postal mail, after performing the required conditions/procedures.

In the fourth stage, the booklet of the program called “Ready to Learn” consists of ten sections and five main stories (“*Fuzzy and the Time of Great Change*”, “*Fuzzy and the Secret of Flowers*”, “*Fuzzy and the Daring Rescue*”, “*Fuzzy and the Final Lesson*” and “*Fuzzy and the Great Migration*”) as well as three supporting stories (“*The Little Pigs*”, “*The Giving Tree*” and “*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*”) included in its contents, were translated by the researcher from English into Turkish, then translation was checked by an expert who knows both languages at a good level and accordingly, the necessary corrections were made. The Turkish versions of the five main stories and three supporting stories were reviewed together with a Turkish language education expert upon reviewing in terms of language and expression and spelling rules and accordingly, all the stories and content of the training program were finalized by making the necessary corrections. The Turkish version of the stories, which will be played from the audio recording CDs in the training program, was also sound-recorded and made available.

In the fifth stage, the character names in the stories of the training program that was regenerated in Turkish were recreated with the words suitable for the Turkish language structure and with the activities suitable for the Turkish preschool education system and culture. In this scope, the main character Fuzzy and his forest friends (Hawkeye, Bonnie, Hoot, and Skippy) in the stories were renamed. At this point, names with rhythmic features were preferred in a way to integrate with the characteristics of the characters, to make the names easier to remember, and to attract attention. According to this; the name “Puf Puf” was used for *Fuzzy*, who is first a caterpillar and then becomes a butterfly, the name “Pofuduk” was used for *Hawkeye* the hawk, the name “Tos Tos” was used for *Bonnie* the rabbit, the name “Tombul” was used for *Hoot* the owl, and the name “Tin Tin” was used for *Skippy* the tortoise. Since preschool children are not made to read and write directly from text in the Turkish education system, the researcher added the activity of creating a story from a storyboard prepared by the researcher was added instead of the activity of creating a story from letters in the program. The stories, Turkish versions of which were created, were bound on large (A3) and thick cardboard sheets and made ready for use. In this scope, the activities in the programs were taken off from the guide format and were arranged in the learning process format in the preschool education practices in our country, and the methods and strategies in the program were included in daily learning activities. A Turkish version of the training program consisting of two-hour activities and twelve sessions was created.

In the sixth stage, the Turkish version of the training program was submitted to experts for opinions; and in this scope, opinions were received from seven experts from the fields of preschool education, child development and education, and program development. The expert opinions evaluated the appropriateness of the activities for the developmental characteristics of preschool children, whether the content of the activities supports social skills, the suitability of the materials used in the activities for the age group, the understandability of the activities, the level of the activities to appeal to the interest and liking of preschool children, the level of the learning process to make the children active, the applicability of the activities in the preschool educational setting, the level of the activities to support the outputs and indicators outlined in the Preschool Education Program of Ministry of National Education [MoNE] (2013), and whether the activities have a story-telling based content. The required changes or arrangements were made in the training programs in line with the opinions of the experts. Three different field experts, one of whom was a lecturer at the department of preschool education and two of whom were lecturers at the department of child development, stated that among the supporting stories in the training program, the contents of the stories named “*The Little Pigs*”, and “*The Giving Tree*” and “*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*” were not appropriate (in terms of the solution strategies used and multidimensional effects on children) and different stories should be used instead of them. At this point, the consent of the program owner was received through e-mail correspondence and it was decided to use stories from two different story-books named “*I am Very Angry*” (published by Mandolin Publications and written by Aysen Oy) and “*All Toys Are Mine*” (published by Uçanbalık Publications and written by Aytül Akal), which were determined by the researcher for the improvement of social skills, instead of these stories.

Finally, *in the seventh stage*, a pilot scheme was carried out for the first three sessions for the Turkish version of the training program consisting of twelve sessions (two hours each session) on preschool children, and its applicability was tested. Parental consent forms were obtained from the families of the children receiving preschool education in the classroom where the pilot study was carried out for the permission statements for their children to be included in the educational practices, and the children's participation in the process was

carried out voluntarily. In this scope, the pilot study was carried out on children who received preschool education in a kindergarten in an official primary school in the province accessible to the researcher, in line with the random sampling selection. Within this context, it was tried to ensure the researcher review the activities and expressions in the whole program and to have a good command of the processes involved in the application. Accordingly, the social skills training program called “Ready to Learn”, which was adapted to the Turkish language and made available for practice-based use, was gained in the relevant literature as a source for developing the social skills of the children in Turkey. In this direction; the aim, content, and strategies of the program are presented in the following section. All these stages, described in this scope so far, were summarized in Figure 1.

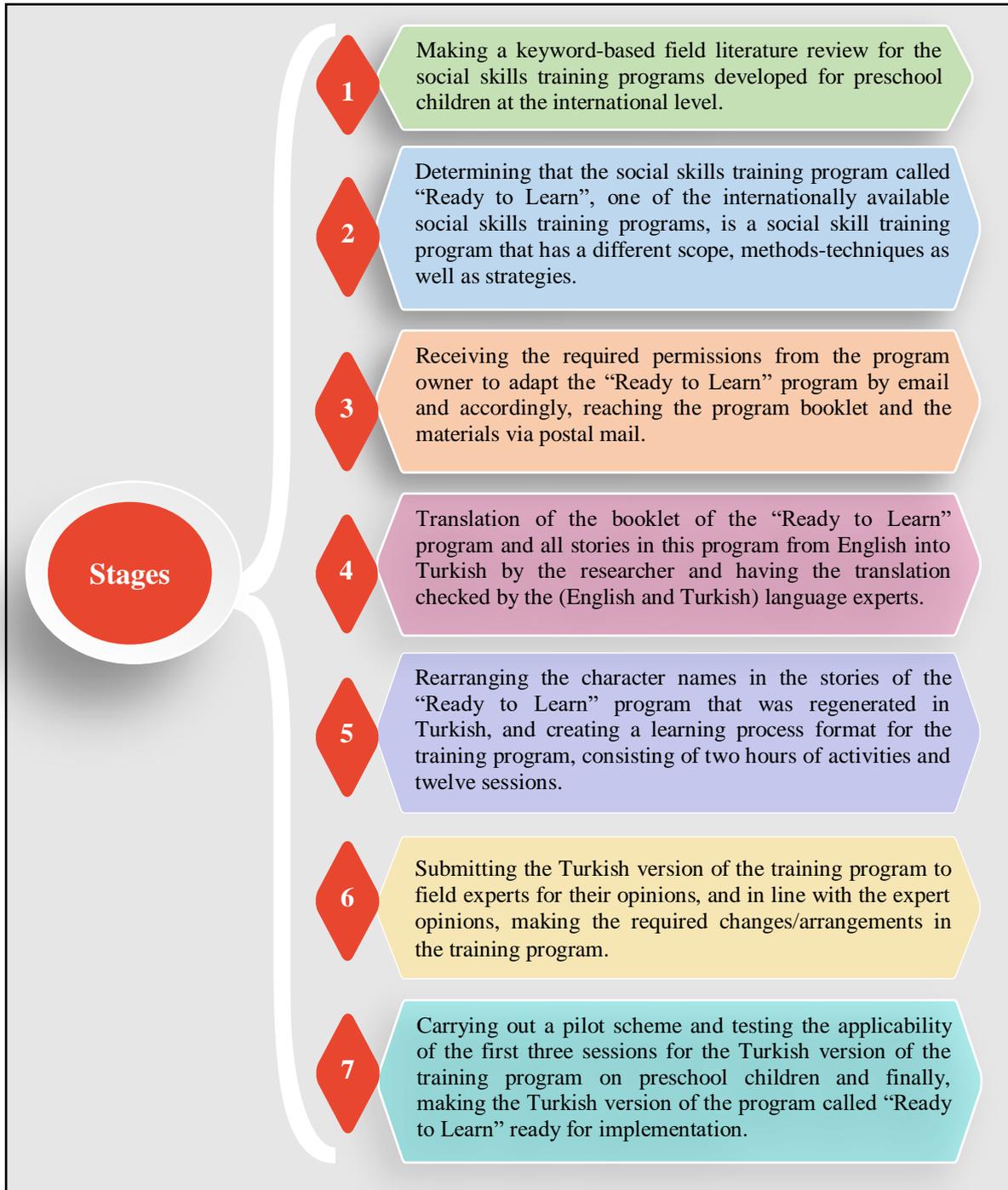


Figure 1. The Stages Carried out in the Scope of the Study

An Overview of the Training Program Addressed in the Study

In this section; the purpose, scope, and strategies of the social skills training program addressed in the study are explained. These situations and explanations are based on the information contained in the program's teacher manual handled by Brigman, Lane, & Lane (1994). The information in this direction is as follows.

Purpose and Scope of the Training Program

The training program called "Ready to Learn" is a classroom-based program was developed by Brigman, Lane, & Lane (1994) and was translated and adapted to the Turkish language by the researcher as translated "Öğrenmeye Hazırım" in the scope of this study.

The original version of this program was developed over seven years. The theoretical foundation of the program called "Ready to Learn" is based on the learning model of Carkhuff, who argued that learning requires prerequisite skills (Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff, 1983), and the idea of Adler that suggests the necessity for social competence (Adler, 1998). These two ideas form the basis of the academic education and social skills training contained in the program. In this process, it is stated that the previous researches on learnings in early childhood were reviewed extensively; and the elements of the program were tested many times on children, conducting constant interviews with early childhood period experts, psychologists, school guidance services, school administrators, and program experts, as well as preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers. For this reason, the mentioned program that is based on a wide research foundation is explained as a preventive program and when used before facing a problem.

This program was developed for children aged four to seven to gain the social skills and learning skills that are needed for school success. The program focuses on the competencies that should be acquired before the more complicated skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics. These competencies include social skills, paying attention, and listening comprehension; as well as cognitive strategies such as understanding the structure of the story and asking effective questions. This program is regarded as a story-based social skills training program for children aged four to seven.

The program called "Ready to Learn" includes social cooperation activities to contain the use of "big books" that are read aloud, storytelling by teachers and children, activities of drawing, dramatic play, puppet, and song, activities on listening and attention, practices for understanding directions through story structures, as well as discussion and interaction. This program consists of a series of stories about "Fuzzy (renamed as "Puf Puf") and his friends". The characters mentioned as "Fuzzy and his friends" in the series of the stories were renamed as "Puf Puf and his friends" in the Turkish version of the training program. Puf Puf is a caterpillar that later in the story transforms into a butterfly. Puf Puf and his friends essentially teach children important learning skills/social skills such as paying attention, listening, and understanding, asking key questions to increase comprehension, encouragement of self and others, working/studying in cooperation, and establishing empathy.

The content, strategies, and activities of the training program are contained in a book written by the program developers (namely, Brigman, Lane, & Lane, 1994), and this book consists of ten chapters. The introduction chapter of the training book includes how the program was developed, the program's importance and contributions, materials, group discussion skills, a review of the learning process, and an example of a weekly plan. In this scope, *the first chapter* mentions the activities and learning process related to the story named "Puf Puf and the Time of Great Change"; *the second chapter* mentions the activities and learning process related to the story named "Puf Puf and the Secret of Flowers"; *the third chapter* mentions the activities and learning process related to the story named "Puf Puff and the Daring Rescue"; *the fourth chapter* mentions the activities and learning process related to the story named "Puf Puff and the Final Lesson"; and *the fifth chapter* mentions the activities and learning process related to the story named "Puf Puff and the Great Migration". Following these, *the sixth chapter* presents research summaries and theoretical framework; *the seventh chapter* presents four learning skills (paying attention, listening and understanding, asking effective questions, and encouragement/self-regard); *the eighth chapter* presents five teacher strategies (modeling, coaching, and clueing, student/child storytelling, student/child story re-telling, positive peer reporting, and encouragement council), followed by *the ninth chapter*, which presents encouraging/friendly things that the teacher and children can do/say, and finally, *the tenth chapter* presents the parent education newsletters.

The "Ready to Learn" program is established on five stories. These are as follows:

- (1) The story named "Puf Puf and the Time of Great Change" is about the skills such as attention, listening and understanding, asking questions, encouragement of self and others.
- (2) The story named "Puf Puf and the Secret of Flowers" focuses on paying attention.
- (3) The story named "Puf Puf and the Daring Rescue" addresses the importance of listening and understanding.

- (4) The story named “Puf Puf and the Final Lesson” focuses on the skills of asking effective questions.
- (5) The story named “Puf Puf and the Great Migration” centers on encouraging self and others.

In the general story, Puf Puf is a caterpillar who, due to his off-task behavior, fails to learn how to spin a cocoon to turn into a butterfly. Activities are conducted for the supplement stories to develop certain learning and social skills in the program, in addition to the main stories about “Puf Puf and his friends”. Four new forest friends of Puf Puf teach him the prerequisite learning skills such as paying attention, listening, and understanding, encouraging himself and others, so Puf Puf can learn to build his cocoon and complete his "big change". In the following four stories, it is emphasized that Puf Puf uses these skills to become a successful butterfly and helps also others learn these skills. In this way, children are taught the importance of effective communication/social skills, learning skills, helping/encouraging others through metaphorical transfers.

Activities are conducted for the support stories to develop social skills in the program, in addition to the main stories about “Puf Puf and his friends”. In this scope, the original version includes the stories named “The Little Pigs”, a world’s classic, “The Giving Tree”, the work written by Shel Silverstein, and "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day”, work written by Judith Viorst. While adapting the program to Turkish, it was ensured to use the stories in two different books named “I Am Very Angry” (one of the stories written by Aysen Oy) and “All Toys Are Mine” (written by Aytül Akal) instead of the other two stories (as mentioned for “The Little Pigs”, and "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day”), as these stories address the skills in the contents of the others.

This training program includes audio CDs that allow children to listen to the five stories read and that contain each one of the studies. The teacher makes children listen to the CDs about the stories read during the day and ensures the reinforcement of the skills included in the stories. In addition to this, after reading each story and answering the questions about the story, a drawing activity takes place in the program. In this scope, children are asked to draw/paint their favorite character/chapter in the story, what happens at the beginning/middle/end of the story, and how Puf Puf feels at the beginning/middle/end of the story in each session, based on teacher's instructions. Afterward, children may be asked to describe their drawings to the classroom and are allowed to take the drawings home at the end of the day. In this context, the program in question is based on the principle of listening to the existing stories, performing activities related to them, and then using certain strategies together at the same time.

Strategies of the Training Program

The training program called “Ready to Learn” is a skills-building program in which various activities are carried out based on the stories read/listened to, and children are first told about social skills and learning skills with stories, and then children are given the opportunities to exhibit these skills through five teacher strategies including speaking, listening, thinking, and vitalization. These five teaching strategies are;

- (1) modeling-coaching-cueing,
- (2) student story-telling,
- (3) student story retelling,
- (4) positive peer reporting,
- (5) encouragement council activities. Each of these strategies is described below:

Modeling: In the program, the teacher acts as a model verbally or non-verbally to support the specific behaviors taught. It is stated that if the teacher continues to be a model for these behaviors (attending, listening, asking questions, and encouragement), children will be motivated to practice these new skills and behaviors, and if the teacher informs the classroom when he/she observes that children are using any skill, it will accelerate the learning process. The teacher is considered an important model for the behaviors included in his/her program. At this point, it is recommended that a child be a model for the activity for the group/classroom after the teacher shows, does, and tells how to do the activity.

Coaching: This includes the teacher giving corrective and supportive feedback to the children regarding the target behaviors. Here, the teacher must first state what children are doing right, then tell and show what needs to be changed, and finally conclude his/her explanations with a positive comment.

Cueing: This refers to the visualization of past explanations in mind with very few words. For example, before giving instructions for subsequent readings or activities, the teacher says, “*Right now, I want to see ... (as much as the class size) beautiful Puf Pufs*”. He/she happens to give children clues such as (1) "turn to the teacher and come face to face", (2) "look at the teacher", (3) "bend forward slightly", and (4) "liven up and show

interest". In this context, the teacher also expresses which of the children immediately exhibits the aforementioned attendance skills.

Student/Child story-telling: Student/child story-telling is used to help children understand questions and practice paying attention and listening skills. Here, the teacher reads the story included in the daily training program aloud to the children in the classroom, and after the story is completed, the teacher guides the children to tell the story for a while (1-2 minutes) through the 4W & 1H questions (Who, What, When, Where and How), and comments on the attendance behaviors of children that he/she has noticed. It is recommended that the poster containing the 4W & 1H questions be hung in the classroom. A sample poster for 4W & 1H questions is presented in Figure 2.

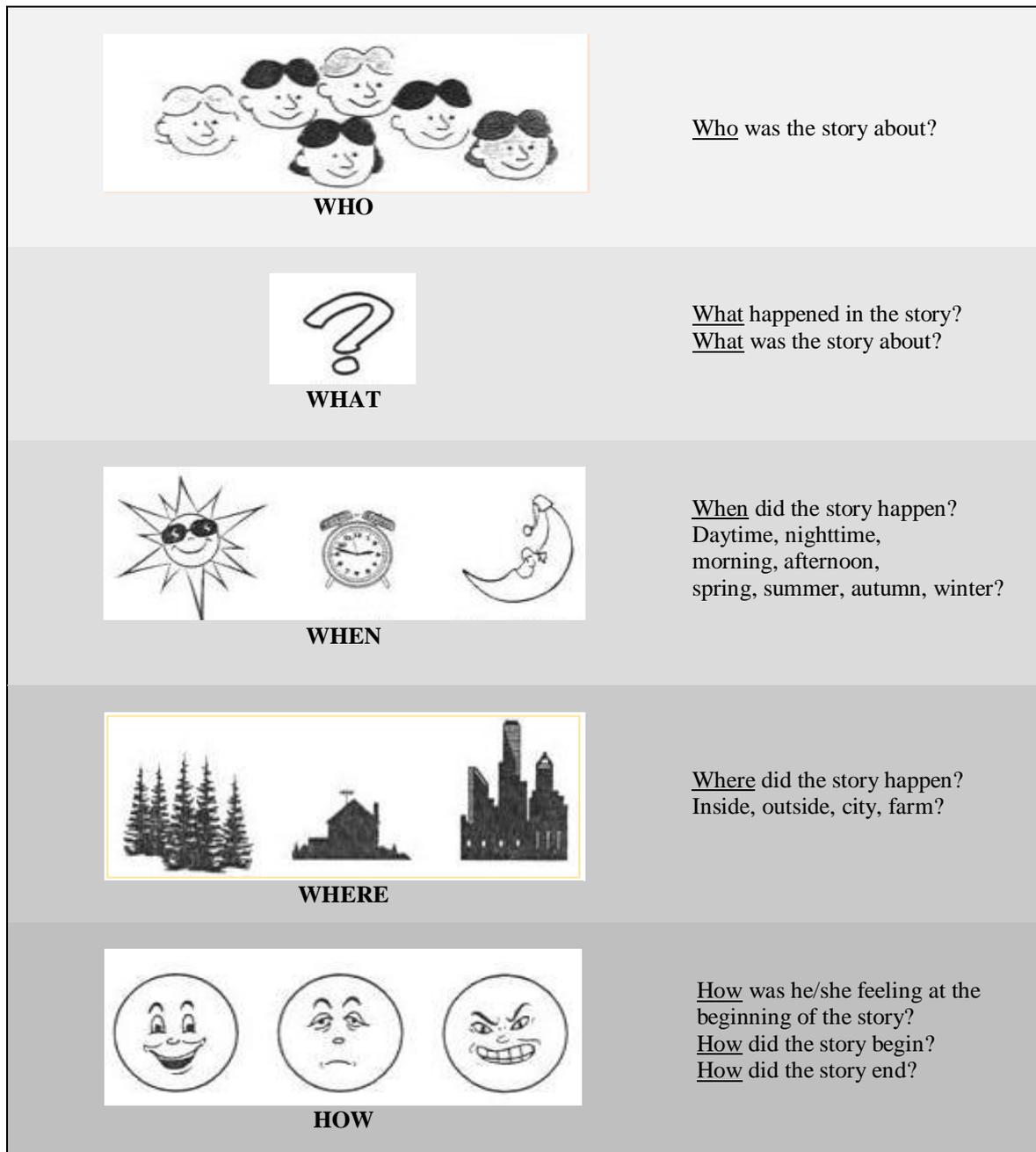


Figure 2. A Sample Poster for 4W & 1H Questions

Student/child story retelling: Student/child story retelling is used to help children understand and review stories read in the daily training program. This strategy includes a good frame to practice sequencing. The following instructions are guiding for story repetitions.

- (1) Children are asked to retell the story using the following dialogue. "I have just read a story (the name of the story...). Could you retell this story as if you were telling it to a friend who has never heard it before?"

And the following steps are used when needed.

- (2) If children have difficulty in beginning the story, they are asked to begin with "Once upon a time..." or "Once there was...".
- (3) If a child stops re-telling the story, he/she is encouraged to continue by asking "What happened next?"
- (4) If a child stops retelling and cannot continue to tell the story, questions are asked about the story at points that encourage continuing the story and are suitable for stopping. For example, "What was....'s problem?"
- (5) When a child is not able to retell or when the sequence and details are missing in his/her story, he/she is encouraged to retell it step by step with the following dialogues
 - He/she is told to begin with "Once upon a time" or "Once there was....."
 - "Who was the story about?"
 - "When did the story happen?" (daytime or nighttime, summer or winter?)
 - "Where did the story happen?" (in the city, on the farm)
 - "What was the problem of (the main character's name) in the story?"
 - "How did he/she try to solve the problem? What did he/she do first, next?"
 - "What happened at the end of the story?"
 - "How did (the main character) feel at the beginning, middle, and end of the story?" and after the child's answer, the story ends by saying "This is how the story ends here".

While one child is telling the other the story, the other is practicing listening and attendance skills.

Positive peer reporting: It is stated that in the program when children are taught to mind other children paying attention, listening, asking questions, doing and saying encouraging things, and indicating these behaviors to other children, a highly basic encouraging system is also established for them. At this point, it is considered important that the teacher encourages each child when they use the behaviors in the program and children also encourage the others in the classroom. It is argued that with the teacher's practice and guidance, children will spontaneously begin to notice and tell about "something friendly, encouraging, inviting and/or helpful that someone did or said". It is stated that as positive peer reporting becomes a part of the classroom environment, children's prosocial behaviors (such as helping others, helping others feel good, and sharing) and learning skills and the behaviors they report will increase.

Examples for teacher's explanations for positive peer reporting are as follows:

- (1) "During the activity, I want you to examine who pays full attention in your group, who listens carefully, who can ask good questions, and who says or does things to encourage others. At the end of the activity, I will ask each of you to describe what you noticed."
- (2) "Who do you think did or said something encouraging/friendly today? What did he/she do/say?"
- (3) "Today, I want each of you to pay attention to who in your group says or does something friendly or encouraging. You can tell them that you like the way he/she behaves when you first notice it. I will ask each of you to share what you noticed in your group at the end of the day. So, try to find something friendly/encouraging that each of your group members says or does."

Practices are performed by asking the above-mentioned questions or making such explanations and attaching the names of the specified children to the courage corner.

At the end of the day, the teacher wants the children to sit together and share friendly and/or encouraging things they noticed each other saying and doing throughout the day. Here, it is stated that teachers can help children complete activities by using some positive peer reporting initiators. For example;

- Today, I noticed that you did ... and I liked it.
- I can tell you that you paid attention, you listened carefully, and so forth. Because you were looking right at me and asking a good question, etc. I really liked it.
- Today, you did/said ... that I think was friendly/encouraging. I really liked it.

Encouragement council: Encouragement council meetings are structured classroom discussions that allow children to talk about encouraging skills. It is a preferred approach to start the encouragement council in a small group at the beginning of the training and then to involve the whole classroom. Within the scope of the encouragement council, children are asked to sit in a circle so that everyone can easily see each other's faces. In each session, the teacher is expected to discuss one of the following topics for 10-15 minutes, and children are expected to express their own opinions on the given situation in turn. Some discussion topics are listed below.

- Something that you like about one of your classmates
- Something that you like in the school/classroom
- Something that you have recently learned
- One thing that your classroom has achieved to do recently
- One thing someone did for you that helped you feel good this week
- Something you did for someone that helped you feel good this week
- Something you do well is
- Something you like about yourself

Encouragement board: Used to motivate children to notice the friendly or encouraging things others do. It also reminds children of different ways that can be encouraging or friendly and allows children to share good things about each other. Here, the teacher prepares a board with a photograph of each child or a symbol representing him/her and hangs it up somewhere in the classroom determined together with the children. Each child is asked to indicate the name of the friend who did or said something new, which is friendly or encouraging, in their classroom, and what he/she did or said. Then, each child is given a voice in turn, and a "smiling face" (or an encouraging symbol) sign is marked next to the named child. At the end of the day, the encouragement board is a different variation of the positive peer reporting used by the teacher.

Stars of the week: A part of the encouragement board is included in the process as "stars of the week". Towards the end of each session, the teacher shows children a "star" card with the names of a girl and a boy in the classroom written on it, and children are asked to say what they like or appreciate about their friends whose names are written on the card. The teacher encourages all children to comment on the child written on the "star". The child who receives a "star" shaped card takes his/her star home at the end of the day. Here, it is considered necessary to inform each of the children that they will receive a "star" until the end of the session during the first week of the session. After it is made sure that each child gets a "star" once, it is possible to continue it for the second time, if desired (depending on the number of children). The practices within this scope must be carried out in a way that encourages the acquisition of desired behaviors while preserving the elements of a courageous and friendly atmosphere in the classroom. While these processes are being carried out, the teacher is the person responsible for maintaining the balance in the classroom. In this activity, the teacher can be allowed to notice the differences in the abilities of the children to express what they like or appreciate about others.

Parent newsletter: Parent education newsletters are used to help parents understand and reinforce the behaviors and main ideas that are taught through "Puf Puf and his forest friends", and to inform them about important learning and social skills in the program. Owing to the parent newsletters, which are considered as a way to communicate with parents about the training program, parents are ensured to review the program and then to be informed theoretically or practically. Parent newsletters are sent to parents at the end of each session and include informative notes on target behaviors contained throughout the day and examples of activities that they can do with their children. Parents are expected to use the information contained in the parent newsletters delivered at the end of each session in their future communication with their children and to complete the activity examples until the next week.

In addition to all the processes mentioned so far, *group discussion skills* are used in the scope of the training program and it is recommended to integrate these skills in the natural learning and teaching approach. Group discussion skills are also adopted in the scope of the training program, and it is asserted that the effectiveness of the sessions will be increased through the use of these skills as well as the strategies. These group discussion skills are described as personalizing, structuring, modeling, connecting, responding to each comment, involving everyone, and summarizing. It is recommended to integrate these skills in the natural learning and teaching approach. At this point, seven group discussion skills are listed below.

(1) *Personalizing:* At this point, for a small group study, it is recommended that everyone sits in a circle or semicircle so that they can see each other's faces without moving, and that teacher and children use their names when communicating with each other. Here, instructions such as "Let's arrange our chairs in a circle. So, we can all see each other easily" can be used when necessary.

(2) *Structuring*: This skill is used when the topic mentioned in the session digresses to return the discussion to the topic. At this point, it is suggested that the teacher give instructions such as “I want you to think about the things you enjoy doing for a while, then we’ll listen to everyone in turn.”

(3) *Modeling*: This skill involves the teacher exhibiting the skills that the teacher uses in his teaching attempt in his/her daily behavior. At this stage, the teacher needs to state the behavior that is desired to be exhibited by saying, “I expect from you. Is everybody ready?.”

(4) *Connecting*: This skill is aimed at enabling children to share their thoughts and interests with others, and to gain a sense of acceptance and belonging. At this point, it is stated that it is possible to connect a link between the explanations of the participants by asking questions such as “Who else has experienced a similar situation?”, “How many of you have felt this way before?” or, as another way, by saying, “What (child’s name) says is similar to what (child’s name) has said before.”

(5) *Responding to each comment*: This skill is used to encourage participation by acknowledging the responses or comments from children. It is stated that it is necessary to respond to the comments by using children’s names such as “Okay..... (child’s name) thank you. (child’s name), how about you?.”

(6) *Involving everyone*: It is possible to give everyone a voice by using two techniques as “hand-rise” and “go-‘round” in a session. Here, when the technique of “go-‘round” is used, some time is given to think before beginning, and the teacher says “I will come back to you later” for a child who does not respond when it is his/her turn. In addition to these, nonverbal communications such as making eye contact, nodding head, and being interested in each comment are emphasized.

(7) *Summarizing*: This skill is intended to support the purpose of the discussion processes and it is used during the discussion as well as at the end. It involves the teacher or children summarizing the skills learned in each session. Here, the teacher allows children to summarize through the questions such as “We are getting closer to the end of time and I want you to think about what we have talked about. What are some of the things we have talked about?” towards the end of the session. Children are given a short time to think and are allowed to explain what they have learned or repeated. The learning process is carried out in the company with all these elements included in the program (Brigman, Lane & Lane, 1994).

A Statement on the Implementation of the Training Program

In the process of implementing the social skills training program on children in Turkey, it is very important to implement the activities and strategies included in the program systematically. In this line, it is considered important to give every child an equal right to speak and to address children by their names within the scope of the implementation process. Until the names of the children in the classrooms where the training is carried out are learned by the practitioner(s)/educator(s), steps can be taken to support the self-esteem of the children and create a positive classroom climate through the ways such as putting name cards on the children's collars within the sessions. It should not also be neglected to inform parents about the importance and content of the training program implemented in the educational environment and what is expected from them during the implementation process. Before starting the implementation, it should be well known that the processes for spending time in the same environment together with children (to carry out some activities and/or support the existing activities) independently of the content of the training program, to ensure that the practitioner(s)/educator(s)/researcher(s) know the environment where the training will take place and to facilitate the adaptation of children to the process, will also contribute to the functionality of the training.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study shares the steps, as well as information and findings, towards the researcher’s Turkish translation of a classroom-based training program called “Ready to Learn”, designed by Brigman, Lane, & Lane (1994) for the development of prerequisite learning skills and social skills and towards its the strategy of implementation on the preschool children in Turkey.

It was determined that the training program adapted into Turkish within the scope of the study includes story activities and many teaching strategies that can create an alternative to Turkey’s preschool education applications of the application examples in the United States, where this training program was developed. In addition to this, while it is expectable that there would be differences in the educational understanding and educational practices adopted by the countries, it is also possible to encounter partial differences in their

contents within this framework. The activity of creating a story using letters in the training program, which is the focus of this study and is based on children between the ages of four to seven, is an example of direct reading and writing. In Turkey, within the scope of the Ministry of National Education (2013) preschool education program, preschool children are not made to read and write directly from the text, instead, preparatory studies for reading and writing (such as phonological awareness) are carried out. In this direction, it can be said that it is possible to encounter different examples of implementations due to the difference in the education legislation of the countries. It is seen that educational programs have content that is suitable for the norms of the country in which they are developed, besides, it is also known that the social skills that preschool children need in their development and learning are universal. It is needed that preschool children learn skills such as communicating, expressing their feelings, asking questions, listening carefully, leading, and being courageous to support cognitive and social development areas of preschool children (as emphasized by Brigman, Lane, & Lane, 1994). The fact that the "Ready to Learn" training program includes stories, activities, and strategies aimed at developing social skills such as paying attention, listening, and understanding, asking questions, encouraging oneself, and others are also processes that will contribute to supporting the development of children in this direction.

Together with the view that children may have different fields of interest and learning styles, great importance is attached to learning processes carried out with different learning strategies. Since the social skills training program called "Ready to Learn" is a story-based program, the skills that are aimed to be gained are supported with the elements included in the stories read, accompanied by teacher strategies. In this scope, a child senses the situations between the butterfly, who is the main character of the story, and his mother and his forest friends, and exhibits identification with the butterfly, which is told to have spun its cocoon when it exhibits appropriate behaviors. In a study conducted by Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance (2004) on three-four age groups, it was determined that the stories read to children have a positive effect on their language development and that children benefit from pictures in the narratives related to the stories. After explaining social skills and learning skills through stories in the training program called "Ready to Learn" that is discussed in the study, its application through the use of five teacher strategies including speaking, listening, thinking, and visualizing is an example of the interactive storytelling process. Crawford (2006) determined that language skills of children can be greatly improved through the fact that the parents who have children in preschool period learn the interactive book reading strategies, and Moody (2007) determined that reading from a traditional storybook is more effective compared to reading from an electronic storybook on the communication skills of children aged three to six years. In another study conducted in recent years (Schapira, & Aram, 2019), it was emphasized that interactive book reading is important in terms of the social-emotional competencies of preschool children. Parallel to these, the function of the program called "Ready to Learn" on communication skills is highlighted as it is a program that contains processes based on the use of five big story-books that are read aloud.

The fact that activities are conducted through the strategies such as "modeling, coaching, and clueing", "student/child storytelling", "student/child story retelling", "positive peer reporting", "encouragement counsel" and "stars of the week" in the social skills training program called "Ready to Learn", which is discussed in the study can be considered as an expression that the program has a multidimensional feature. It can be said that the activities carried out based on these strategies will contribute to the development of children's social skills such as expressing one's emotions, assertiveness, recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses, and complimenting others, as well as the development of the skills such as listening carefully and expressing what they listen to properly. At this point, the fact that the mentioned features are the individual features in the direction of current educational approaches also emphasizes the importance of the program. Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) determined that story-based activities contribute to the development of preschool children in the dimensions of spoken language, early literacy, and social competence. The study of Yahya Mahmoudi, Naseh, Salehi, & Tizdast (2013) also revealed that group story-based social skills training has a positive effect on external behavior problems. The fact that the program in this context includes both story-based activities and various learning strategies can be considered as an indicator that it will be supportive in developing skills and behaviors in the different areas of children's development.

The scope of the story-based social skills training contains processes based on answering questions about the stories and children telling stories that answer the "Who", "What", "When", "Where" and "How" (4W & 1H) questions, along with the stories read. These processes may facilitate the acquisition of skills such as making eye contact while speaking, using gestures and facial expressions appropriately, answering questions about emotions correctly, and answering questions asked. As determined by Wasik & Bond (2001), reading books to children and asking them open-ended questions about the story contribute to the development of children's expression skills. In addition to these, following the stories read and the questions answered in the training program, children drawing pictures for some situations based on the content of the story (their favorite characters/chapters in the story, what happened at the beginning/middle/end of the story, and what the characters

felt at the beginning/middle/end of the story) are also the processes for the development of expression skills in different ways. The contribution of children's drawings on children's social-emotional, personality, and spiritual development is the focus of many studies (For example; Farokhi, & Hashemi, 2011; Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007; Kendrick, & McKay, 2004). Philip (2018) also emphasized that the use of visual thinking strategies through the questions such as "What is going on in this picture?", "What made you think that?", "What else could it be?" is important for the social skills of preschool children. Besides all these, informing parents about the target behaviors during the day and letting them know about the activities they can carry out with their children through the parent newsletters, which are also prominently included in the Turkish version of the training program, is encouraging for family participation. It is more and more acknowledged day by day that parent supported/centered training programs improve parent-child interactions and increase social skills of children (Adams, Womack, Shatzer, & Caldarella, 2010; Çağdaş, Arslan, Erbay, & Orçan, 2010; Göktaş, & Gülay-Ogelman, 2016; Powell, Son, File, & San-Juan, 2010).

The processes described in this study can be used as an alternative learning process for activities such as storytelling/story reading, story creation, role-playing a story, and retelling a story within the scope of the Turkish activity to be carried out based on the learning outcomes and learning objectives in the MoNE (2013) preschool education program, which is a guiding resource in preschool education delivered in Turkey. In line with this study, the social skills training program that has been brought to the national literature in line with this study is expected to contribute to the enrichment of the activities in preschool education in terms of the structure and scope of the training program. It is recommended for the educators/practitioners and researchers to benefit from some of the existing features of training programs like this study from theory to practice at the point of supporting the social skills of preschool children. As an alternative to the social skills training programs developed nationally, the adoption of a holistic approach can be supported at the point of increasing the quality of preschool education by reviewing the programs adapted from international literature like this study in terms of purpose, scope, and strategies. The training program called "Ready to Learn", which was developed outside of Turkey and translated into Turkish and adapted for preschool children in Turkey by the researcher, can be used as a resource that can be applied at the point of eliminating the deficiencies in social skills and learning skills, on the condition that its utilization permits are fulfilled and application competency is achieved. It is recommended that experts, education administrators, and education program practitioners in the field of preschool education fulfill their responsibilities with great sensitivity and follow up-to-date studies on this subject to achieve a country-based standard in the behaviors involving the social skills of preschool children. At this point, it should be ensured that all stakeholders of education, especially preschool teachers, participate in educational services to be carried out in cooperation with relevant institutions and organizations so that they have knowledge and experience about social skills training and related training programs and practices. Workshop studies can be conducted in different provinces to raise awareness among preschool teachers about the features, implementation processes, and strategies of various training programs with proven effects, such as the training program described in this study, and the contributions of training programs in this direction can be made much more widespread.

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