

# Investigating Teachers' Approval and Disapproval Behaviors towards Academic and Social Behaviors of Students with and without Special Needs

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## Abstract

The present study was designed to (a) investigate teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors towards academic and social behaviors of students in mainstreaming classrooms and (b) determine whether or not having special needs be a predictor of teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors. The study group consisted of 43 teachers who were working in the elementary schools in Bolu and had students with special needs in their classrooms. Ten observers recorded academic and social approval and disapproval behaviors of 43 teachers using Teacher Behaviors Observation Form. In the analysis process, descriptive statistics and Categorical logistic regression analysis techniques were used. The results of the analysis indicated that teachers used disapproval behaviors more than approval behaviors, and used academic approval and disapproval more than social approval and disapproval and recognized and responded to the behaviors of students with special needs more than their peers. Teachers mostly used 'yes' to approve academic and social behaviors, and 'don't talk, don't make noise, shut up, be quiet' and 'Shh!' to disapprove behaviors. This study showed that having special needs had a significant prediction in social disapproval category and not having a special need had a significant prediction in approval category.

## Key Words

Teacher Behaviors, Approval, Disapproval, Inclusion, Students with Special Needs.

There is a positive relationship between teacher and student behaviors, and the effects of teacher behaviors on students are very strong. Studies emphasized that teachers had to approve student behaviors more in order to increase desired academic and social behaviors and decrease inappropriate

behaviors (Brophy, 2006; Landrum & Kauffman, 2006; Swinson & Harrop, 2001), and the disapproval behaviors should be ultimately used (Landrum & Kauffman). Approval behaviors were described as rewarding appropriate behaviors, and they were identified if a teacher praised a student or students following an appropriate behavior, if s/he expressed his/her appreciation of a student, his/her classroom work, behavior, or performance (Gresham, 1998; 2001; Swinson & Harrop). On the other hand, disapproval behavior was described as verbally or nonverbally reprimanding or criticizing a student or students following an inappropriate behavior (Partin, 2010; Swinson & Harrop). Verbal approval behaviors were very effective in decreasing students' problem behaviors and increasing the efficiency of an intervention (Ferguson & Houghton, 1992), and if the teacher used verbal approval more, time spent on dealing with problem behaviors may decrease so the time s/he spent on

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academic studies may increase during the lessons (Brophy, 1983; Chalk & Bizo, 2004).

For the last three decades teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors have increasingly become an area of interest (Partin, 2010). It is possible to combine the research studies related to this topic into two groups. From the first group, White (1975) was the first to record the frequency of teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors. Subsequently, Heller and White (1975), and Thomas, Presland, Grant, and Glynn (1978) conducted similar research studies and they recorded the frequency of elementary and secondary school teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors. These first studies showed that especially elementary school teachers used approval behaviors (on average .66 per minute) more than disapproval behaviors (on average .46 per minute). Moreover, Thomas et al. (1978) indicated that teachers' verbal disapproval behaviors (on average .58 per minute) were higher than their verbal approval behaviors (on average .20 per minute).

The second group of research studies which were conducted since 1980 showed differences in teachers' use of approval and disapproval behaviors and especially in the first and second grades teachers used approval behaviors more frequently (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000; Harrop & Swinson, 2000; Nafpaktitis, Mayer, & Butterworth, 1985; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). Moreover, these studies revealed that majority of the teachers used approval behaviors for the students' academic behaviors whereas they used disapproval behaviors for their social behaviors (Harrop & Swinson; Merrett & Wheldall, 1986). In terms of teachers' use of approval and disapproval behaviors towards students with special needs, limited number of studies have been conducted in the general education classrooms (Partin, 2010; Reinke & Herman, 2002; Sutherland, 2000).

The literature in Turkey showed that there were some studies which examine teachers' behaviors towards students with special needs (Çifci, Yıkımlı, & Akbaba-Altun, 2001; Sucuoğlu, Akalin, & Sazak-Pınar 2007; Sucuoğlu, Demirtaşlı, & Güner, 2009). It is seen that teachers do not recognize or reward positive behaviors of students with special needs; even some teachers do not recognize the student with special needs in their classroom. In Turkey, for the last three decades there have been many studies related to the mainstreaming model but studies focusing on teacher behaviors are limited. However, it is vital to obtain detailed information

related to teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors in order for the success of students in the mainstreaming practices. Considering this fact, in order to obtain detailed information related to teacher behaviors in mainstreaming classrooms this study was conducted.

The general purpose of this study was to examine teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors towards academic and social behaviors of students in mainstreaming classrooms. Parallel to this purpose following research questions are answered:

- 1) For academic and social behaviors of student with and without special needs,
  - a) What is the frequency of teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors?
  - b) Which approval and disapproval phrases and behaviors are most frequently used?
- 2) Can having special needs be a predictor of teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors?

## Method

### Study Group

The study group consisted of 43 teachers who were working in the elementary schools in Bolu and had students with special needs in their classrooms. Of all the teachers 29 were women (67.4%) and 14 (32.6%) were men. More than half of the teachers (67.4%) were graduates of education faculties' department of elementary education and the remaining were graduates of different departments, but they were certified by Ministry of National Education to work as classroom teachers.

### Research Model

This study was conducted in descriptive and relational model in which the purpose was to examine the frequency of teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors towards students' academic and social behaviors, and the relationship between student characteristics and teacher behaviors (Büyüköz-türk, Kılıç *Çakmak*, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2010).

### Data Collection Tools

**Demographical Information Form:** This form consisted of six questions including the gender, age, grade, job experience, experience in mainstreaming practices, and the undergraduate department.

**Teacher Behaviors Observation Form (TBOF):** TBOF was developed by Güner (2010) as an event-recording observation form with the purpose of determining the frequency of teachers' approval and disapproval behaviors. Over the course of developing the observation form, the literature was reviewed and any observation forms found were examined (Polirstok & Gottlieb, 2006; Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008), approval and disapproval behaviors of teachers aimed at measuring frequencies (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Tekin & Kircaali-ftar, 2001). TBOF consists of two parts and the first part has three columns. The first column includes examples of teachers' verbal and nonverbal approval and disapproval behaviors towards students' academic and social behaviors and columns to record the frequency of each behavior towards a student with and without special needs. The second part consists of approval and disapproval behaviors and a column to record these behaviors.

### Procedures

**Data Collection:** Having obtained the necessary permissions, videos were recorded in an academic lesson –Turkish, Social Sciences, Mathematics, or Science– of teachers in the study group. Videos were recorded in one lesson, 10 minutes after the teacher begins the lesson, for 20 minutes and using event recording technique using TBOF and 43 sessions lasted 860 minutes.

**Observer Training:** Ten independent observers who were undergraduate students at the Department of Special Education at Abant İzzet Baysal University, had passed the Applied Behavior Analysis course, and were taking School Experience and Mainstreaming Practices course were trained by the first author. Independent observers were separated into two groups and observer training for every group lasted three weeks, during these three weeks every group met for four times totaling eight sessions. Inter-observer reliability for two parts of TBOF was calculated. When 80% inter-rater reliability was obtained, observer training was terminated. Ten observers recorded academic and social approval and disapproval behaviors of 43 teachers using TBOF.

### Results

#### What is the Frequency of Teachers' Approval and Disapproval Behaviors towards Academic and Social Behaviors of Students with and without Special Needs?

The least exhibited behavior of teachers towards

students with special needs was approval of social behaviors (mean .72, on average 0.4 per minute, one of the teachers used at most 6 times), the most exhibited behavior towards students with special needs was disapproval of social behaviors (mean 9.53, on average .47, one of the teachers used at most 48 times). Moreover, it was seen that teachers' both academic and social approval behaviors towards students with special needs were fewer than their peers. In one lesson, teachers approved social behaviors of a student with special needs on average .72 times and academic behaviors 1.79 times whereas they approved social behaviors of a student without special needs on average 2.19 times and academic behaviors 8.44 times. For disapproval behaviors, in one lesson, teachers disapproved social behaviors of a student with special needs on average 1 time and academic behaviors 1.63 times whereas they disapproved social behaviors of a student without special needs on average 9.53 times and academic behaviors 4.84 times.

#### Which Approval and Disapproval Phrases and Behaviors are Most Frequently Used for the Academic and Social Behaviors of Students with and without Special Needs?

Teachers mostly used 'Yes' to approve academic and social behaviors, secondly they used 'nodding the head to approve.' The most commonly used disapproval phrases and behaviors were as follows 'Don't talk, don't make noise, shut up, be quiet' and "Shh!" Threatening was at the third rank. The behaviors (i.e., 'pulling the student's ear, slapping in the face, and knocking about') which were not listed –since they were not the most frequently used ones– were also less frequently (6 times in sum) exhibited by the teachers.

#### Can Having Special Needs be a Predictor of Teachers' Approval and Disapproval Behaviors?

Categorical logistic regression analysis produced significant results for the first chi square value [ $X^2 = 32.167, p = .00$ ]. When predictor variables were entered, model's goodness of fit index was calculated as 119.221 meaning that the change in the model was significant. Hosmer Lemeshow test produced insignificant results ( $p > .05$ ) meaning that model had an acceptable goodness of fit and model-data fit was adequate (Çokluk, Şekerciöglü, & Büyüköz-türk, 2010). Moreover, Wald statistics showed that having special needs had a significant prediction in social disapproval category and not having a spe-

cial need had a significant prediction in approval category. Accordingly, one unit increase in the special needs led to 34% [(1-1.344).100] increase in disapproval odds and one unit increase in not having a special need led to 41% [(1-1.411).100] increase in approval odds.

### Discussion

The results of this study could be summarized in three points: Teachers (a) used disapproval behaviors more than approval behaviors. (b) used academic approval and disapproval more than social approval and disapproval. (c) recognized and responded to the behaviors of students with special needs more than their peers.

Academic and social success of students are directly related to teacher behaviors and teacher approval if used systematically both increases academic and social behaviors and decreases inappropriate behaviors of students (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000; Brophy, 2006; Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Harrop & Swinson, 2000; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). Moreover, it is emphasized that teachers should approve appropriate student behaviors more and decrease disapproval behaviors for a successful teaching and effective classroom management (Swinson & Harrop). On the other hand, studies indicate that teachers must use disapproval behaviors least frequently because these behaviors may increase problem behaviors (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006; Swinson & Harrop). In this study student behaviors were not examined. Therefore, the effects of teachers' disapproval behaviors on student behaviors are unknown. However, studies suggested that students who show problem behaviors consistently draw negative attention and disapproval responses from teachers and students who receive these responses show more problem behaviors (Graden, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1983; Lago-DeLello, 1998; Wehby, Symons, & Shores, 1995). Lago-DeLello showed that students with behavior problems received more disapproval behaviors, their task engagement was less, and they showed more problem behaviors than their peers with normal development. By using disapproval behaviors more teachers may increase students' problem behaviors (Kounin, 1977). Therefore, it is essential to inform teachers about the effects of approval behaviors.

Because teachers in this study used many disapproval behaviors, it may indicate that they do not know the effective methods in dealing with problem behaviors. Studies conducted in Turkey show

that teachers working in mainstreaming classrooms cannot control students' problem behaviors (Kargin, Acarlar, & Sucuoğlu, 2005); they try to decrease these behaviors by using negative methods (e.g., reinforcing counter behaviors, warning verbally, punishing physically, precluding from the activity, and sending out of the classroom) (Batı & Özen, 1997). Therefore it is essential to inform teachers about how to deal with problem behaviors in future training programs.

The present study showed that teachers used academic approval and disapproval more than social approval and disapproval. This result was consistent with the literature findings (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000; Brophy, 2006; Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Harrop & Swinson, 2000; Swinson & Harrop, 2001). This finding may be related to the limited knowledge of teachers about social skills and the relationship among students' competence of social skills, academic skills, and problem behaviors (Sazak-Pınar, 2009; Sazak-Pınar & Sucuoğlu, 2011).

Teachers in this study recognized and responded less to behaviors of students with special needs than their peers without special needs. This finding was consistent with the findings of national studies (Akalin, 2007; Çifci et al., 2001; Sucuoğlu et al., 2007, 2009) but not with the findings of international studies (Brown, Odom, Li, & Zercher, 1999; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993; Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, & Hupp, 2002). Brown et al. and Wallace et al. showed that behaviors of students with special needs were not different than their peers however teachers directed more attention to students with special needs. In fact, studies in Turkey showed contrary results and some teachers did not even recognize the student with special needs in their classrooms (Çifci et al.) and some direct little attention to students with special needs (Akalin). Sucuoğlu et al. (2007) showed that teachers did not exhibit any approval or disapproval behaviors to student behaviors in 92.16% of all observation intervals.

These results are especially important for preparing teachers' in-service trainings. These trainings should include focusing on students with special needs and recognizing and approving their positive behaviors, and the relationship between teacher focus plus approval and students' positive behaviors. In this way teachers can develop their classroom management skills and they can prevent students' negative behaviors (Jones & Jones, 2001).

Another important result of this study showed that when the number of students with special needs

increased teachers' probability of disapproving students with special needs also increased by 34%, and when the number of students without special needs increased teachers' probability of approving the behaviors of these students also increased by 41%. Some previous studies showed similar results (Graden et al., 1983; Lago-DeLello, 1998; Wehby et al., 1995). Lago-DeLello suggested that teachers showed more critical behaviors to students with special needs and they approved behaviors of these students less. On the other hand Partin (2010) indicated that students with special needs engaged in the task minimally 80% of the lesson, at a very low frequency they exhibited inappropriate behaviors (i.e., talking and distracting other students), and teachers showed approval behaviors more than disapproval behaviors. The behaviors of students with special needs were not examined in this study. However Sucuoğlu et al. (2007) indicated that students with special needs did not show any problem behaviors during 65% of the observation intervals. The finding that teachers' probability of disapproving students with special needs when their number increased and their probability of approval behaviors increased when the number of students without special needs increases could be explained by teachers' attitudes towards these students. Bender and Smith (1990) showed that students with special needs were described as participating in the lesson less, showing more problem behaviors (e.g., talking without permission, and walking around), and all these negatively affected teacher attitudes. Because of negative attitudes, teachers may recognize and disapprove inappropriate behaviors of students with special needs more.

As a consequence, the results of this study showed that teachers working in mainstreaming classrooms recognized and responded to the behaviors of students with special needs less than their peers. Moreover, teachers exhibited disapproval behaviors more than approval behaviors and they used academic approval and disapproval more than social approval and disapproval. In addition, this study showed that student characteristics (whether having special needs or not) were a significant predictor of teacher behaviors. In order to provide generalization same study should be conducted with different grades, different programs, and with different teachers. Approval and disapproval behaviors of special education and general education teachers could be examined. Pre-service and in-service teacher training programs should include more information related to recognizing student behaviors, approving, and reward using.

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