



The Effect of a Social Skills-Based Psychoeducation Programme on Primary School Students' Social Skill Levels *

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Abstract

In this study, the effect of a social skills-based psychoeducation programme, consisting of eight sessions, on primary school students' social skill levels was investigated. The study group of the research consisted of a total of 24 third and fourth grade students attending a state primary school. In the research, a quasi-experimental model with a control group and pretest, posttest and follow-up test was used. A Social Skills Knowledge Test, Sociometric Technique and Personal Information Form were used for data collection. After the pretest measurement, the Social Skills-Based Psychoeducation Programme was implemented by the researcher for the students in the experimental group between May and June 2019, for two days per week (4 weeks, 8 days) and approximately 45 minutes per day. No group sessions or activities were conducted with the control group, and only the pretest and posttest were administered to those students. The posttest measurements were taken one week after the end of the sessions, and the follow-up measurements were made six months later. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Mann-Whitney U test were used for the analysis of the obtained data. As a result of the study, it was observed that the social skill scores of the students in the experimental group increased significantly compared to those of the students in the control group. At the same time, the follow-up test was applied to the students in the experimental group six months later, and it was observed that the difference between the posttest and follow-up test mean scores was not significant and that the effect of the social skills-based psychoeducation programme was still continuing. The findings obtained reveal that the social skills-based psychoeducation programme was effective in improving students' social skills.

Keywords

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Introduction

Together with the adoption of the modern understanding of education, the importance given to the holistic development of students has increased. Within the scope of student personnel services, the emotional and social development of students have begun to be given importance along with their academic development. One of the periods in which students' psychosocial development is important is the primary school period. This period, which encompasses the ages of 6-12, is a period in which children's social and personality development is important as well as their academic development (Bacanlı, 2010; Işıklar, Bilgin, & Bilgin, 2015). Piaget (1999), cognitively defines this period as the concrete operational period, and in his view, children make logical inferences about concrete objects in this period. During this period, which Freud (1908) classified as the latency stage in his psychosexual theory of personality, the individual begins to identify with other adults apart from his parents, and especially with his teachers, and mostly directs his attention towards acquiring social and intellectual skills. Successful completion of this period is achieved by strengthening the sense of autonomy that will support the individual's efforts to learn and acquire social skills (Can, 2002; Weiten, Hammer, & Dunn, 2016). According to Erikson's (1963, 1968) psychosocial development theory, this stage, in which an inferiority complex against success develops, is the period in which children start school life, when they will acquire the skills necessary for adult roles. In this period, when children's interests are mostly focused on academic and social issues, industriousness emerges as a dominant theme. Children are curious about how things are made and how they work. Thus, tools and equipment begin to enter the child's self-boundaries. They develop skills to be able to use these tools and materials. When children are encouraged to produce, perform, and work, a sense of achievement develops. In this period, in which the family and the social world also contribute to the sense of achievement, if individuals cannot acquire the skills to use the tools considered appropriate and necessary in society, then when they start school with deficient and inadequate skills, it will be difficult for them to adapt to the world of learning and this may cause them to despair. In a world where many tools and materials are used, this may turn into family dependence by making it difficult for the individual who perceives himself as weak and inadequate to embrace school-related activities (Işıklar et al., 2015; Öztürk, 1994; Santrock, 2016). For this reason, it is important that the child is motivated towards academic and social success by his teachers at school and by his parents at home. The primary school period is one in which the individual moves away from egocentric thinking and can perceive the difference between his own perspective and the perspective of others, in other words, a period when, with the development of his perspective-taking ability, he realises that others are individuals like himself (Bacanlı, 2014). The child reflects this understanding on his social relationships and play, and becomes able to cooperate with his peers and to begin playing together (Akkök, 1996). At the same time, at this stage, as a result of the comparison they make with their peers, children try to understand whether they themselves are competent (Bacanlı, 2010). Therefore, the primary school period is a critical one for the acquisition of social skills.

When the concept of social skills, which has an important role in the socialisation of the individual, is explained in relation to the concept of skill (Wilson & Sabee, 2003), which is basically defined as behaviours and a series of behaviours that can be deliberately repeated for a purpose, it is defined as the special ways that the child resorts to in order to perform his social developmental tasks and that enable him to achieve his goal (Gültekin Akduman, Günindi, & Türkoğlu, 2015; Kılıç & Güngör Aytar, 2017). In the literature, Edward Lee Thorndike's studies on defining social intelligence and measuring social intelligence are considered to be the first studies related to social skills (Ünlü, 2010). When the previous studies are examined, it is seen that there are many definitions and classifications regarding social skills. Social skills are learned behaviours that facilitate communication with others, enable positive results to be achieved in social environments, and increase social acceptance (Durualp & Aral, 2010; Kelly, 1982; Lin, 1996). Sam (2013) defines the concept of social skills as the skills required for individuals to initiate interaction in certain social environments and act in accordance with their social environment, while Little, Swangler, and Akin-Little (2017) define social skills as the ability of an individual to initiate and maintain a relationship within a group and to interact with the social environment. Another definition of social skills is the ability of an individual to understand his own and others' feelings, thoughts and behaviours in interpersonal relationships and to exhibit appropriate

behaviours in this direction (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2006; Marlowe, 1986). When the definitions of social skills are examined, common elements are noticeable in many definitions, such as the fact that they are learned behaviours that can positively structure interpersonal interactions, that they include goal-oriented behaviours that can affect the social environment, that they are skills that can be situational as well as changeable depending on social content, and that they encompass observable and unobservable mental and emotional behaviours (Cartledge & Milburn, 1992). At the same time, these elements overlap with the objectives of the modern understanding of education, which targets the development of the individual's physical, emotional, cognitive and social abilities in the most appropriate way for himself and for society (Yeşilyaprak, 2003).

Social skills are classified as skills for initiating and maintaining a relationship, skills for working with and adapting to a group, skills related to emotions and body language awareness, skills for coping with aggressive behaviours and anger control skills, skills for coping with stressful situations, problem-solving and planning skills, mediation skills, help-seeking skills, respect for diversity and social assistance skills, humour skills, academic skills, and enterprise (assertiveness) skills (Akkök, 1996; Ataş, Efeçinar, & Tatar, 2016; Jenson, Slone, & Yough, 1988; Karataş, 2019; Lynch & Simpson, 2010; Westwood, 1993). Caldarella and Merrell (1997), on the other hand, classified social skills in five groups. These are academic skills, peer relations skills, compliance skills, assertion skills, and self-management skills. As can be seen from the definitions and classifications made, the concept of social skills, which exhibits a complex structure due to its different components, also expresses the ability to harmoniously manage the various skills that create complex relationships (Duran, Çeliköz, & Topaloğlu, 2013).

Social skills, which form an integral part of social competence, are the ability of an individual to behave in a way that enables social satisfaction both for himself and for the person with whom he is in communication in his social environment (Dowrick, 1986). When the literature is examined, it is seen that the concepts of social competence and social skills are discussed in relation to each other. Social competence is a more comprehensive concept than that of social skills, and it expresses the fact that the individual possesses social skills and can use these skills appropriately when necessary (Akkök, 1999). Individuals with high social competence also possess social skills. However, in individuals who have not adequately learnt where and how to use these skills, a lack of social skills results (Hops, 1983). Social skills, which are also important in terms of avoiding risky behaviours and turning towards protective factors, can affect individuals both physically and mentally. Possession of social skills creates a two-way effect by not only reducing the tendency towards risky behaviours, but also increasing protective competencies since it enables possession of social competence (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2001). It has been stated that the best predictor of adjustment in adulthood is the level of competence in relationships formed with others rather than intelligence and academic achievement (Hartup, 1992).

Previous studies show that there are significant relationships between social skills and academic and social achievement, general well-being, adjustment and mental health level (Carter, Briggs-Gowan, & Davis, 2004). Examining the positive results obtained from related studies, it is seen that communicative competence enabled good relations between people (Wilson & Sabee, 2003), that social skills were effective in eliminating the attribution style specific to learned helplessness (Aydın, 1985), that social skills of children who were excluded by their families improved after social skills training (Oden & Asher, 1977), that social skills training contributed positively to adolescents' interpersonal relationships (Uzamaz, 2000), and that a psychoeducation programme aimed at improving the social skills of children in the 4th and 6th grades of primary school increased the students' social skills (Çetin, Bilbay, & Albayrak-Kaymak, 2002). Other findings revealed that a lack of social skills led to negative consequences such as an increase in external behavioural problems such as aggressiveness and confrontational behaviour and internal behavioural problems such as fear, uneasiness and introversion (Özbey, 2012), rejection by peers (Durualp & Aral, 2010; Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 1996; Günder, 2011), adjustment problems, tendency to violence, and increase in negative feelings and thoughts such as insecurity and anxiety (Coşkun & Samancı, 2012), academic failure (Coşkun & Samancı, 2012; Durualp & Aral, 2010), and a negative effect on relationships with peers and parents (Durualp & Aral, 2010; Günder, 2011).

Acceptance of children by their friends requires them to have social skills such as obeying social rules, ability to participate appropriately in the group, and ability to communicate effectively (Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981). Children who do not possess these skills may be rejected by their friends, and children who are rejected may have trouble initiating friendships in the way that they want. In fact, according to the definition of peer acceptance, which is one of the definitions of social skills, when children are accepted by others, they perceive themselves as socially competent (Gresham & Elliot, 1987). Social skills learned in the socialisation process, in which children become active members of a certain group and acquire the values, behaviours and beliefs possessed by other individuals in the group (Gander & Gardiner, 1993), continue throughout life, and the relationships and communication styles that individuals establish with the people around them have a significant effect on social cohesion (Bayhan & Artan, 2004; Kandır, 2004). Therefore, the earlier social skills are fostered in children, the easier it is for children to internalise these skills and exhibit them as behaviours, since social behaviours acquired in early childhood make it easier for the individual to establish healthy communication with others, to know himself, and to achieve the necessary competence to adapt to the social environment in a balanced way (Ekinçi Vural, 2006). Thus, social skills, which are defined as behavioural components that facilitate the social development of the individual, can be defined as a “set of competencies” that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social relationships, that contribute to peer acceptance and a satisfactory school adjustment, and that allow an individual to cope effectively with the larger social environment (Karataş, 2019). When considered from this point of view, the social and behavioural needs that arise in the relationships established by children with their peers and adults, especially during the primary school period, require the use of more social skills. Indeed, in some sources (Choi & Kim, 2003; Danielson & Phelps, 2003; McClellan & Katz, 2001), it is emphasised that when children are unable to acquire social skills by the age of six, they also have difficulty in acquiring social skills at later ages and in adulthood, that interventions made after the age of 8 for children who experience social, emotional and behavioural problems do not achieve the desired level of success (Eron, 1990), and that therefore, it is important for social skills to be fostered in an earlier period. It is stressed that the implementation of social skills training programmes for children aimed at anger management, reducing aggressive behaviours, and fostering problem-solving skills should be started at an early age (Stewart & McKay, 1995).

It is emphasised that primary schools are especially important for fostering, developing and maintaining social skills (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2006; Dermez, 2008), and that school-based preventive activities reduce students’ negative behaviours (Uz Baş, 2009). Furthermore, considering the basic assumption that social skills training is effective in preventing problems requiring clinical assistance such as social anxiety, depression, loneliness and alcoholism that may develop in the future due to the failure to acquire social skills (Sergin & Giverts, 2003) and that the reason why individuals do not exhibit appropriate social behaviour is that they lack knowledge of these skills (Tagay, Baydan, & Voltan Acar, 2010), the aim of this study is to equip primary school students with the necessary social skills at a developmental and preventive level by means of a psychoeducation programme focused on social skills. In descriptive studies (Duran et al., 2013; Kabakçı & Korkut, 2008), it is recommended to develop a programme aimed at social skills activities and to conduct experimental studies with different sample groups. In this respect, it is predicted that this study will contribute to the areas that are stated to be required in the literature.

In line with the main purpose stated above, in this study, the aim is to examine the effect of a social skills-based psychoeducation programme on the social skill levels of primary school students. In this research, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There will be a significant difference, in favour of the experimental group, between the social skills pretest and posttest scores of the students in the experimental group participating in the social skills-based psychoeducation programme compared to the students in the control group.
2. There will be no significant difference between the social skills posttest and follow-up test scores of the students in the experimental group participating in the social skills-based psychoeducation programme.

Method

Research Design

In this study, in which the effect of a social skills-based psychoeducation programme on the social skill levels of primary school students was examined, a quasi-experimental model with a nonequivalent control group was used. In cases where the controls required by real experimental models cannot be fully achieved, quasi-experimental models can be utilised (Büyüköztürk, 2014). Due to the repeated administration of measurement tools used in research to the groups, it is recommended that after the completion of an experimental study, a follow-up is conducted after a certain period of time in order to avoid a measurement problem caused by subjects becoming accustomed to the measurement tool (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). For this reason, six months after the end of the quasi-experimental study, a follow-up test was implemented to see if the effect of the psychoeducation programme was maintained.

Study Group

The study group of the research consisted of 24 students attending the third and fourth grades of primary school in a state school in the İpekyolu district of Van province. The experimental group consisted of 12 students (3 boys and 9 girls), while the control group also consisted of 12 students (4 boys and 8 girls). According to Vander Kolk (1985), the ideal number of members in structured or educational groups should be between 10 and 18, while according to Jacobs, Mason, and Harvill (1998), it is recommended to be between 5 and 15 people. In addition, it is stated that postgraduate and doctoral students should make sure that there are at least 7 and at most 12 members in the group they are to lead, by also considering that students leave the group due to their practical courses (Voltan Acar, 2018). The study group was determined with the convenience sampling method from among students who obtained lower scores than their friends (1 or 0 out of 3) according to the results of the sociometric technique, and by also considering the opinions of the class teachers and the school counsellor. It is stated in sources (Gresham & Elliott, 1987; Çiftçi & Sucuoğlu, 2003; Çetin et al., 2002) that direct behavioural observation and the sociometric technique can be used to evaluate social skills. It is emphasised that in the planning and creation of the group, the observations of the school counsellor, the applications made to the guidance service, and some recommendations of the teachers can be taken into account (Kağmıcı, 2015). In addition to these criteria, it is stated that the use of questionnaires or scales is one of the resources that can be utilised in the formation of the group (Jacobs et al., 1998). In this study, since the aim was to identify students who needed social skills training and to include them in the group process by utilising more than one source, a quasi-experimental design which did not include random assignment was used. Not only is there an important limitation in groups formed in this way, it also cannot be guaranteed that the groups included in the study are equivalent (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2017). The distribution of the experimental and control group students according to gender and class groups is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Experimental and Control Groups According to Grade and Gender

Demographic Variable	Groups	Experi-mental Group	%	Control Group	%	Total	%
Gender	Female	9	75	8	66.7	17	70.8
	Male	3	25	4	33.3	7	29.2
Grade	3rd grade	6	50	6	50	12	50
	4th grade	6	50	6	50	12	50

Data Collection Tools

Social Skills Knowledge Test

The Social Skills Knowledge Test developed by Çetin et al. (2002) was developed in 2 parallel forms to be used as a pretest and posttest. The tests consist of 19 multiple choice items and 11 open-ended questions. In this study, the multiple choice tests were used and the open-ended questions were

not used. The scores obtained from the scale range from 0-19. High scores obtained in these tests indicate the high characteristics of the measured dimension. The internal consistency coefficients of these tests calculated with Cronbach's alpha were found to be .71 and .61. In this study, since the answers given by the students to the tests were evaluated as correct or incorrect, the internal consistency coefficient of the tests was calculated according to the KR-20 coefficient, and the internal consistency coefficient calculated with KR-20 was found to be .60. It is stated that a KR-20 reliability coefficient as low as .50 is sufficient for multiple-choice tests consisting of around 10-15 items, whereas the KR-20 value should be at least .80 for tests with over 50 items (Kehoe, 1995). It can be said that the reliability coefficient obtained is within acceptable limits.

Sociometric Technique

The sociometric technique used to determine the study group of the research is a 3-point Likert-type rating technique used to determine students' levels of acceptance by their friends. The students were asked the question, "Which classmates would you like to go on a picnic with?" and they were asked to rate each friend with a score ranging from 1 to 3. Students who obtained lower scores (1 and 0 points) than their friends in the rating were included in the experimental group, by also taking into account the teacher's opinions.

Personal Information Form

This is an information form that includes the gender and class information of the students in the experimental and control groups.

Process

This research was carried out as a quasi-experimental study measuring the effect of a psychoeducation programme in which social skills techniques were used to improve the social skills of primary school students. Before beginning the study, the administrators of the educational institutions were contacted and the necessary permission was obtained for the implementation of the research in their institutions. Moreover, a consent form was completed by obtaining the permission of the students' parents. In the interview with the school administrators, the content and purpose of the research and its benefit to the children were explained. The sociometric technique, and the Social Skills Knowledge pretest developed by Çetin et al. (2002), were applied respectively to the children by the researcher one week before the group sessions began. Prior to the group sessions, each student was interviewed individually and informed about the content and purpose of the group they would participate in, and their views were obtained as to whether they wished to join the group or not. It is suggested that certain criteria should be taken into account in the selection of members for a group. According to Voltan Acar (2018), gathering members with similar characteristics, such as all the shy ones, in a group can make the group inefficient and cause the group to clam up. According to Çivitci (2018), when choosing candidates for psychoeducational groups, candidates who are considered to contribute to the group with their individual characteristics can be chosen as group members. For this reason, in order to make the group more dynamic and to facilitate the acquisition of social skills, 3 students with a good level of social skills were included in the experimental group to act as a model for their peers. After the pretest was implemented with the students in the experimental and control groups, the Social Skills-Based Psychoeducation Programme was implemented by the researcher for the students in the experimental group in eight sessions over a period of four weeks, two days per week between May-June 2019. While the psychoeducation programme for social skills was implemented with the experimental group, no group sessions or activities were carried out with the control group in this process. In group comparisons, the experimental group receives an intervention such as a teaching method or a training programme whose effect on the dependent variable will be tested, while the control group does not receive any intervention (Büyükoztürk et al., 2017). In the arrangements of physical conditions for group practices, it is recommended that rather secluded environments are created where confidentiality can be preserved, the group process cannot be divided, the members will not be disturbed, and silence can be ensured (Chen & Rybak, 2004; Corey & Corey, 2006; Gladding, 2008; Trotzer, 1989; Voltan Acar, 2018). Therefore, the sessions were held by the researcher in an unused room in the school where silence

was ensured. One week after the completion of the sessions for the experimental group, the social skills posttest was administered to the students in both the experimental group and the control group to determine whether the programme was effective. Six months after the completion of the group sessions, the follow-up test was administered to the students in the experimental group.

Social Skills-Based Psychoeducation Programme

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of a social skills-based psychoeducation programme on the social skill levels of primary school students. For this purpose, the social skills-based psychoeducation programme was implemented. The skills-based group process is an integral part of psychoeducational groups (Corey, 2008). Psychoeducational groups focus on improving their members' cognitive, emotional and behavioural skills through structured group sessions (Çakır, 2015). For this purpose, the Social Skills-Based Psychoeducation Programme consisted of 8 sessions covering the techniques of giving information, role modelling, reinforcement, role playing and giving feedback, with the aim of improving the students' social-emotional aspects. In groups held with children, as their attention spans will be more limited, it is recommended that the ideal duration of sessions should be between 30-45 minutes, and that in groups held in schools, the session duration should be limited to one class hour (Corey & Corey, 2006; Jacobs et al., 1998; Ohlsen, Home, & Lawe, 1988; Trotzer, 1989). In line with these considerations, each session of the social skills group training lasted 45 minutes. By paying attention to the fact that the students participating in the session were taken from different courses, the sessions were held at different class times each week. The group sessions were held twice a week, and a total of 16 activities were implemented, with 2 activities in each session. Each session included checking the home activities given in the previous session, summarising the previous session, providing students with a different social skill in each session, having the students practise the learned skills within the group, summarising the learned skills, and giving homework related to the learned skills. In each session, home activities (homework) for the social skills learned that day were given to the students, and in the next session, the home activities were checked and smiling faces were given to the students who had completed the activities. In the group sessions, activities included in the book by Çetin et al. (2002) and activities developed by the researcher were used. The group activities, techniques used and objectives of the sessions are included in Appendix 1.

In the first session, a file, pen and notepad were given to each of the children for them to file their home activities. The members were informed about the purpose of the study and the programme, and the group rules were created. The aim of this session was to enable the children to get to know each other better, look closely at the social environment they were in, and develop their awareness of people, events and their social environment by improving their observation skills. For this purpose, activities named "I am Aware of My Social Environment" and "Who Am I?" were included. In the second session, the "Word of mouth" and "How is it done?" activities were conducted to develop the group members' ability to carefully observe and listen to those around them. The aim of the third session was for the members to realise how a person feels when they encounter a positive or negative event and to be able to express these feelings using tone of voice, body posture and facial expressions. For this purpose, activities called "Fill with Feelings" and "Circle of Friends" were held. In the fourth session, activities named "On My Own" and "Can I Play Too?" aimed at improving appropriate participation in an event or game were included. Moreover, at the end of the fourth session, saplings were presented to students who had collected 4 smiling faces and the saplings were planted in the school garden together with the students. This activity both enabled students to socialise and fostered a love of nature in them. The aim of the fifth session was to improve members' coping skills when they were excluded by their friends and to teach them what to do in such a situation. Within this framework, activities called "By Yourself" and "Rejection" were implemented. In the sixth session, activities named "Solve the Problem Amicably" and "Differences" were included in order to enable children to become aware of verbal and nonverbal behaviours that can provide reconciliation in cases of conflict, and to equip them with practical skills in this regard. The aim of the seventh session was to furnish the group members with skills for sharing their games or possessions with their friends. For this purpose, the "Let's Share" and "Balloon Dance" activities were held. The aim of the eighth session was to evaluate the programme, to allow the members

to share their thoughts and feelings about the group process, to prepare the farewell party together by sharing the task with the children, and to distribute the certificates of participation to the children at the end of the party. For this purpose, the activities named “Goodbye” (Çetin et al., 2002) and “Long Live Musical Entertainment” developed by the researcher were included. At the end of the eighth session, the farewell party was held for the students and the certificates of participation were given at the end of the party.

Data Analysis

The data of the research were analysed using the SPSS/PC+ software package. The data obtained in the study were analysed with non-parametric statistical methods since the groups consisted of 12 students. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare the pretest and posttest total scores of the experimental group. The Mann-Whitney U test was utilised to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores obtained by the experimental and control groups in the social skills test. The significance level was determined as .05.

Ethical Approval

Ethics committee approval for the ethical appropriateness of this research was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Publication Ethics Committee of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University with the decision number 2020/04-03, dated 20.05.2020.

Results

In this section, the findings obtained in the analyses carried out to test the hypotheses of the research are given.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test, which was conducted to determine whether the difference between the social skills pretest and posttest scores of the students in the experimental and control groups was significant, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Result of Mann-Whitney U Test for Social Skills Pretest and Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Test Group	Group	n	MeanRank	U	p
Pretest Social Skill Level	Experimental	12	16.0	30.5	.014*
	Control	12	9.0		
Posttest Social Skill Level	Experimental	12	18.5	.50	.000**
	Control	12	6.5		

**p<.01; *p<.05

As can be seen in Table 2, according to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the social skills pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups, it was determined that the difference between the students' social skills pretest score distributions according to the experimental and control groups was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($U= 30.5$; $p= .014$; $p<.05$). Accordingly, it was determined that the social skills pretest mean scores of the students in the experimental group (meanrank = 16.0) were higher than the pretest mean scores of the students in the control group (meanrank = 9.0). This finding indicates that the groups were not initially equivalent in terms of social skill level. Again, as can be seen in Table 2, it was determined that the social skills posttest scores of the students in the experimental and control groups were statistically significantly different at a 99% confidence level ($U= .50$; $p= .000$; $p<.01$). The social skills posttest mean scores of the students in the experimental group (meanrank = 18.5) were higher than the posttest mean scores of the students in the control group (meanrank = 6.5). Although a result in favour of the experimental group was obtained between the groups according to the posttest scores, when it is considered that the groups were not initially equivalent, it can be stated that the experimental group made progress within itself.

The result of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which was conducted to determine whether the difference between the social skills pretest and posttest scores of the students in the experimental group was significant or not, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Result of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Social Skills Pretest and Posttest Scores of Experimental Group

Group		n	MeanRank	Z	p
Experimental	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	0	-3.068	.002**
	Positive Ranks	12 ^b	6.5		
	Ties	0 ^c			

**p<.01; a. Posttest social skill level<Pretest social skill level; b. Posttest social skill level >Pretest social skill level; c. Posttest social skill level = Pretest social skill level

As seen in Table 3, the difference between the social skills pretest and posttest scores of the students in the experimental group was statistically significant at a 99% confidence level ($Z = -3.068$; $p = .002$; $p < .01$). According to the Wilcoxon signed-rank test results, it was found that the social skills scores obtained by all the experimental group students in the posttest were positive compared to their scores in the pretest (positive rank = 6.5), and that the social skills posttest scores of the experimental group were higher than their pretest scores. This finding reveals that the social skills-based psychoeducation programme implemented with the experimental group contributed positively to their social skills.

In order to determine the permanence of the social skills-based psychoeducation programme, the social skills follow-up test was applied to the students in the experimental group six months later. The result of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which was conducted to determine whether the difference between posttest scores and follow-up test scores was significant, is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Result of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Social Skills Posttest and Follow-Up Test Scores of Experimental Group

Group		n	MeanRank	Z	p
Experimental	Negative Ranks	9 ^a	6.83	-1.773	.076
	Positive Ranks	3 ^b	5.50		
	Ties	0 ^c			

a. Follow-up test<posttest; b. Follow-up test>posttest; c. Follow-up test = posttest

As can be seen in Table 4, it was found that the difference between the social skills posttest and follow-up test scores of the students in the experimental group was not statistically significant ($Z = -1.773$; $p = .076$; $p > .05$). According to the Wilcoxon signed-rank test results, it was determined that the majority of the experimental group students ($n = 9$) obtained negative social skills scores from the follow-up test compared to the posttest (negative rank = 6.83). This result shows that there was no significant difference between the social skills posttest and follow-up test mean scores of the experimental group.

In this study, the opinions of the teachers of the students who participated in the social skills-based psychoeducation group were also consulted. As is known, direct behavioural observation (Gresham & Elliott, 1987; Çiftçi & Sucuoğlu, 2003) is one of the methods used for the evaluation of social skills. Following the social skills training group sessions, the teachers were asked, "When you compare the situations of your students participating in the group sessions before and after joining the group, what are the positive and negative changes that you observe in your students?" and the answers given to this question were generally grouped under two headings. The first of these is observations regarding changes in the lessons. The teachers stated that the students who participated in the social skills training group activity increased their active participation in the in-class and out-of-class activities, and that their achievement performance in written exams increased. The second point that the teachers emphasised concerns changes in their students' social behaviours. The teachers stated that the students participating in the social skills training exhibited behaviours such as improving their friendship relations, expressing

themselves more easily in social groups, being aware of their emotions and being able to express them, participating more in group games, and being more assertive in in-class and out-of-class activities. In the classroom teachers' evaluation regarding the students in the experimental group, it was stated that 11 out of 12 students in the experimental group showed progress both socially and academically, where as one student's friendship relations improved, albeit a little, but were still not at the desired level.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of a social skills-based psychoeducation programme on the social skill levels of primary school students. Within the framework of this main aim, 12 students were included in the experimental group and 12 students were included in the control group, and the implementation was made with the experimental group for a period of four weeks. Prior to the group sessions, the pretest parallel form of the Social Skills Knowledge Test (Çetin et al., 2002) was administered to all students. After the group sessions were completed, the social skills posttest, which was another parallel form, was implemented. The results obtained in the research revealed that the social skills-based psychoeducation programme conducted with the experimental group had an effect on primary school students' social skill levels. In addition, six months after the completion of the four-week psychoeducation programme, a follow-up test was performed to examine whether the outcomes assumed to be achieved through the group training would be maintained. It was observed that there was no significant difference between the scores obtained from the posttest and follow-up tests of the experimental group. This result shows that the effect produced by the group training was long-lasting.

When the research findings were examined, it was found that the social skills posttest mean scores of the primary school students who took part in the psychoeducation programme based on social skills training were significantly higher than their pretest mean scores. This finding reveals that the social skills training given was significantly effective in improving the students' social skills. Myrick (1997) stated that small group sessions conducted for personal and school development turned into a unique educational experience in which students could work together to explore their emotions, attitudes and behaviours. It is emphasised that for children to maintain appropriate behaviours, prosocial skills including behaviours such as working in cooperation, helping each other, sharing, and taking responsibility for other children should be acquired. It is important to offer children suitable options and educational opportunities in the classroom environment in order for them to acquire prosocial skills (Wortham, 2006; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999). In other words, the education offered to children in a supportive environment, where they are guided by considering their expectations about what to do, and when and how to do it, makes a significant impact on children's behaviour (Alisnanoğlu & Özbey, 2011).

In studies conducted to develop social skills (Kjøbli & Ogden, 2014; Siu, 2014), it has been observed that children who receive social skills training have improved social skill levels and friendships compared to children who do not. In a study investigating the effect of social skills training including behavioural practices on primary school children with emotional-behavioural problems (Muskett, 2008), it was determined that children's social skills improved both at home and in the school environment, they felt safer in the group, and they made more friends. It was determined that a fifteen-week social skills training programme was significantly effective on students' social skill levels (Tagay et al., 2010), that a group guidance programme for social skills training improved the social skills and self-perceptions of 3rd grade primary school students (Yukay, 2006), that a 22-week social skills training programme aimed at developing problem-solving skills increased children's problem-solving skills and their ability to understand the emotions of others (Dereli, 2009), and that social skills training prepared for students receiving pre-school education improved the students' social skills, communication, adaptability and assertiveness behaviours (Kılıç & Güngör Aytar, 2017). In parallel with the results obtained in this research, when the literature is examined, as well as the research findings mentioned above, the results of many studies (Çelik, 2007; Çetin et al., 2002; Ekinçi Vural, 2006; Hepler, 1990; Stewart & McKay, 1995) reveal that social skills-based training is effective for children's acquisition of social skills.

In cognitive psychoeducation groups, which are conducted based on a specific programme for behavioural change such as social skills development and assertiveness training (Voltan Acar, 2018), the aim is to equip the members with the necessary information and life skills in order to eliminate the lack of information about certain issues that may cause problems in the lives of individuals, to increase their awareness and to enable them to cope better with problems (Corey & Corey, 2006). Furthermore, in these groups, in which members are offered the opportunity to learn and develop various skills, the aim is to prevent psychological problems and support personal development by furnishing them with life skills as well as eliminating their lack of knowledge and skills (Çakır, 2015). When the functions of psychoeducational groups are considered, it is important to begin the implementation of such programmes, which aim both to reduce risk factors and to improve protective factors, from an early period. Indeed, it is pointed out in studies (Tagay et al., 2010; Uz Baş, 2009) that social skills training should be organised from an early age in order to increase individuals' social competence and academic performance. Again, in an experimental study (Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2008) examining the effect of an intervention programme implemented during the primary school years in terms of protective and risk factors during adolescence and adulthood, it was determined that 15 years after the implementation of the intervention programme, the experimental group had positive psychological, cognitive and behavioural outcomes. Although the results of the research support the effectiveness of this experimental study, they reveal that it is important to increase the experimental studies aimed at improving social skills.

In this study, it was found that the scores obtained from the social skills posttest by the primary school students who participated in the psychoeducation programme based on social skills training were significantly higher than the scores they obtained from the pretest. This finding shows that the social skills training given had a positive effect on the students' social skill levels. In the literature, it is emphasised that students need to discuss certain areas related to their personal development, and that for this reason, studies conducted with small groups for developmental purposes provide the individual with this opportunity (Öncü, 2002). In this way, the individual is accepted unconditionally; the group process experienced in a group atmosphere, where the feelings of giving, receiving and sharing can be experienced, has the nature of a social laboratory in which valuable experiences that can be transferred to larger groups in a person's life are gained (Ören, 1989). In addition, when the information given by the classroom teachers based on the observations they made on the students after the group training is taken into account, it is revealed that the psychoeducation given had a positive effect on the students both socially and academically.

When the findings of the study are evaluated in general, it was observed that the posttest scores of the experimental group receiving social skills training were found to be higher than their pretest scores, and that this effect continued in the follow-up test performed on the experimental group six months later. This result reveals that the social skills training they received improved the social skill levels that they possessed at the beginning. Again, the fact that there was no significant difference between the posttest social skill scores of the students in the experimental group and their follow-up test scores indicates that the social skills group training given had a positive effect on the primary school students' social skill levels and that this effect was maintained in the future. This can also be evaluated as a strength of the study. These results reveal that the intervening six-month period did not cause a significant difference in the characteristics measured in the children, that the experimental process was permanent, and that the effect of the training programme was lasting. This result shows that social skills can be developed in a receptive small group atmosphere and that individuals can transfer the behaviours they acquire in these groups to larger groups (Kuzgun, 1991), since in a group atmosphere that requires trust, understanding and acceptance (Myrick, 1997), close working relationships are established among members, enabling them to explore the issues in depth. As well as developing social skills in various areas of their lives, the outcomes that members achieve from these groups contribute to better knowledge of themselves and others (Çakır, 2015). According to Yalom (1995), who evaluates this situation on the basis of the social microcosm of the group, by experiencing in the group environment the social behaviours that they are reluctant to exhibit in real life, and thanks to the

appropriate feedback given by the members, children learn new skills and behaviours, and it will become easier to transfer these skills they have learnt to real life. For example, within the group, children will learn verbal and non-verbal skills such as thanking, apologising, expressing their emotions appropriately for their age, keeping an appropriate distance with friends according to the degree of closeness, making eye contact (Westwood, 1993), sharing with friends, empathising, and coping with exclusion. This enables group members to gain experience, make these experiences lasting, and transfer them to other environments.

In this study, the retention of social skills may be related to the fact that the training given was a programme based on numerous activities that would attract students' attention, such as games, role playing, role modelling, and the use of symbolic and social reinforcers. In related studies, it is seen that stories, games and drama-based social skills activities are used and that the goal is achieved. As is known, providing children with materials, educational opportunities and a comfortable environment suitable for their age in which they can interact, makes a significant positive impact on their social skills (Kemple, 2004). It has been revealed that drama-based social skills training programmes foster skills such as basic social skills, advanced communication skills, coping with aggression, working in groups, and cooperating with peers (Çetingöz & Cantürk Günhan, 2012; Eldeniz Çetin & Avcioğlu, 2010; Kocayörük, 2000; Mantaş, 2014); that a story-based social skills training programme is effective on the development of social skills, aggressiveness, adaptation, communication skills, self-control and assertiveness behaviours, problem solving, and working collaboratively (Aksoy, 2014; Koç, 2015; Neda, Ashkan, Sırouş, & Taher, 2013; Pekdoğan, 2016; Villares, Brigman, & Peluso, 2008); and that play-based social skills training has an effect on children's communication skills, shyness and maladaptive behaviours, and emotional and behavioural problems (Durualp & Aral, 2010; Muskett, 2008). In some studies conducted on the development of social skills (Dereli İman, 2014; Durualp & Aral, 2010; Pekdoğan, 2016; Tagay et al., 2010; Uysal & Kaya Balkan, 2015) the findings obtained from the follow-up test show similarity with the results of this study. Considering the results of this study, in future studies on this subject, social skills training can be carried out not only for the students who will receive the training, but also as supportive activities for the students' parents and teachers. In this way, since students will have the opportunity to exhibit the social skills learned in the training at home and in the classroom as well, social skills will become more permanently established in the child's behavioural repertoire.

Despite the positive results, this study does have some limitations. The most important limitation is that due to the method applied in the structuring of the groups, the groups were not equivalent at the beginning. For this reason, it is recommended that studies should be carried out in which real experimental models are applied and in which random assignment is performed. Another limitation is that there is a significant difference between the number of male students and the number of female students in the experimental and control groups. In future studies on this subject, care can be taken to ensure a similar number of male and female students to be included in the study. Furthermore, the effect of demographic variables that may affect students' social skill levels can be examined. Again, social skills training activities can be carried out with groups that are better structured in terms of the number of sessions, the time allocated to the sessions, and the number of members. Moreover, the implementation of programmes which are based not on only a few dimensions in the experimental process, but on fostering skills such as needs-based skills, interpersonal relationship skills, problem-solving skills, and skills for coping with aggression, and which are suitable for the multidimensional structure of social skills, will yield better results.

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Appendix 1. Contents of Sessions, Techniques Used and Objectives

Group Sessions:

Session No.	Content	Technique Used	Objective
1	Meeting the members, informing them about the purpose of the study and the programme, setting the group rules and finding a name for the group (Implementing the activities named "I am Aware of My Social Environment" and "Who Am I?").	Observation, giving information, role playing, group sharing, feedback.	To increase children's observation skills by enabling them to get to know each other better and to look closely at their social environment.
2	Stressing the importance of attention in being able to distinguish between voices and behaviours (Implementing the activities called "Word of Mouth" and "How is it done?").	Observation, giving information, role playing, group sharing, feedback.	To develop group members' ability to carefully observe and listen to those around them.
3	Grasping how an individual feels when faced with a certain situation (Implementing the activities called "Fill with Feelings" and "Circle of Friends").	Role modelling, giving information, role playing, group sharing, feedback.	To improve members' ability to recognise how a person feels when faced with a positive or negative event, and to be able to express these feelings using tone of voice, body posture and facial expressions.
4	Being able to participate appropriately in a game or event (Implementing the activities named "On My Own" and "Can I Play Too?").	Giving information, role playing, group sharing, reinforcement, feedback.	To enable children to develop their ability to engage in a game or group.
5	Teaching students what they can do when they are excluded from a group (Implementing the activities called "By Yourself" and "Rejection").	Role playing, group sharing, reinforcement, feedback.	To improve children's coping skills when they are alienated by their friends.
6	When children are in conflict with their friends, equipping them with skills that will enable them to resolve this conflict amicably (Implementing the activities named "Solve the Problem Amicably" and "Differences").	Giving information, role playing, group sharing, feedback.	To teach verbal and nonverbal behaviours that will enable reconciliation in situations where children experience conflict, and to equip them with practical skills in this regard.
7	Teaching students how to share their games and possessions with their friends (Implementing the activities called "Let's Share" and "Balloon Dance").	Giving information, role modelling, role playing, group sharing, reinforcement, feedback.	To enable children to gain practical skills in sharing their games and possessions with their friends.
8	Evaluation of the programme, and allowing members to share their thoughts and feelings about the group process. (Implementing the activities named "Goodbye" and "Long Live Musical Entertainment").	Group sharing, feedback.	To evaluate the group session and ensure that the session ends on a positive note.