

## Social Acceptance of Students with Special Needs from Peer Viewpoint

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### ABSTRACT

Individuals with special needs have such rights as benefiting from health services and obtaining an education which is consistent with their abilities. As long as they can use these rights effectively like other individuals do, they are satisfied, active and productive in their social lives. Individuals with special needs who were ignored and neglected for centuries became socially accepted after social values began to change in a positive direction. This positive change was mostly felt in the field of education. The purpose of this study is to display the social acceptance level of students with special needs by normal peers in inclusive classes in TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). According to the findings, female participant students show more positive social acceptance towards inclusive students compared to male students, and it was found out that social acceptance level does not show any difference based on age of the participants.

**Keywords:** peer views, Northern Cyprus, student, individuals with special needs, social acceptance, social acceptance

### INTRODUCTION

Individuals in the society naturally have different characteristics from each other. Such differences are also reflected to their education lives, as a result of which education environments should be regulated taking this fact into consideration. As known, students with special needs have to benefit from equality of opportunities so that they can maintain their independent living skills in the society. In recent years, individuals with special needs are educated in the same environment with their peers, as the term “inclusive class” indicates, which is a widely adopted method.

It was noticed that students with special needs who are educated at separate schools in a boarding or non-boarding model are deprived from their rights to actively participate in social life within the process. Since 1970s, legislations have been made to allow for them to be educated with their normal peers in the same environment. Positive reflections of these legislations was effective in the adoption of inclusive education for students with special needs today.

Inclusive education aims at providing supporting services that help increase the independent living qualities of children with special needs and ensuring that they are educated in the same environment with their normal peers, acquire academic and social success through mutual interaction, and benefit from the opportunity of being an effective and productive member of the society (Kırcaali and İftar 1998; Akçamete and Ceber 1999; Sucuoğlu, 2006).

It is stated that thanks to the interactions and sharing they experience with their peers, students with special needs can establish healthy communication, effectively use their social role-modelling and communication skills, learn faster, as a result of which improve their self-control and self-esteem (Wu et al. 2008)

### **Contribution of this paper to the literature**

- Social inclusion of students with special needs is one of the key areas in inclusive education. Children in this paper gain role models with social personality roles by sharing the same physical media with their normal peers.
- One of the fundamental keys which ensure success for inclusion application is social acceptance by peers. The attitudes, prejudices and beliefs of peers without disabilities towards their peers with special needs is seen as an essential factor in their acceptance as friends of students with special needs.
- It is believed that this study will guide the educationists in the creation of the mentioned classrooms and educational programs.

It is also known that in addition to students with special needs, their normal peers are also positively affected by inclusive education and obtain certain acquisitions. For example the teacher presents the objectives of the class by making adaptations in teaching methods and materials which provides benefits for both types of students. It is known that the self-confidence and academic success of both types of students increases and normally developing students receive higher or the same scores from success tests compared to their peers who do not attend such a program (Sucuoğlu 2006).

It is argued that due to the intense interaction that students with special needs have with their normal peers, their sense of belonging to this group increases. In this case, class teachers have to plan activities and actions in inclusive classes which will facilitate acceptance of students with special needs by their peers and improve their friendship relations (Sucuoğlu 2006). Metin (1992) claims that when inclusive environments are well-planned, it will facilitate easy and intense interaction between normal peers and students with special needs who are especially at small ages, as a result of which social acceptance behaviour can be acquired at early ages.

In cases where social acceptance is low or non-existent, it is observed that children with special needs feel themselves lonely and valueless, their self-esteem and academic success worsens, and the low academic performance is expressed in such behaviours as aversion and disobedience (Sucuoğlu 2006; Demir Şad 2007; Ergüden 2008).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine the social acceptance level of inclusive students with special needs by their normal peers in inclusive classes in TRNC.

### **Research Model**

The purpose of the study is to determine the attitudes and behaviours of normally developing students in third, fourth and fifth grades of elementary schools in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, thus, descriptive survey method was used. "Survey method consists of surveying activities on a universe consisting of multiple elements or a group, example or sample taken from the universe in order to reach a general judgment on the universe" (Karasar 2011, p. 79).

### **Sample of the Model**

The universe of the research consists of In 2016-2017 academic year, the students at third, fourth and fifth grades of elementary schools who are between the ages of 8 and 10 in Nicosia, Kyrenia, Famagusta, Güzelyurt and İskele regions of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus with simple random sampling method.

The sample of the research consists of 595 students chosen with simple random model in relevant grade and age interval.

### **Data Collection Tools**

Data collection tools used in this study consists of two parts. In the first part, the Personal Information Form developed by the researcher which asks the age and gender data of the participants is used; in the second part, Social Acceptance Scale which was developed by Siperstein (1980) and adapted to Turkish by Civelek in 1990 is employed. The questionnaire form used as data collection tool in the study was applied in the spring semester of 2016 through personal interview technique.

**Table 1.** Definitive statistics as regards the answers given by students to social acceptance scale

	$\bar{X}$	s
I would tell him the homework when he missed the class.	4.73	0.77
I would stand by him in the queue.	4.26	1.13
I would play with him even after the school.	4.02	1.28
I would lend him my pen or pencil.	4.68	0.87
I would help him solve maths problems.	4.38	1.13
I would protect him if other children mocked him.	4.76	0.73
I would speak to him in free time in the classroom.	4.11	1.27
I would invite him home.	4.07	1.28
I would sit beside him in the classroom.	3.95	1.32
I would play with him at school in free times.	4.34	1.12
I would share with him a secret which only a few children knew in the class.	3.36	1.63
I would approach him and say "hello".	4.63	0.92
I would share my lunch with him.	4.15	1.29
I would sit beside him at school trips.	3.96	1.32
I would sometimes call him from home.	3.68	1.49
I would stand by him even when he did wrong things.	3.14	1.64
I would tell him about myself (I would mention myself)	4.25	1.18
I would help him in group class projects.	4.40	1.08
I would praise him in areas where he is successful.	4.16	1.33
I would meet him with my friends.	4.49	1.06
When we are playing peer games, I would choose him as my peer.	3.72	1.42
I would tell him things about myself that I did not tell anyone before.	3.30	1.59
Social acceptance scale – General	4.11	0.68

## Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 for Windows Evolution version was used in the statistical analysis of data.

## FINDINGS

The mean and standard deviation values as regards the answers given to the expressions in social acceptance scale by students covered by the research are given in **Table 1**.

It is found out that students received scores above the mean value of 4.20 from the following expressions in social acceptance scale: "I would tell him the homework when he missed the class", "I would stand by him in the queue", "I would lend him my pen or pencil", "I would help him solve maths problems", "I would protect him if other children mocked him", "I would play with him at school in free times", "I would approach him and say "hello"", "I would tell him about myself (I would mention myself)", "would help him in group class projects", and "I would meet him with my friends". As most of the students answered "yes" to these expressions, their opinions about these expressions are usually positive.

It is found out that students received scores between 3.40 and 4.19 on average from the following expressions in social acceptance scale: "I would play with him even after the school", "I would invite him home", "I would share my lunch with him", "I would sit beside him at school trips", "I would sometimes call him from home", "I would praise him in areas where he is successful", and "When we are playing peer games, I would choose him as my peer". It is found out that the students mostly gave positive answers to these expressions and marked the option "I think yes".

It is found out that students received scores between 3.14 and 3.39 on average from the following expressions in social acceptance scale: "I would share with him a secret which only a few children knew in the class", "I would stand by him even when he did wrong things" and "I would tell him things about myself that I did not tell anyone before". Students mostly answered to this question neither yes nor no.

**Table 2** gives the definitive statistics obtained by students from social acceptance scale according to their gender and **Table 3** gives Mann-Whitney U test results as regards the comparison of scores obtained by students from the scale according to their gender.

**Table 2.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to their gender

	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	300	93.57	13.20	34	110
Male	295	87.51	15.96	22	110

**Table 3.** Comparison of social acceptance scale scores of students according to their gender

	n	Rank mean	Rank total	U	P
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	300	332.11	99632.50	34017.50	0.00*
Male	295	263.31	77677.50		

\*p&lt;0.05

**Table 4.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to their age

	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
<b>Age</b>					
8 years old	51	91.16	14.01	61	110
9 years old	169	91.55	13.83	47	110
10 years old	259	91.59	13.77	34	110
11 and more years old	116	86.57	18.48	22	110

**Table 5.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to their age

	n	Rank mean	$\chi^2$	sd	P
<b>Age</b>					
8 years old	51	302.45	5.37	3	0.15
9 years old	169	306.28			
10 years old	259	306.54			
11 and more years old	116	264.91			

**Table 6.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to number of siblings

	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
<b>Number of siblings</b>					
None	57	87.42	13.08	46	108
One sibling	243	91.44	14.56	34	110
Two siblings	163	91.88	14.32	47	110
Three siblings	72	87.22	17.07	22	110
Four siblings and more	60	90.45	16.38	22	110

When **Table 3** is examined, statistically significant difference is found between the scores obtained by students covered in the research from social acceptance scale according to their gender ( $p < 0.05$ ). The mean value of the scores obtained by female students from social acceptance scale are found to be significantly higher compared to male students. In other words, female students gave more positive answers to the expressions in the scale compared to male students.

Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to their age are given in **Table 4** and Kruskal-Wallis Test results of social acceptance scores of students according to their age is given in **Table 5**.

It was found out that there was no statistically significant difference between social acceptance scores of students participated in the study according to their age ( $p > 0.05$ ). It was identified that students gave similar answers to the expressions in social acceptance scale regardless of their age.

**Table 6** gives the definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to number of siblings and **Table 7** gives the Kruskal-Wallis test results as regards comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to number of siblings.

**Table 7.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to number of siblings

	n	Rank mean	X <sup>2</sup>	sd	p	U
<b>Number of siblings</b>						
None	57	248.40	9.84	4	0.04*	
One sibling	243	308.80				1-2
Two siblings	163	313.55				1-3
Three siblings	72	264.17				
Four siblings and more	60	299.73				

\*p<0.05

**Table 8.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to their grade

Grade	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	194	91.42	14.19	54	110
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	185	91.19	14.64	41	110
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	216	89.26	15.79	22	110

**Table 9.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to their grade

Grade	n	Rank mean	X <sup>2</sup>	sd	P
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	194	306.52	2.20	2	0,33
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	185	305.19			
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	216	284.19			

**Table 10.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to the education status of mother

Education status of the mother	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
Illiterate	51	89.08	16.09	41	110
Elementary school	168	90.76	15.25	22	110
Secondary school	101	91.70	16.29	22	110
High school	160	91.12	13.75	34	110
Undergraduate and graduate degree	115	89.17	14.39	47	110

**Table 11.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to the education status of mother

Education status of the mother	n	Rank mean	X <sup>2</sup>	sd	P
Illiterate	51	284.15	3.65	4	0,46
Elementary school	168	301.60			
Secondary school	101	319.20			
High school	160	300.19			
Undergraduate and graduate degree	115	277.22			

When the Kruskal-Wallis test results in **Table 7** are examined, it can be seen that there is statistically significant difference between social acceptance scores of students covered in the study according to the number of siblings (p<0.05). This difference is caused by the students with no siblings and students with one and two siblings. It is found out that students with no siblings received lower scores from the scale compared to students with one or two siblings.

**Table 8** gives the definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to their grade and **Table 9** gives the Kruskal-Wallis test results as regards comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to their grade.

It has been found out that there is no statistically significant difference between social acceptance scores of students covered in the study according to their grades (p>0.05). 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students gave similar answers to the expressions in social acceptance scale.

Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to the education status of the mothers of students covered in the study and Kruskal-Wallis test results as regards comparison of scale scores are given in **Tables 10** and **11**, respectively.

**Table 12.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to education status of father

	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
<b>Education status of the father</b>					
Illiterate	18	86.28	17.28	47	110
Elementary school	112	91.34	15.34	22	110
Secondary school	122	92.84	15.17	22	110
High school	187	91.07	14.68	34	110
Undergraduate and graduate degree	156	88.12	14.22	47	110

**Table 13.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to education status of father

	n	Rank mean	$\chi^2$	sd	P	U
<b>Education status of the father</b>						
Illiterate	18	255.22	12.66	4	0.01*	2-5
Elementary school	112	309.87				3-5
Secondary school	122	329.52				4-5
High school	187	304.08				
Undergraduate and graduate degree	156	262.47				

\*p&lt;0.05

**Table 14.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to having a sibling with disability

	N	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
<b>Siblings with disability</b>					
Yes	28	92.68	15.04	54	110
No	567	90.46	14.94	22	110

**Table 15.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to having a sibling with disability

	n	Rank mean	Rank total	U	P
<b>Siblings with disability</b>					
Yes	28	327.16	9160.50	7121.50	0.36
No	567	296.56	168149.50		

When the test results in **Table 11** are examined, it has been found out that there is no statistically significant difference between social acceptance scores of students covered in the study according to the education status of their mother ( $p>0,05$ ).

Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to the education status of the fathers of students covered in the study and Kruskal-Wallis test results as regards comparison of scale scores are given in **Tables 12** and **13**, respectively.

When the Kruskal-Wallis test results are examined, it has been found out that there is statistically significant difference between social acceptance scores of students covered in the study according to the education status of their mother ( $p<0.05$ ). Students whose fathers have undergraduate and graduate degrees received lower social acceptance scores compared to students whose fathers have elementary, secondary and high school degrees.

**Table 14** gives the definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to having a sibling with disability and **Table 15** gives the Mann-Whitney U test results as regards the comparison of scores obtained from the scale by students according to having a sibling with disability.

When **Table 15** is examined, it was found out that there is no statistically significant difference between social acceptance scores of students covered in the study according to them having a sibling with disability ( $p>0,05$ ). There is no difference between the scores of students with and without a sibling with disability.

**Tables 16** and **17** give the definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to having a friend with disability and Mann-Whitney U test results as regards the comparison of scores obtained from the scale by students according to having a friend with disability, respectively.

It was found out that there is statistically significant difference between the scores obtained by students from social acceptance scale according to having a friend with disability ( $p<0.05$ ). Students with a friend with disability received higher scores from the scale compared to students without no friends with disability. In other words, students with disabled friends gave more positive answers to the expressions in the scale compared to the students with no friends with disabilities.

**Table 16.** Definitive statistics as regards the social acceptance scale according to having a friend with disability

	n	$\bar{X}$	s	Min	Max
<b>Friends with disability</b>					
Yes	206	92.97	13.63	46	110
No	389	89.29	15.45	22	110

**Table 17.** Comparison of social acceptance scores of students according to having a friend with disability

	n	Rank mean	Rank total	U	P
<b>Friends with disability</b>					
Yes	206	324.50	66846.00	34609.00	0.01*
No	389	283.97	110464.00		

\*p<0.05

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of the study which examined the social acceptance of students with special needs by their peers in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus:

It has been observed that female students who participated in the study showed more positive social acceptance compared to male students. It is believed that this difference is caused by the fact that girls are more emotional compared to boys. When the results of the study are compared to other studies from this perspective, De Boer et al. (2012) conducted a study in 20 different countries on the basis of attitudes of peers towards students with special needs examining publications in a time span of 13 years and found out that female students showed more positive attitude compared to male students. These findings are similar to those of our study, whereas Kargin and Baydık (2002) and Ayril et al. (2015) concluded that gender variable of peers did not have any impact on the social acceptance of inclusive students.

Based on the finding that there is no difference in social acceptance by participants according to their age, it can be claimed that children accepted their friends with special needs regardless of their age. The findings in Ayril et al. (2015) support the findings of our study whereas Swaim and Morgan (2001) claim that, different from our findings, the age factor is effective on attitudes and it became positive at lower ages.

Our research found that the grade of peers is not an effective factor on social acceptance. This shows that participant students are not at a level to develop judgments with definite borders in terms of their age and grade, and the borders of their attitude and social acceptance are permeable.

It is seen that the participant peers who have a disabled friend show more positive social acceptance compared to the peers with no disabled friends. This finding indicates that creating more frequent interaction between normally developing peer and children with special needs can affect the social and personal development of children in further ages positively.

It is also witnessed that peers with no siblings have more negative social acceptance values compared to students with siblings. Based on this finding, it can be claimed that children with no siblings can be more ego-centric and less empathic compared to children with siblings, and as they did not know how to share and develop friendship, they can be more distant to their peers with special needs.

The finding that education status of mothers is not effective on the social acceptance by peers indicates that, as women are more empathic and emotional compared to men, regardless of their education status and workload level, they can spare more time to their children help them develop didactic and empathic skills. Nevertheless, it is seen that peers whose fathers have undergraduate or graduate degree have more negative social acceptance levels. This result indicates that fathers with high education status spare more time to their careers and cannot reserve enough time for their children.

In conclusion, this research we conducted on the students in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, it is seen that the peers who participated in our study have generally positive social acceptance attitudes towards inclusive students.

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