

Full Length Research Paper

Turkish language teachers' and primary school teachers' attitudes toward their stuttering students

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Stuttering is a speech defect which is seen in all countries. Stuttering affects fluency of speech due to some physiological, psychological and neurological causes. Protractions, clogs and repeats are seen in stuttering. Since it will probably result in social handicaps, stuttering should be considered as more important than other speech defects. There are many physiological, mental and psychological factors affecting stuttering. Findings of researches show that in addition to environmental factors, psychological measures are also important in the treatment of stuttering. One of the factors which affect the student most is the teacher. The attitude of teacher affects stuttering student, too. The aim of this research is to determine the attitudes of teachers toward stuttering students. The research was carried out with the participation of 290 teachers who work in Malatya Province. A stuttering scale, developed by the researcher, was administered to 219 primary school teachers and 71 Turkish language teachers. The scale consists of failure, awareness and abstraction sub-dimensions. Teachers develop positive attitudes considering these sub dimensions. In addition, we also investigated whether attitudes of teachers toward stuttering students differ in terms of their gender, branches, length of service, having had stuttering student, and having read books on stuttering.

Key words: Stuttering, education of Turkish Language, language education, teacher attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a complex language skill which appears as a result of the combined functioning of many organs and which has an intellectual dimension. Observable deficiencies in the complex structure of this language skill can cause speech disorders. Problems that result solely from intelligence can also cause speech disorders as can physical deficiencies, diaphragm disorders and deficiencies in or disorders of the vocal organs.

People with speech disorder are sometimes mocked, they can be embarrassed and they even be discriminated against by other individuals. As a result, individuals with speech disorders avoid communication with others because of these negative attitudes. This is a frequently encountered problem, especially in stutterers (Akgün, 2005).

Stuttering is a speech disorder which affects the fluency of speech for various physical, psychological and neurological reasons. Prolonged pauses/silence, sound prolongation, blocks and repetitions can be observed in

stuttering. Stuttering requires more attention than other speech disorders because various social handicaps can appear as a result of stuttering.

Some researchers emphasize that stuttering is an individual behavior which is the result of an emotional disorder and its symptoms are closely related to the personality of the stutterer. Stuttering is defined in many different ways as it includes complex behavior patterns. It can be said that stuttering is not a unique syndrome but rather a multi-causal case (Özgür, 2003; Dumanoğlu, 2006). Stuttering can be accompanied by language or articulation disorders (Korkmaz, 2008).

Stuttering is a speaking disorder which is seen in all regions of the world. The extensity of stuttering is 0.8% in the USA (St Louis et al., 1992), 0.72% in Australia, and 1.1% in the UK (Craig et al., 2002, cited by Pachigar et al., 2011). It was determined that 3 million people in the USA and that 55 million people worldwide stutter (Büchel and Sommer, 2004, cited by Aybay, 2009). Karacan

(2000) stated that the frequency of stuttering is approximately 3% and its extensity is approximately 1%. The numbers are different for Turkey. In a survey conducted on elementary school students near Ankara, the extensity of stuttering was found to be between 1.6 and 3.1% (Öztürk, 1994). Özdemir (2010) states that there are approximately 700,000 stutterers in Turkey when world figures are adapted to consider Turkey.

There are two tendencies in a stutterer when he/she is to participate in a conversation: the willingness to speak and desire not to stutter. The second predominates. The psychological explanation of this situation is the dilemma of perception; there are behaviors at two opposite poles (Aybay, 2009).

Psychological disorders can occur in an individual as a result of stuttering. It becomes difficult to motivate stutterers to seek treatment if they are avoiding society and if they have negative attitudes towards the disorder. A child becomes disconnected from a social life out of constant anxiety over his/her stuttering.

According to Johnson et al. (1963), stuttering is a problem which includes not only the speaker but also the audience. It includes not only the lack of fluency in the speaker, but also the reactions of the speaker and audience to that lack. They also stated that data should be collected about the reactions and attitudes of the audience towards the speaker and his/her speech, the reactions and attitudes of the speaker towards the audience, himself/herself and his/her own speech (Boyle, 2011) and the speaking behavior of the speaker as parts of the assessment of the problem of stuttering (Aybay, 2009 as cited by Akgün, 2005).

Boyle (2011) stated that raising awareness of the issues in stuttering is an important factor for overcoming problems concerning stuttering as it has influence on the development of any defensive mechanisms of the stutterer; in affective terms, the avoidance of fear. Awareness of adaptation methods should also be raised. The raising of awareness is only possible through education. Awareness is important for affective feedback, attention raising and the acquisition of fluent speaking skills. It provides a concentrated and internalized experience. A person can break the cycle of negative opinion; develop powers of attention control; ameliorate his/her speaking deficiency, become more fluent and willing to learn.

Stuttering children avoid talking to and establishing communication with people who have authority, such as teachers, school managers and adults. Communicating with these types of people over time can contribute a great deal to a child's psychological development. For this reason, it would be beneficial if such people took special steps in order to communicate with the child with the support of a counselor or an educator. It is known that factors such as heavy discipline applied on children of school age, pressure and civility can cause stuttering in children who may have the tendency to stutter because

of their families. For this reason, it is proposed that teachers and other adults should offer the child love, tolerance and respect at school and at home (Aybay, 2009).

The education offered by therapists is not sufficient to treat stuttering. If teachers lack knowledge about and tolerance for stuttering, the student can become more nervous and embarrassed and communication breaks down. For this reason, it is important to question teachers' attitudes towards stutterers (Pachigar et al., 2011; Turnbull, 2006).

Determining teachers' attitudes towards stuttering is an obligation as the number of stutterer students in Turkey is at a considerable level; teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards stutterers increase or decrease stuttering; and teachers should plan their lessons accordingly.

It is seen that research studies of stuttering conducted in Turkey mostly concern the fields of special education and medicine. There are few studies which examine stutterer students' situation in school life. When stuttering treatment methods are examined, it is seen that the treatment depends on many factors (İnal, 2009; Dumanoğlu, 2006; Madanoğlu, 2005; Akgün, 2005). The most important factor is school life. The teachers who influence the achievements or failures of stutterer students are the Turkish language and primary school teachers responsible for the students' acquisition of language skills. The teaching and improvement of language skills is the responsibility of primary school teachers in the 1st to 5th grades and the responsibility of Turkish language teachers in the 6th to 8th grades.

Teachers' attitudes towards stutterer students are very important. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to determine teachers' attitudes towards stuttering students and to determine whether teachers' attitudes differ or not according to variables such as gender, teaching department, level of seniority, whether or not they have stutterer students and whether or not they have read sources on stuttering.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The aim of a study is the most important criterion in determining the methodology and the design of that study. This study aims to find out teachers' attitudes towards stuttering and whether those attitudes vary depending on some demographic variables. When the aim of a study is to account for the research area or make general comments, the screening model would be preferred (Cohen et al., 2005). Screening models are suitable for describing the past or present conditions of a case (Karasar, 2005). Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) define studies aiming to describe a case thoroughly and carefully as descriptive studies. Thus, this study is a descriptive study applying a screening model.

Study group

The study consists of Turkish language and primary school

teachers working at primary schools in the City of Malatya. In 2011 to 2012 there were 623 primary school teachers and 263 Turkish language teachers in the Central District of Malatya. The study was piloted with the participation of 310 teachers. After the final completion of the scale, 290 teachers, 219 of whom were primary school teachers and 71 of whom were Turkish language teachers participated in the study.

Data collection instrument

A "Stuttering Attitude Scale" (SAS), developed by the researcher, was used to determine the teachers' attitudes towards stuttering. SAS is a 5-point Likert scale aiming to evaluate teachers' attitudes towards stuttering under three factors. The scale consists of 14 items and these 14 items account for the 48.252% of the variance. Five items in the first factor (Failure) state thought regarding the failure reasons of stuttering students. Five factors in the second factor (Awareness) state the teachers' awareness of stuttering. Three of the four factors in the third factor state that stuttering students should get separate education from normal students and one of the four items argue that stuttering students should get education together with normal students. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency values for sub factors are as follows: for *Failure* factor $\alpha = 0.712$, for *Awareness* factor $\alpha = 0.784$ and for *Abstraction* $\alpha = 0.753$.

FINDINGS

Findings and comments regarding the first sub-problem of the research

The distribution of values of teachers' attitudes towards stuttering is given in Table 1.

The mean points the participants teachers got from the scale are found to be: for *failure* sub-dimension at *Don't agree* level ($\bar{X} = 10.36$), for *awareness* sub-dimension at *Agree* level ($\bar{X} = 19.27$), and for *abstraction* sub-dimension at *Don't Agree* level ($\bar{X} = 8.21$). Thus, generally the participant teachers did not consider stuttering students unsuccessful; their awareness about stuttering students is high; and the teachers did not think stuttering students should be educated in distinct environments.

Findings and comments regarding the second sub-problem of the research

The t-test results of the question whether there is a significant difference between teachers' attitudes towards stuttering in terms of gender are given in Table 2.

When we look at the figures in Table 2, we see that in terms of gender there is not a significant difference between the teachers' points they got from *failure* sub-dimension [$t(261.70) = 0.40, p > 0.05$] and *abstraction* [$t(288) = 0.36, p > 0.05$] sub-dimension of stuttering scale. Regarding the points of awareness, however, there is a significant difference regarding awareness in terms of

gender [$t(284.6) = 2.29, p < 0.05$]. When the arithmetic mean of the groups is examined, it is seen that female teachers' awareness regarding stuttering ($\bar{X} = 19.78$) is higher than that of male teachers ($\bar{X} = 18.87$).

Findings and comments regarding the third sub-problem of the research

The t-test results of the question whether there is a significant difference between teachers' attitudes towards stuttering in terms of teachers' branches are given in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, there is not a significant difference between the teachers' points they got from *failure* sub-dimension [$t(288) = 0.64, p > 0.05$] and *abstraction* [$t(288) = 1.14, p > 0.05$] sub-dimension of stuttering scale. Regarding awareness points, however, there is a significant difference in terms of their branches [$t(288) = 2.08, p < 0.05$]. When we examine the arithmetic means of the groups, we see that Turkish Language teachers' awareness level ($\bar{X} = 20.00$) is higher than that of primary school teachers ($\bar{X} = 19.3$).

Findings and comments regarding the fourth sub-problem of the research

The t-test results of the question whether there is a significant difference between the attitudes of teachers who had had any stuttering student or not are given in Table 4.

As seen in Table 4, there is no significant difference between the points the participant teachers got from *failure* [$t(288) = 1.618, p > 0.05$] and *awareness* [$t(288) = 1.382, p > 0.05$] sub-dimensions of the stuttering scale. Regarding the points teachers got from stuttering students' abstraction sub-dimension, there is a significant difference between the teachers who had had stuttering students or not [$t(288) = 3.448, p < 0.05$]. When we have look at the points which reflect teachers' thoughts about stuttering students getting separate education or not, we see that the teachers' mean who had had stuttering students was ($\bar{X} = 7.67$) and the teachers' mean who had not had stuttering students was ($\bar{X} = 8.82$).

Findings and comments regarding the fifth sub-problem of the research

The t-test results of the question whether there is a significant difference between the attitudes of teachers who had read any book on stuttering or not are given in Table 5. seen in Table 5, in terms of whether the teachers had read any books on stuttering there is no significant difference between the points the participant

Table 1. Distribution of values of teachers' attitudes towards stuttering (n = 290).

Sub factor total points	Min. to Max.	\bar{X}	SD	Level
Failure	5-25	10.36	3.49	Don't agree
Awareness	5-25	19.27	3.44	Agree
Abstraction	4-20	8.21	2.89	Don't agree

Table 2. The t-test results of teachers' attitudes towards stuttering in terms of gender.

Dimensions	Gender	N	\bar{X}	S	Df	t	p
Failure	Female	126	10.26	3.60	261.70	0.40	0.69
	Male	164	10.43	3.42			
Awareness	Female	126	19.78	3.11	284.60	2.29	0.02*
	Male	164	18.87	3.63			
Abstraction	Female	126	8.21	3.05	288	0.36	0.971
	Male	164	8.22	2.77			

*p<0.05.

Table 3. The t-test results of teachers' attitudes towards stuttering in terms of branch.

Dimensions	Branch	N	\bar{X}	S	Df	t	p
Failure	Prim Sch Teac.	219	10.28	3.45	288	0.64	0.52
	Tur. Lang. Teac.	71	10.59	3.63			
Awareness	Prim Sch Teac.	219	19.03	3.51	288	2.08	0.04*
	Tur. Lang. Teac.	71	20.00	3.12			
Abstraction	Prim Sch Teac.	219	8.11	2.88	288	1.14	.266
	Tur. Lang. Teac.	71	8.55	2.90			

*p<0.05.

Table 4. The t-test results of attitudes of the teachers who had had stuttering students or not.

Dimensions	Stuttering student	N	\bar{X}	S	Df	t	p
Failure	Yes	153	10.04	3.30	288	-1.618	0.107
	No	137	10.71	3.68			
Awareness	Yes	153	19.53	3.37	288	1.382	0.168
	No	137	18.97	3.50			
Abstraction	Yes	153	7.67	2.61	288	-3.448	0.001
	No	137	8.82	3.07			

*p<0.05.

teachers got from awareness [t (288) = 0.971, p>0.05] sub-dimensions. As of the stuttering scale. Regarding the points teachers got from stuttering students' being more

unsuccessful [t (288) = 2,530, p<0.05] and whether they should be separated from normal students [t (288) = 2,483, p<0.05], there is a significant difference depending

Table 5. The t-test results of attitudes of the teachers who had read any books on stuttering or not.

Dimensions	Read any books	N	\bar{X}	S	Df	t	P
Failure	Yes	91	9.60	3.13	288	2.530	0.012*
	No	199	10.70	3.60			
Awareness	Yes	91	19.56	3.70	288	0.971	0.332
	No	199	19.13	3.31			
Abstraction	Yes	91	7.60	2.69	288	2.483	0.014*
	No	199	8.50	2.94			

*p<0.05.

on the teachers having read any books on stuttering or not. The teachers who had read books agree with the idea that stuttering students' are academically more unsuccessful ($\bar{X} = 9.60$) and they should be separated ($\bar{X} = 7.60$) less than the teachers who had not read any books on stuttering ($\bar{X}_{(Failure)} = 10.70$ and $\bar{X}_{(Separation)} = 8.50$).

Findings and comments regarding the sixth sub-problem of the research

The results of the Pearson test aiming to find out if there is any relation between the teachers' length of service and their attitudes towards stuttering are given in Table 6.

When we look at the correlation values between the teachers' thoughts about stuttering and their length of service, we see that there is only a significant, negative correlation between the teachers' awareness points and their length of service variable ($r = -0.300$). Thus we could argue that as the length of service increases, awareness about stuttering decreases.

DISCUSSION

Since primary school teachers and Turkish Language teachers are responsible for giving training on speaking skills, which are one of the bases of language skills, the treatment of speech disorders is primarily the responsibility of these teachers. The teachers should first focus on the reason for speech disorders, and then they should try to treat those disorders. Interdisciplinary studies should also be conducted to find out the reasons for speech disorders. Given the fact that speech has physical and mental components, in order to find out the reasons for stuttering, we should first consult with ENT, psychology and neurology specialists.

Regarding the teachers' attitude towards stuttering, there is no significant difference between genders' grades about language skills and academic failure;

regarding the awareness, however, both female and male teachers have more positive attitudes. According to these results we could argue that female teachers have a more affectionate attitude toward stuttering students and are more sensitive to their handicaps. Given the fact that teachers' attitudes have positive influences on the education of handicapped and disabled students; we should increase the attitude level of male teachers towards those students. In Türköz's study (2004), there was no significant difference between female and male teachers' attitudes towards stuttering students.

When we look at the attitude points of the teachers, there is no significant difference in language skills, academic failure and abstraction sub-dimension in terms of their branches; regarding the awareness sub-dimension however, Turkish language teachers had more awareness than primary school teachers. This might be due to the fact that Turkish language teachers took more courses related with teaching language skills and teaching speaking during their undergraduate years. Thus, we could argue that in the undergraduate curriculum of primary school teacher departments teaching language skill courses, especially a course on teaching speaking course should be included in the curriculum. In Türköz's study (2004), there was no significant difference between the stuttering attitudes of teachers teaching in the first and second stages of elementary education.

Primary school students are affected by the environment more than other children and negative attitudes cause these children to become more introverted, avoid communication and have negative habits in stuttering and other speech disorders; therefore, it is essential for primary school teachers to become aware of stuttering. In Aybay's study, stuttering children had more self-confidence than the children in the control group. Freud (1962) defines 6 to 12 years as the latency period. This period coincides with the school period and during this period the child becomes socialized and exits from egocentrism. At the start of this period, there is the seventh year crisis. If the child lacks support from his/her close relatives, she may lose confidence. In addition,

Table 6. The Pearson results of attitudes of the teachers depending on their length of service.

Parameter	Pearson test	Length of service
Failure	Pearson	-0.101
	P	0.086
	N	289
Awareness	Pearson	-0.300**
	P	0.000
	N	289
Abstraction	Pearson	0.079
	P	0.182
	N	289

** p < 0.01.

inter family controversies, teacher's behaviors without love or understanding cause these children not to overcome the crisis and they, therefore, develop psychopathological conditions such as stuttering or twitching.

Teachers are responsible for eliminating anxieties and building a trustworthy atmosphere (Aybay, 2009). Studies aiming to find out how to overcome these anxieties should be conducted and pre-service teachers should be trained about these issues during their undergraduate years. As the teachers' level of education increases, their positive attitudes towards stuttering increase (Pachigar et al., 2011).

In Yeakle and Cooper's study (1986), it was found that the teachers did not know how to behave to stuttering children. The teachers who had had stuttering students before and who had taken a speech disorder course, however, had more positive attitudes towards stuttering children (cited in Türköz, 2004).

When we look at the attitude points of the teachers in terms of having had stuttering students or not, we see that there is a significant difference between the point they got from language skills, academic achievement and awareness sub-dimension; regarding the abstraction dimension, however, the teachers who had had stuttering students agree with separate education less than the teachers who had not had stuttering students. Such being the case, stuttering students become more successful when they are not separated from other children and get in harmony with them. New studies should be conducted to see whether such issues emerge with other types of mainstreaming students and their teachers. When new studies aiming to find out the issues related with such handicapped children's understanding and narration skills, teaching Turkish (native tongue) could receive better foundation.

At awareness dimension, having read any books on stuttering or not did not cause any significant difference between the teachers' attitudes towards stuttering; the

agreement level of the teachers, who had read books on stuttering, about academic failure and failure in language skills and abstraction was less than those of the teachers who had not read any books. Thus, it becomes clear that those teachers who are aware of the stuttering make more contribution to the education of stuttering students. Therefore, teachers should be trained about stuttering and speech disorders both during undergraduate years and in-service education years. While those who had read books on stuttering had more awareness level than those who had not and why the difference was not significant is yet another question to be investigated. In Madanoğlu's study (2005), the final stuttering levels of children who had got education and who had not was compared; the mean point of children who had got education got higher points than those who had not.

Regarding the values of correlation between the teachers' length of service and their ideas on stuttering, there was a negative correlation at the intermediate level between awareness and length of service. Hence, as the length of service increased, the awareness of stuttering decreased. Training, resources and sensitivity on stuttering have increased in the past years which account for the fact that stuttering students do not avoid school as in the past and new teachers' awareness level is higher. As a result of this sensitivity, a course title "Special Education" has been included in the curriculum of fourth year students of education faculties for the past three years. Since this implementation is quite new, it was not investigated as a variable in this study. In the future new studies could be conducted investigating the effects of this variable.

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