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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reviewing Graduate Studies about First Step to Success Early Intervention Program in Turkey

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Abstract

Antisocial behavior follows a developmental process which starts with minor offenses and continues into major offenses in older children and adolescents. So, it is very important to determine antisocial behaviors and develop a preventing intervention program. There are only a few programs included family-school-community to deal with the problem or antisocial behaviors. One of these programs is *First Step to Success Intervention Program*. Effectiveness of the program has been proven in many studies. In the current study, it was aimed to review graduate studies in Turkey about the program. Within this context, only two theses and a dissertation were reached from database of Council of Higher Education, so it was seen that there were three studies about the program. According to the results of the study, it was seen that one of the conducted studies about first step to success early intervention program aimed to learn views of teachers, parents and counselors; others aimed to examine the effectiveness of the program on children. Focus of the studies was preschool children. Results of the all studies reviewed in the current study indicated that first step to success program was effective to decrease antisocial or problem behaviors.

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Introduction:-

Problem or antisocial behaviors seen at preschool period may have probability of reoccurrence in elementary school and there is a higher risk for ongoing problem behavior and long term negative effects (Feil et al., 2014). If antisocial behaviors do not be intervened, the behaviors may become more complex and destructive over time (Diken et al., 2011). Antisocial behavior follows a developmental process which starts with minor offenses (e.g. whining, teasing, noncompliance) and continues into major offenses (e.g. stealing, homicide) in older children and adolescents (Beard and Sugai, 2004). So, it is very important to determine antisocial behaviors and develop intervention program for preventing. Dealing with problem or antisocial behaviors efficiently, home-school-playground settings and key social agents within these settings such as parents-teachers-peers are very important aspects of intervention or prevention process (Diken et al., 2011). According to literature, families with teachers, rather than teachers alone, could have strong effect on antisocial behavior through intervention (cited by Beard and Sugai, 2004).

There is only a few programs included family-school-community for dealing with problem or antisocial behaviors. One of these programs is *First Step to Success Intervention Program* (Diken et al., 2011). First step to success program is considered a secondary-level intervention for at-risk kindergartens through to second graders who have notable signs of antisocial behaviors (Sumi et al., 2012; Diken et al., 2010; Loman et al., 2010; Carter and Horner, 2007; Sprague and Perkins, 2009). The program was developed by Walker et. al in 1997 (Golly et al., 1998; Blalock, 2008; Celik, 2012). In Turkey, program was translated and adapted into Turkish by Diken, Cavkaytar, Batu, Bozkurt and Kurtulmaz (2010). First step to success program consists of three modules (cited by Frey et al., 2013): (1) universal screening, (2) the school module, (3) the home module. The three modules of the program are based on extensive researches on school and home intervention procedures with children having challenging behavior and over a decade of work related to the universal, early screening of children at risk of school failure (cited by Frey et

al., 2013). *Screening Module* provides four screening and identification methods to determine children who are at risk for antisocial behaviors. These methods include “Tools based on views of teacher” and “Multiple evaluation methods including views of teacher and detailed observation”. Any of these four methods can be used for identification. *Class Module* include teacher, peers in the class and program counsellor who help for implementing of the program. Class module is applied in 30 school days. In this module it is aimed to get antisocial behavior under control in the class and to give positive behaviors instead of antisocial behaviors. For this purpose, teacher use a card with green and red sides, to provide visual stimulant to child about his/her behavior. If child enact in a true manner, green side of the card is showed to the child; if child enact in a wrong manner, red side of the card is showed to the child. Proper behaviors are noted within the specified period of the program; the child and other children in the class are rewarded when gaining the points indicated within the program. *Home Module* is started in 11th day of the program. This module includes daily activities/plays which parents play with their children in 15-20 minutes. Activities/plays include six different topics which are based on developing social skills of child and parents’ knowledge about relationships with their children. Program counsellor interviews with parents before implementing the program and explains how program is implemented at home. Also program counsellor supports parents by doing weekly interviews (Melekoglu et al., 2014).

In the current study, it is aimed to review graduate studies in Turkey about *first step to success early intervention program* that its effect on antisocial behaviors has been proven in lots of studies. Graduate studies may be thought as the beginning step of the academic studies and they are precious for scientific information and practicing the science. So, purpose of the current study is to examine graduate studies.

Method:-

The current study was aimed to review of master thesis and doctoral dissertations that were conducted about *First Step to Success Early Intervention Program* in Turkey. According to this aim, thesis and dissertations were searched on the database of Council of Higher Education (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>) by use of first step to success key word on 2nd April 2016. As a result of search, three thesis and dissertations were reached in this context, so it was seen that there were three studies about the program. It was intended to gain general perspective about postgraduate studies using first step to success early intervention program in Turkey. Thesis and dissertations examined one by one with document analysis which is a form of qualitative research method. Document analysis is a systematic evaluation for reviewing documents (Bowen, 2009). Researcher who uses document analysis method does not intervene in document and reflects context as it is (Bowen, 2009).

Results and Discussion:-

Master thesis and doctoral dissertations, examined within the study, are accessible as a full text on the database. Within the scope of the study, researcher reached two theses belonged to Celik, S. (2012), Tomris, G. (2012) and a dissertation belonged to Karaoglu, M. (2011). Master theses were conducted in Anadolu University, Department of Special Education and a doctoral dissertation was conducted in Marmara University Department of Preschool Education. When examined expiration date of theses and dissertation, it is seen that studies were handled over the past six decades.

One of the conducted studies about first step to success early intervention program aimed to learn views of teachers, parents and counselors (Tomris, 2012); others aimed to examine the effectiveness of the program on children. Thereby, one of the studies used semi-structured interview technique that is one of the techniques of qualitative research method; two of the studies used pretest-posttest experimental design with control group that is one of the techniques of quantitative research method.

Karaoglu (2011) aimed to examine effectiveness of *class and home based combine module* and *class only module* of first step to success program on problem behavior, social skills and academic engagement time of 5-6 years old children. She used Turkish version of the program adapted by Diken, Cavkaytar, Batu and Kurtyilmaz (2010). Celik (2012) aimed to examine the effectiveness of preschool version of first step to success early intervention program on 36-72 months old Turkish children’s problem behavior and social skills (she used program as class and home based combine module). Tomris (2012) aimed to determine views of teachers, parents and counsellors about preschool version of first step to success early intervention program and about application of the program. Also, she aimed to get suggestions about the program from them. Celik and Tomris used Turkish version of preschool version of the program adapted by Diken, Arıkan, Çolak and Bozkurt (2011; cited by Celik, 2012). When examining the aims of

the studies, all of them focused on preschool children. Also, one of the studies (Karaoglu, 2011) aimed to see effectiveness of the program on academic engagement time as well as problem behavior and social skills. Researchers studied about both class module and home module of first step to success early intervention program. Also, it was seen that studies of Celik (2012) and Tomris (2012) produced from a project and each of the studies handled different aspect of the research. So, participants were same in these studies.

When examining the study groups, it is seen that Karaoglu (2011) worked with 5-6 years old and Celik (2012) worked with 3-6 years old children. Tomris (2012) worked with teacher and parents of preschool aged children and counselors. In this aspect, it may be said that preschool version of first step to success program is focused in graduate studies in Turkey.

Karaoglu (2011) conducted the doctoral dissertation with 24 preschool children. There were three working group: experimental group 1, experimental group 2 and control group. Each working group consisted of eight children. Participants of the first step to success program (experimental groups) were 16 children from 16 classrooms and their teachers and parents. Children at experimental group 1 received class and home based combine module and children at experimental group 2 received class only module of first step to success program.

Celik (2012) conducted the thesis with 22 preschool aged children without any developmental disabilities (38-76 months old). Also, 22 teacher, 11 parents and six guidance counselor for first step to success program (counselors are responsible for conducting the first step to success program successfully at classroom and home, also they are responsible for guiding to families and teachers) attended to the study. So, totally 61 people attended to the study. She divided the participants into two groups: experimental group and control group. According to this, experimental group was consisted of 11 children, 11 teacher, 11 parents and six guidance counselor; control group was consisted of 11 children and 11 teachers.

Tomris (2012) conducted the thesis with 11 preschool teachers, 11 parents and six counselors to determine their views and suggestions about the first step to success program.

Karaoglu (2011) used *Social Skills Rating System-SSRS* for determining the social skills, also determining problem behaviors and academic competence related to social skills. Karaoglu also used *Information Form* for getting the information about the families and calculated the *academic engagement time*, looked *consistency between observers* and *reliability of implementation*. Celik (2012) used *Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scale* for evaluating problem behaviors and social skills, and used *Parent and Teacher Satisfaction Form for First Step to Success Program* for social validity of research. Tomris (2012) collected data with semi-structured interview and questionnaire formed by the researcher. It can be seen that all of the researchers used behavioral scales and none of them used developmental scales. It may be suggested that besides evaluating antisocial or problem behaviors, development of children can be evaluated and compared with pretest and posttest.

According to duration of implementation, Karaoglu (2011) implemented the program during school days of two month time for class module and she implemented the home module for six weeks; Celik (2012) and Tomris (2012) conducted the study during 30 school days. According to application of the first step to success program, class module is applied in at least 30 school days. So, it is seen that all of the studies met required time of the program.

When examining the key words used for studies, Karaoglu (2011) used key words of *first step to success*, *early intervention*, *problem behavior*, *social skills* and *academic engagement time*. Celik (2012) used key words of *first step to success*, *early intervention*, *prevention*, *problem behaviors* and *social skills*. Tomris (2012) used key words of *early childhood education*, *problem behaviors* and *preventing problem behaviors*. Inartificially all the studies used mutual key words such as *problem behavior*. Experimental studies of Karaoglu and Celik generally used mutual key words; only key words of *academic engagement time* and *prevention* were different. It is seen that key words were associated with the definition of the program.

When examining the applications conducted in the theses and dissertation, Karaoglu (2011) studied with 5-6 years old preschool children divided in three groups. There were two experimental groups. One of the experimental groups received class and home based combine module and other received class only module of first step to success program. Problem behaviors and social skills were evaluated; academic engagement time was calculated by means of direct observation. Also, demographic information about families was collected. Fidelity of application was also

assessed. According to results of the study, it is found that problem behaviors decreased in each groups. So, researcher looked for results of analysis between groups to determine which application is predominant. According to this, it was seen that class and home based combine module was most effective. Consequently, when class and home based combine module was implemented, problem behaviors of children decreased significantly with respect to control group. When examining the analysis within the groups for experimental group received only class module and control group, it was seen that there were differences between results of pretest and posttest; when comparing with other groups, there was no significant difference. According to results of the study, researcher explained that first step to success program had more effect on externalized problem behaviors rather than internalized problem behaviors. Results about social skills indicated that there was an improvement in each experimental group (for class and home based combine module and class only module) when compared with control group. Also, results about academic engagement time indicated that first step to success program has effect on academic engagement time. Beard and Sugai (2004) conducted a study for examining the effects of first step to success program involving (a) teacher-directed and (b) a combination of teacher- and parent directed strategies on the behaviors of elementary school children at risk for antisocial behavior. They found that interventions involving teachers and parents were associated with decreases in problem behaviors in the classroom; its effect maintained over one academic school year after intervention. It may be concluded that according to the study of Karaoglu (2011) and study of Beard and Sugai (2004), first step to success program is most effective when class and home module are used together.

Also, Ozdemir (2011) conducted study with children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder to evaluate first step to success program on children's academic engagement behaviors. She worked with four 7-year-old children. Results of the study revealed that all children's level of academic engagement behaviors increased with the introduction of first step to success program and at three month's follow up. Also, according to follow up data at two years indicated that three of children continued to display high level of academic engagement behaviors. These results may be interpreted that studies of Karaoglu and Ozdemir had parallel results: first step to success program has positive effect on children's academic engagement behaviors and time.

Celik (2012) studied with 36-72 months old children as two groups (experimental and control). Problem behaviors and social skills were evaluated; fidelity of application was assessed with *Application Reliability Checklists of the stage of FSS-PV Guidance Counselor, Teacher and Home Applications*. Also, views of teacher and parents were gotten by *Parent and Teacher Satisfaction Form for First Step to Success Program* for social validity of research. According to results of the study, there was no significant difference between three measurements of control group about problem behavior; but it was seen that pretest total problem behaviors score of experimental group was significantly high from posttest total score and follow up score. This result showed that first step to success program was effective on decreasing problem behaviors. Also, it was seen that there was not significant difference between total pretest-posttest-follow up social skills score of two groups. So, first step to success program did not make significant difference between control group and experimental group. According to data of social validity, teachers and parents were satisfied with the program; they soon noticed the differences in the target children's behaviors in class and home.

Tomris (2012) studied with teachers and parents of preschool aged children and counsellors. Semi-structured interview technique that is one of the techniques of qualitative research method was used in the study to collect data. According to results of the study, teachers and parents explained that they encountered problem behaviors during the preschool period at both class and home. The teachers also specified that problem behaviors of children influenced both students themselves and other students as well as teacher. The parents stated that this situation influenced them psychologically and emotionally and caused conflicts between the spouses. Teachers and the parents as well as the counsellors provided positive feedback regarding the changes observed in the behavior of students who received first step to success program. Teachers explained that they could use time better and work in a systematic and planned manner due to first step to success. Also, parents explained that they could spend better quality time with their children due to the program. Teachers, parents and counselors gave positive feedback about the program regarding the changes observed in the behaviors of children received first step to success program.

Diken, et al. (2011) worked on effectiveness of Turkish version of first step to success early intervention program on problem behaviors, social skills, and academic competence of at-risk students for antisocial behaviors in Turkey. They studied with 102 children (53 of them in experimental group, 49 of them in control group) and experimental group children's teachers and mothers. Researchers translated and adapted the program into Turkish. On adaptation of the first step to success program, the original program with three modules (first step screening, first step school

intervention program: class [contingencies for learning academic and social skills] and first step home intervention program: home-based) was kept the same with minor language and cultural modifications. Results of the study revealed that there were significant differences between the score of two groups on problem behaviors and social skills. While problem behavior scores of experimental group decreased significantly, social skill and academic competence score increased. Also, teachers and mothers of experimental group children reported high level of satisfaction about the program.

Also, Feil et al. (2014) conducted a cross-site randomized controlled trial. They studied with 126 preschool children with challenging behaviors divided into two groups: experimental (n: 65) and control groups (n: 61). Results of regression analyses indicated that children received first step to success intervention program had significantly higher social skills and significantly fewer behavior problems, across a variety of teacher- and parent-reported measures at post-intervention. Effect sizes for teacher-reported effects ranged from medium to large across a variety of social competency indicators; effect sizes for parent-reported social skills and problem behaviors were small to medium, respectively. Researchers concluded that preschool adaptation of the first step to success intervention program provides an opportunity to determine and intervene emerging antisocial behaviors and externalizing behavior disorders prior to school entry.

Frey et al. (2013) aimed to examine feasibility of preschool version of first step to success intervention program. They studied with 12 preschool children. According to results of the study, they indicated that preschool version of the program could be implemented with acceptable integrity by coaches and teachers in preschool settings. Also, social validity results revealed that perception of teachers and parents about the program was positive.

Many research conducted about first step to success program indicated that exposure to the program produced powerful and immediate behavior changes in kindergarten, first and second grade children who displayed antisocial or problem behaviors (Sprague and Perkins, 2009). Also, experimental studies showed that kindergarteners received the program improved positively in terms of academic engagement and aggressive behavior in both during and following implementation of the program (Carter and Horner, 2007).

So, it may be concluded from results of the studies mentioned in the current study that first step to success early intervention program is an effective program for preventing problem behaviors and supporting social skills and academic competences.

Conclusion:-

Graduate studies which were conducted about first step to success early intervention program in Turkey were reviewed in the current study. According to results, researchers (Karaoglu, 2011; Celik, 2012; Tomris, 2012) conducted their studies with preschool children. One of the conducted studies about first step to success early intervention program aimed to learn views of teachers, parents and counselors (Tomris, 2012); others aimed to examine the effectiveness of the program on children. Karaoglu (2011) aimed to examine effectiveness of *class and home based combine module* and *class only module* of first step to success program on problem behavior, social skills and academic engagement time of 5-6 years old children. Celik (2012) aimed to examine the effectiveness of preschool version of first step to success early intervention program on 36-72 months old Turkish children's problem behaviors and social skills. Tomris (2012) aimed to determine views of teachers, parents and counsellors about preschool version of first step to success early intervention program and about application of the program. All of the studies proven effectiveness of the first step to success program on children. Results of the studies are parallel with others.

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