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The Effect of Group Games on Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction: 5-6 Year-old Sample[*]

Hatice Nur GÖKCAN[**], Zeliha YAZICI[***]

1. INTRODUCTION

Kindergartens are important in developing cognitive skills as well as peer relationships. Children starting kindergarten adapt to the school environment by playing games, as in all areas of life. Social behaviors such as being invited to games by their peers in the school environment, participating in the playgroup, being able to lead the group, expressing their thoughts in the group of friends (Arabacı & Demircioğlu, 2019) facilitate the child's adaptation to the school context (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Galanaki & Kalantzi-Azizi, 1999). Peer groups are an important context in acquiring attitudes and behaviors related to social life at school (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2007; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman 2007). Children adapt to school with the games they play with their peers and develop their individual and group identity through their interactions in it (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Guralnick et al., 2007; Kernan, Singer, & Swinnen, 2013, Ladd & Birch, 1999). It develops attitudes and behaviors related to establishing unity, sharing and social equality, social rights and freedom through games played in peer groups (Avcı, Selçuk, & Kaynak, 2019; Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost, & Wainwright, 2005). Games played in peer groups are very important in establishing emotional behavior patterns such as social behaviour patterns (Hartup, 1989), controlling emotions, empathy, and emotion regulation, especially regarding attitudes and values related to social life (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Guralnick, Neville, Hammond, & Connor, 2007; Martin, Fabes, Hanish, & Hollenstein, 2005; Malecki & Elliot, 2002; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). For this reason, peer groups are seen as an important context for children's social communication skills acquisition. However, in some cases children may encounter difficulties in interacting with their peers, especially in kindergarten. Difficulties encountered in peer interactions can cause sadness, discontent or stress for children. For example, negative peer experiences such as rejection or exclusion from the game by their peers can cause unhappiness and anxiety in children, leading to a lack of belonging at school (Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 2009). Children's self-perception can negatively get affected and it may cause boredom in the school environment and alienation from school when 5-6-year-old children do not have a friend to play with at school, are excluded from play by their friends or experience difficulties in making friends (Bullock, 1998). This kind of negative self-perception may cause the child to feel worthless or experience social loneliness due to social dissatisfaction (Youngblade et al., 1999). Qualitative or quantitative loneliness experienced in kindergarten can harm children's self-esteem (Brennan, 2008).

According to the Basic Needs Theory, when social-emotional needs are met, a sense of belonging, trust and social satisfaction occur in the individual. When these requirements are not met, social dissatisfaction may develop due to the lack of belonging. From this point of view, negative peer experiences experienced in kindergarten can negatively affect the psychological well-being and satisfaction of children (Dijkstra, Kuyper, Werf, Buunk, & Zee, 2008; Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008).

In studies examining social dissatisfaction in children, it is stated that there is a direct relationship between exclusion anxiety by peers and social dissatisfaction (Coplan et al., 2007; Galanaki, 2004). It is found that exclusion anxiety increases social dissatisfaction in children and social dissatisfaction increases loneliness (Jackson & Warren, 2000; McWhirter, Besett-Alesch, Horibata, & Gat, 2002; Nie, Tian, & Huebner, 2019; Youngblade, Berlin, & Beslky, 1999). Especially the lack of ability to act with the peer group, exclusion from the peer group, the shortage of playmates cause lack of close friends. In kindergarten, such social problems can lead to dissatisfaction with peer relationships (Asher & Cassidy, 1992; Asher & Paquette, 2003; Galanaki & Azizi, 1999). There are also research findings indicating that children who experience loneliness as a result of peer exclusion are at risk for depressive symptoms during middle childhood (Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004). It is stated that children who had problems with their peers in early childhood have a low tendency to social stimuli in their future school life and that the rate of displaying aggressive behavior increases in the process of social problem solving (Rose-Krasnor & Denham, 2009). On the other hand, children with high peer acceptance are more willing to participate in school activities in the later years of life, adapt more easily to school, love going to school (Cacioppo et al., 2006) and are social individuals with high self-confidence (Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). As can be understood from these studies, social experiences such as exclusion or rejection from play by peers in kindergarten lead to social dissatisfaction in peer relationships; being preferred or accepted as a playmate can lead to an increase in social satisfaction in peer relationships.

Play is the most important tool in strengthening peer interactions and developing effective social interaction skills in early childhood (Rubin & Mills, 1988). Group games, in particular, offer to children an effective social communication environment. While group games enable children to notice social norms or rules, they also support the development of group action skills by moving away from egocentric thinking (Özdoğan, 2014). Through group games, children develop social behaviors such as trust, belonging, helping each other, sharing, and cooperating (Öztürk Aşık, 2018). In addition, it improves children's skills of controlling themselves and others' emotions and behaviors, building mutual interaction, and using imagination (Kacır, 2015). While children demonstrate high levels of social skills in the group, they acquire social flexibility, influence regulation and perspective. All these skills are skills that reduce dissatisfaction in the social environment where children are present. Therefore, in the present study, it was aimed to determine whether group games are effective in reducing social dissatisfaction in 5-6-year-old children or not. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. Is there a difference between the loneliness and social dissatisfaction scores of the experimental and control groups before the group play training program?
2. Is there a difference between the social dissatisfaction and loneliness scores of the experimental and control groups after the group game training program?
3. Is group play education program an effective variable on children's loneliness and social dissatisfaction?

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the purpose was to reveal group games' effect on loneliness and social dissatisfaction in 5-6-year-old children. For this reason, to discover the cause-effect relationships between variables and to determine possible results, a pretest-posttest control group model was applied. In the pretest-posttest control group model, which is one of the experimental designs, pre-experiment and post-experiment measurements are made on two groups formed by unbiased assignment (Büyüköztürk, 2016). The symbolic appearance of the model and the meanings of the symbols are as follows.

Table 1.
Symbolic View of the Research Model

G_1	R	$O_{1.1}$	X	$O_{1.2}$
G_2	R	$O_{2.1}$		$O_{2.2}$

G_1 = Experimental group, G_2 = Control group, R = Impartiality in the formation of groups, X = Independent variable, O = Measurement (Büyüköztürk, 2016).

2.1. Study Group

The study group of the research consists of children between the ages of 5-6 attending the official independent kindergarten in the city center of Kütahya. In determining the study group, independent kindergartens in the city center were determined in line with the permission obtained from the Governorship of Kütahya (n=5). Consent forms were sent to the families after discussing the process of the study with school management. According to the consent form received from the parents, the independent kindergarten with the highest number of children in the preparatory class was determined. There were 40 children in the preparatory classes as morning and afternoon groups and all of the children were included in the study group. The average age of children in both groups was 68 months.

To increase the internal validity of the research in experimental designs, the subjects included in the study should be balanced and independent variables should be controlled. Therefore, to determine the equivalence of loneliness and social dissatisfaction levels of the groups, pre-test measurements were applied via *Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale* to all children in the study group. The morning and noon groups were divided into two groups of 10 children to keep the time change constant. To realize the neutrality rule of the experimental pattern, each class has been cross assigned as an experiment and control group. The mean scores and standard deviation results obtained from the pretest measurement are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Findings Regarding the Pretest scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Age	Mean	SD
Experiment group	20	68 months	21,15	2,77
Control group	20	68 months	21,05	2,89

When Table 2 is examined it is seen that there is a slight difference of.10 points between the mean pre-test scores of the children in the groups. It indicates that before the research the groups were equivalent in terms of the dependent variable level to be examined. This also shows that the necessary conditions for research were met.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

In order to collect the data of the present study, first of all, a decision dated and numbered 10.10.2018/ 10231 from Akdeniz University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee and official permissions from the Governorship of Kütahya were obtained. To collect general information about children and their families "Personal Information Form" was used. "Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale" was used to determine the social satisfaction level of the study group.

2.2.1. Personal information form

It is the form prepared by the researcher to collect information about the study group and their families included in the study. *The personal information form* consists of two sections containing the information of the parents of the study group and the information of the children included in the study group. Parents filled in the forms and then gave them to the children's teacher.

2.2.2. Loneliness & social dissatisfaction scale (60-72 month)/LSDS

The scale, which was used to evaluate the loneliness and social dissatisfaction of children aged 5–6, was originally developed by Cassidy and Asher (1992). It was adapted to Turkish by Yazıcı, Duyan and Gelbal (2013). The scale is a 3-point Likert type consisting of 23 items in total. Children were asked to rate themselves on a 3-point (1 = no, 2 = sometimes, 3 = yes) scale ranging from across 23 items, 15 of which assess feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction (e.g., "Do you feel alone at school? and "Is it easy for you to make new friends at school?). Eight items were filler items that were not included in the scoring (e.g., "Do you like to watch television a lot?" and "Do you like to read a book?"). The total possible scores from the scale vary between 15 and 45. The high points mean that the level of loneliness and social dissatisfaction is high while the low points mean that the level of loneliness and social dissatisfaction is low. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale is .76 (Yazıcı et al., 2013).

2.3. Data Collection Process

Pretest Application: Before starting the pretest applications, the researcher spent time with the children in the classroom environment accompanied by the kindergarten teacher. This was carried out not only to reduce the effect of the anxiety level that may occur but also to meet the children and to communicate with them so they got the chance to get to know the children in their educational environment. This harmonization process was organized as two days a week for two weeks. During the process, activities in the classroom environment were observed, sometimes the researcher supported the kindergarten teacher in some activities and at other times she played with the children in the classroom or the garden.

After the adaptation process, pre-test measurements were applied to the children in the experimental and control groups. Measurements were carried out with each child individually in the school library. Each interview lasted approximately 20-25 minutes. The volunteering of the children interviewed was taken into consideration. Specially to prevent children from being affected by external stimuli, interviews were interrupted when behaviors such as boredom, distraction and reluctance to answer were displayed. The measurement was retried at another time during the day. After the pre-test application, the children in the experimental group were given a Play Education Program with a Group for 11 weeks.

Play Education Program with a Group; once a week, one and a half hours a day, a total of 11 sessions were conducted. In the Play Education Program with a Group, the sessions consist of four stages: *the starting ritual, major games, the closing ritual and evaluation. The starting ritual*; is the stage that includes greeting and starting the day. The same game was used as a starting ritual for 11 weeks. After starting the ritual every week, the most popular game was repeated from the previous session. *The major game stage* includes three different games with rules that aim to teach behaviors such as sharing, helping, obeying rules

and instructions, trusting others, cooperation, being part of a group, making friends, avoiding conflict, controlling anger and accepting criticism. Some of these games were originally prepared by the researcher, and some were adapted from well-known ones. All three games were played in pairs or with the whole group. Group therapy techniques with children were used in the implementation of these games. *The closing ritual;* is the stage that includes ending the game time. The same game was performed as a closing ritual for 11 weeks. At times when *Play Education Program with a Group* was not implemented, children in the experimental and control groups continued their pre-school education. *Post-test application:* after the completion of the *Play Education Program with a Group*, a post-test was applied to the experimental and control groups in the same environment and conditions where the *Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale* pre-tests were performed.

2.4. Statistical Analysis of Data

In order to determine whether the levels of loneliness and social dissatisfaction of the children in the experimental and control groups included in the sample differ depending on whether they participate in the *Play Education Program with a Group* or not. The paired-sample t-test was used in repeated measures among the parametric tests. An independent sample t-test was used in unrelated (independent) samples. Two-Way ANOVA for Repeated Measures was used to test the effect of the training program.

3. FINDINGS

Pre-test scores of the experimental and control group children are given in Table 3.

Table 3.
Independent Samples t-Test Results on the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (LSDS) Pre-test Scores of the Experimental and Control Group Children

Measurement	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Pre-test	Experiment Group	20	21,37	2,77	36	-,343	,733
	Control Group	18	21,05	2,89			

According to Table 3, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between children's LSDS pretest mean scores (t_{38} = -,343 p > .05). According to this finding, it can be said that there is no significant difference between the social satisfaction levels of the experimental and control groups before the *Play Education Program with a Group*.

Table 4.
Independent Samples t-Test Results Related to the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (LSDS) Post-test Scores of the Experimental and Control Group Children

Measurement	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Pre-test	Experiment Group	20	16,89	2,49	38	-5,409	,000
	Control Group	18	27,35	4,94			

When the results of the analysis in Table 4 are examined, it is seen that there is a statistically significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the loneliness and social dissatisfaction scale (t_{38} = -5,409, p < .05). It is seen that the social dissatisfaction post-test average scores of the experimental group decreased to 16.89 after the application of the program. On the other hand, the social dissatisfaction post-test average scores of the control group increased to 27.05 that had no attending group game training program. According to this finding, it can be said that there is an increase in children's social *satisfaction* attending group game training program while control group children were attending an increase in social *dissatisfaction*.

As seen in Table 5, it was found that there is a statistically significant difference in the measurement effect of the children's pre-test and post-test average scores ($F_{(1-36)}$ = 5,965; p < 0,05). This finding shows that children's *LSDS* pre-test and post-test scores vary significantly without making a group (experiment and control) distinction. Considering the *group*measurement* common effect to determine the effectiveness of the experimental procedure applied, it is seen that the group-measurement common effect on children's social satisfaction scores was significant ($F_{(1-36)}$ = 43.840; p < .05; η^2 = .549). When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that the effect size value obtained from group measurement was (η^2) 0,549. According to Cohen's table of guideline values (η^2= .01 = small effect, η^2 = .06 = medium level effect and η^2 = .14 = large effect) when assessed (Balcı & Ahi, 2017), it is seen that social satisfaction value in children was at the level of "great effect". This finding shows that children participating in the Play Education Program with a group gain more social satisfaction than those who did not, and that group play was effective in increasing children's social satisfaction scores.

Table 5.

Two-Factor ANOVA Results for Mixed Patterns of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Children in Study Group from Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η²
Intergroup	16605,642	1	16605,642	2547,095		
Group (Experiment / Control)	113,853	1	113,853	17,464	.000	.327
Error	234,700	36	6,519			
Within groups	390,65					
Measurement (Pretest-Posttest)	5,965	1	5,965	1,238	.000	.033
Group * Measurement	211,229	1	211,229	43,840	.000	.549
Error	173,456	36	4,818			

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that there was no significant difference between children's *pre-test* scores regarding loneliness and social dissatisfaction (p > .05). However, a significant difference was found between experimental and control group children's *post-test* scores regarding loneliness and social dissatisfaction (p < .05). This result indicates that in the period from the pre-test to the post-test, social satisfaction of children in the experimental group increased and social dissatisfaction decreased. On the other hand, in the control group, social dissatisfaction increased and social satisfaction decreased. Accordingly, it can be said that children participating in play education with a group have a shift towards social satisfaction, while children who do not participate have a shift towards loneliness and social dissatisfaction. The most important social support resources of children in the school environment are their peers (Galanaki & Kalantzi-Azizi, 1999) as games played with peers created peace, happiness and confidence in children (Bukowski, 2001; Oishi et al., 2009; Rubin & Mills, 1988). Group games are games that offer opportunities for social and emotional sharing. While playing group games, children interact socially-emotionally with their peers in the playgroup and with the group leader. This interaction makes it easier for children to focus on feelings such as being together and belonging to a group (Sweeney, 2017). From this point of view, since the children in the experimental group are included in group games with their peers in their class, they may have achieved satisfaction by meeting their social needs and expectations such as belonging, peer interaction in the "context of games".

Lack of peer social support in educational activities applied in preschool education may cause children to experience dissatisfaction in the context of peers (Yazıcı et al., 2013). Considering that children in the control group continue their education processes within the scope of the Ministry of National Education program, it can be thought that children have more individual interactions with the group rather than play. They lack social interaction environment with peer groups, which increases social dissatisfaction in children. In the study of Vellymalay (2010), it is stated that the perception of the school preparation class in the programs applied in the preparatory classes directs children towards individuality rather than the group, and the resulting dissatisfaction may cause social dissatisfaction in children. In many similar studies, negative situations experienced in the peer environment create anxiety situations in children such as feeling sad, unhappy and lonely (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Bullock 1998; Cassidy & Asher 1992, DeRosier et al., 1994), and it is stated that this anxiety paves the way for dissatisfaction (Coplan et al., 2007; Yazıcı, 2016). In addition, it is emphasized that social satisfaction decreases in children who have negative peer experiences in kindergarten because they cannot form belonging to the group (Coplan et al., 2007; Galanaki, 2004).

Another finding reached at the end of the study is that the common effect of group-measurement (pretest-posttest) on children's social satisfaction scores is statistically significant (p < .05). This finding shows that the group play education program is effective in increasing children's social satisfaction. Durualp and Aral (2010) found that social adaptation increased in six-year-old children who participated in play-based social skills training, and assertiveness and social skill behaviors were high in children who received play-based social skills training. Similarly, Alp (2016) examined socialization by using the game activities program and peer education, and it was determined that children participating in the play programs were happy to play with their peers, and their friendly relations and social behaviors were positively affected. Another study examining the effect of the play program on children's social adaptation is the study of Kacır (2015). Kacır (2015) included preschool children in the educational play program and found that peer interaction and social-emotional adaptation skills increased in children. In the study of Waliski and Carlson (2008), it is stated that the games played with the group enable children to establish positive social interactions and acquire emotional awareness and positive social skills. The results of these studies are in line with the findings obtained from the present study.

As emphasized in the literature, play is an important tool in shaping the social perception of the child as the social environment can affect children's perception of play (Aktan Şahan, 2017). Children of this age structure their behaviors by observing peer social behaviors in group games (Kottman & Ashby, 2017; Ray & Landreth, 2017). Through play, children gain positive social interaction behaviors such as inviting peers to play, forming a playgroup, being able to lead the group, expressing their thoughts in the group of friends, and respecting the thoughts of others (Sweeney, 2017; Waliski & Carlson, 2008). They may have strengthened these behaviors in the games performed during the education process and reflected on their peer relationships in the class. This may have increased the satisfaction of the children in the experimental group in their interactions with their

peers. In addition, skills such as social rules, waiting in turns, speaking, respecting others' thoughts, acting together are frequently repeated in the applied play activities, the children in the experimental group may have shaped their social behaviour patterns by observing the reactions of their peers in these games. In addition to all these, the intensity of play to increase the sense of satisfaction such as being with the group, acceptance and belonging to the group may have enabled the children in the experimental group to enjoy peer social interaction. This pleasure may have also functioned in increasing social satisfaction.

Self-perception and environmental perception of 5-6-year-old children are quite optimistic. While the optimism in children gets stronger as they get social support, they may weaken when they do not get it (Lau et al., 1998). Children who participate in play education with a group may have strengthened their optimism in social perception towards their peers, especially through group games. This may have increased the social satisfaction of the children in the experimental group in interacting with their peers.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

In the present study, research and publication ethics were taken into consideration. Before the study, the necessary permissions were obtained from the Akdeniz University Social and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee and the privacy of the participants was protected.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

This study is derived from the first author's master's thesis, conducted under the supervision of the second author. Both authors contributed equally to the preparation of the article.

Statement of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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