

## Preschool Teachers' Practices to Support Children's Social Development

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine practices of teachers to support the social relations of children with their families, peers, teachers and institution personnel in the preschool period. This research was conducted with a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. The participants of the study were 24 pre-school teachers working in public schools. The study group of the study was determined by the criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods. The research was carried out by interview method and the data were collected using a semi-structured interview form consisting of two parts. In the first part of the interview form, there are questions about the participants' age, professional experience, educational level and type of institution they work in, and the second part includes questions about the practices of the participants to support children's social relations with their families, peers, teachers and institution staff. Content analysis method was used in data analysis. As a result of the research, it was revealed that the family was involved in educational activities to support children's relationships with their families, various activities were carried out in and out of the classroom to support children's peer relationships, and practices were made to increase teacher-child interaction to support children's relationships with their teachers. It was determined that in order to support the relations of the children with the staff, practices for communicating with them are also carried out.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood, Family, Peer, Social Competence, Social Relationship, Social Skills, Teacher

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a period of rapid changes in human life with growth, development and learning. In this period, the correct support of children's development forms the basis for their learning experiences in the following years. The early childhood period has a critical importance in a child's life in terms of cognitive, social and emotional aspects (Mustard, 2002). The period from birth to the age of five is a process in which children develop their basic capacities and acquire many skills in all areas of development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). From infancy, children begin to learn social development tasks in a family environment. Many values, rules and routines are learned when children start school in the preschool period. Children develop new and appropriate social behaviors through their relationships with adults and their peers (Davies, 2010; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). Children need adult guidance in their relationships with family, peers and other individuals around them, because children need to be aware of the norms related to interpersonal relationships (Lawhon & Lawhon, 2000). From the beginning of life, children learn many social behaviors through their relationships with their environment and develop them.

Healthy and supportive social relationships includes skills such as effective communication, active listening, developing positive relationships, collaborative problem solving, resolving conflicts in a constructive way, resisting negative social pressure, leadership, offering support and help when necessary, and protecting the rights of others (CASAL, 2020). The foundations of these skills are formed in the family environment and developed in the school environment. Children learn social rules and norms through their relationships with their parents. Through positive relationships between parent and child, skills such as respect, open communication, and solving problems by speaking are taught to children by parents through modeling. Later, these skills are observed in children's relationships with their peers and other adults (Amato, 2005). Schools also play an important role in the socially healthy development of children. The ability to successfully interact with peers and adults is one of the most important aspects of a child's development. Schools represent the most important environment in which children develop skills that are crucial for peer acceptance, as well as the ability to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg & Durlak, 2017; Gresham, 1988). Children who attend pre-school education develop new relationships with other adults other than their peers and family members, while also striving to fulfill certain responsibilities to adapt to their environment (McGinnis, 2016). These relationships, which are developed in the pre-school period, form the basis of children's social development.

In preschool education institutions, children's relationships with their peers and teachers are very important for both academic and social emotional development. In today's societies, children need much more social support in crowded classroom environments where students with culturally different characteristics, various abilities and motivations, and socio-economic disabilities are present (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Children's interactions with others and the meaningful relationships they establish with them deeply affect the quality of academic learning. Therefore, successful education programs integrate social, emotional and academic learning (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Supporting the social development of children from an early age and helping them to develop positive social relationships are among the most important objectives of early childhood education programs (Trawick-Smith, 2014). During this period, children need the guidance of teachers, who are among the most important people in their lives. The way the teacher communicates with children in the classroom, establishes rules for social interaction, and coaches for learning social skills from an early age, and the way children interact with active experiences in their environment are very important for social development (Jalongo, 2006; Weikart, 1998). For this reason, teachers' providing a stimulating social environment where children interact with peers and other individuals helps children to develop socially. Practices such as creating classroom environments that support social development, providing play opportunities that encourage social functioning, and direct teaching of social skills will enable children to develop their social relationships (Lynch & Simpson, 2010). Studies have shown that positive social behaviors are related to trust towards the teacher, and that the friendly attitude of the teacher during games and between peers plays an important role in the teacher-child and child-peer relationship (Howes, Hamilton &

Matheson, 1994; Poulou, 2017). In similar studies, there is a positive connection between teacher-child relationships and children's academic performance (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Camilli, Vargas, Ryan & Barnett, 2010), and learning social skills such as collaboration, helping, and sharing in the preschool period increases early school success (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura & Zimbardo, 2000; McClelland & Morrison, 2003). In addition, negative social behaviors such as attention problems and aggression have been found to negatively affect academic development (Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee & Marshall, 2012; Moffitt et al., 2011). In a social context, the relationships that children establish with other individuals around them affect their holistic development.

Children's relationships with people in their social environment differ, and relationships with family members and other individuals represent lifelong mental and social ties (Repetti, Taylor & Seeman, 2002). The social circles of children are mothers, fathers, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers and a network of relationships with people such as school staff. Relationships with all individuals within this network affect the development of the child. In the ecological theory, Bronfenbrenner (1992) revealed that human development occurs through long-term and regular interaction with people in the close vicinity of the individual, and defined these forms of interaction as proximal processes. According to Bronfenbrenner (1992), proximal processes can be encountered in actions between parent-child and child-child, and in situations such as learning new skills. The content and direction of proximal processes that affect development change systematically depending on the characteristics of the human being and the environment in which the process takes place. According to the ecological theory, changes occur in the development process through mutual interactions in the home and school environment where the development of the child takes place. It is important to understand and support children's development. There are studies in the literature on children's relationships with their family (Ibabe & Bentler, 2016; Pike & Oliver, 2017; Preston et. al., 2016; Repetti, Taylor & Seeman, 2002; Smorti & Ponti, 2018) peers (Denio, Keane, Dollar, Calkins & Shanahan, 2020; Ladd & Coleman, 1997; Sturaro, Van Lier, Cuijpers & Koot, 2011) and teachers (Chen et. al., 2020; Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Sandilos, Goble, Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2018). The child's relationships with the individuals around him serve the emergence of social skills and the development of social competence in the development process. In the preschool period, teachers can provide opportunities to support children's relationships with their families, peers, teachers, and other adults. In this study, different from the studies in the literature, the support provided by preschool teachers in the social relations of children with other individuals in their immediate environment was investigated in a multidimensional way in line with teacher practices. Social support practices in preschool period can provide more qualified learning opportunities. Application results can be used for the pre-school education program and the teacher's self-assessment. It is thought that supporting the social relations of children with their family, peers, teachers and institutional staff will contribute positively to their development and will guide the research studies and teacher practices on this subject.

The aim of this research is to examine preschool teachers' practices to support children's social development. For this purpose, the sub-objectives of the research are determined as the examination of:

- (1) Practices implemented in preschool education institutions to support the social relations of children with their families in pre-school education institutions,
- (2) Practices implemented in preschool education institutions to support the social relations of children with their peers in preschool education institutions,
- (3) Practices implemented in preschool education institutions to support the social relations of children with their teachers, and
- (4) Practices implemented in preschool education institutions to support the social relations of children with institution personnel (such as administrators and auxiliary staff).

## METHOD

### Research model

This study, which is based on the experiences of preschool teachers, aims to examine practices that support children's social development. For this purpose, the research was carried out with a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is about the description of how phenomena (events, experiences, concepts, situations, etc.), which we are aware of but do not have detailed information about, are perceived by individuals based on their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Christensen, Burke-Johnson & Turner, 2015). This study aims to reveal the experiences of teachers about how they support children's social relationships. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the experiences of the interviewees regarding events and concepts and to obtain information about different aspects of the subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). A phenomenological study emphasizes the experience itself (Merriam, 2015) and the essence of "what" is experienced and "how" it is experienced (Creswell, 2016). In this design, by focusing on a phenomenon, the researcher collects in-depth information about the participants' experiences of that phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005). The aim of this study, is to describe the practices of teachers to support the social development of children based on their experiences.

### Study group

The sample of this study consists of 24 teachers actively working in five different pre-school state education institutions and difference classes. While determining the study group of the research, criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. Purposeful sampling is a method used to choose a study group in which to explore, understand, gain insight, and where many things can be learned (Merriam, 2015). The aim of this study is to examine preschool teachers' practices. Criterion sampling helps to obtain in-depth data by obtaining many details from a small number of situations for a specific purpose (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2015). The basic criterion in determining the study group of the study is that teachers work with children between the ages of 4-6 in public schools. The variables related to the participants in the study were determined as age, professional experience, educational level and the type of institution where they work. According to the age variable, 3 participants (12.5%) were aged between 22-30, 15 participants (62.5%) were aged between 31-40 and 6 participants were aged between 41-50 (25%). According to the professional experience variable, 6 participants were in the range of 1-10 (23%) years of experience, 16 participants (66.7%) had between 11-20 years of experience and 2 participants (8.3%) had between 21-30 years of experience. According to the educational level variable, all of the participants (100%) were at the undergraduate level. According to the institution type variable, 18 participants (75%) worked in kindergarten and 6 participants (25%) worked in nursery class.

### Data collection tool

In this study, which focuses on the experiences of preschool teachers, the interview technique was used as the data collection method and four open-ended questions were asked to teachers through a semi-structured interview form. In the process of data collection, the researcher should be able to collect data with effective questions, and evaluate the new and different situations he encounters as an opportunity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The semi-structured interview form used as a data collection tool in the study consisted of two parts, and in the first part, questions were asked to the participants about their age, professional experience, education level and the type of institution where they worked. In the second part, there were questions aiming to reveal the experiences of preschool teachers regarding their practices to support children's social relations with family, peers, teachers and institution staff. In cases where the answers given by the participants were not sufficient, additional questions were asked. The semi-structured interview form provides flexibility to ask both basic and additional questions during the data collection process (Robson, 2011). Care was taken to ensure that the questions in the research form were appropriate, clear and understandable for the purpose of the

research. The opinions of 2 domain experts were obtained regarding the prepared form, a pilot interview was held with 2 participants, and the interview form was finalized.

### **Collection of Data**

The research data were collected using the interview method in the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. Necessary permission was obtained before the interviews and explanations were made to the participants about the purpose, scope and confidentiality of the research before starting the interviews. Each participant was interviewed individually for 20-25 minutes and the questions in the interview form were asked during the interviews. The data obtained during the interviews were recorded.

### **Analysis of data**

The data collected by the interview method in the study were analyzed using the content analysis method. Content analysis is a data analysis technique that aims to reach different themes and codes by analyzing data in depth (Krippendorf, 2013). During the data analysis process, a three-stage content analysis process was followed in defining, analyzing and reporting the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first stage, the data were reviewed and read in detail and similar statements were coded. Then, the themes representing the codes were determined and the resulting codes and themes were arranged. Finally, the data were defined, interpreted and reported. In the analysis of the research data, direct quotations reflecting the experiences of the participants regarding the findings were included, and codes were used in these quotations instead of participant information.

### **Validity and reliability**

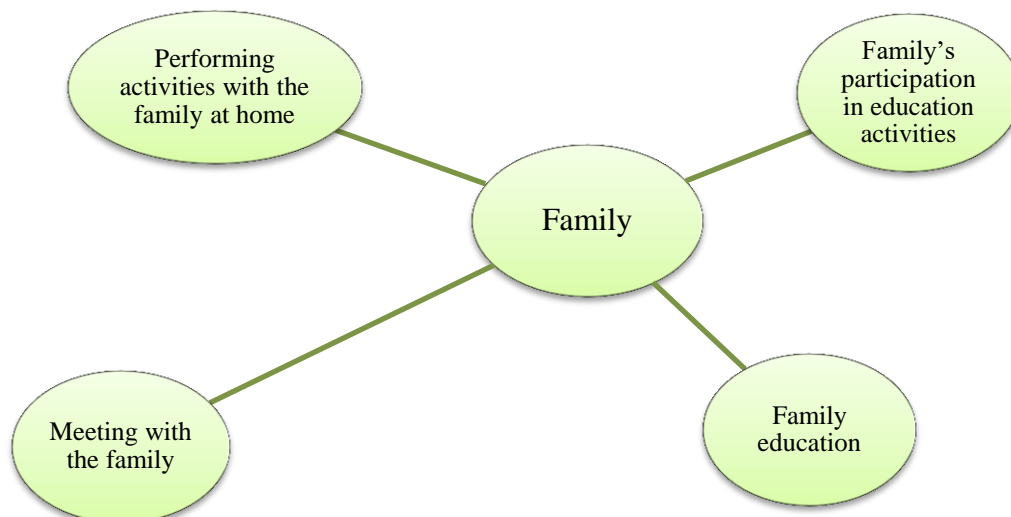
For reliability in qualitative research, necessary measures should be taken in the dimensions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and the research should meet these criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In this study, enough time was allocated to the interviews in order to ensure the credibility of the findings showing how compatible they were with reality, and when necessary, details about the experiences of the participants were accessed with additional questions. 20-25-minute interviews were made with the participating teachers for credibility in the study and long-term interaction was achieved. In order to ensure the transferability of the findings, showing to what extent the findings can be adapted to other contexts, the original data were transferred to the reader according to the emerging concepts and themes without being interpreted, and direct quotations were frequently included. In the study, the same findings were accessed with the same participants in the same context, that is, the coding for reliability was made by 2 experts separately and compared, and using the formula  $P = [Na / Na + Nd] \times 100$  (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the similarity rate was found to be 89%. The raw form of the interview data, the encodings made in the analysis process, and the notes taken were archived and made ready to be presented for confirmation review, in order to ensure the confirmability, which states that the findings of the study stem from the experience and thoughts of the participants, not the researcher.

### **Results**

In this part of the study, findings regarding the practices of preschool teachers to support the social development of children are included. The research findings are visualized in figures and tables and explained in detail by making direct quotations from the participants' views.

#### **1. Practices to support children's social relations with their families**

The first sub-problem of the study aims to determine the practices of preschool teachers to support children's social relations with their families. In Figure 1 below, practices for supporting family-child relationships according to the experiences of preschool teachers are included.



**Figure 1. Practices to support the family-child relationship**

When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that preschool teachers' practices to support children's social relations with their families are discussed in 4 dimensions. These practices aimed at supporting children's social relations with their families were stated to be the family's participation in education activities by 15 participants (37%), performing activities with the family at home by 13 participants (32%), meeting with the family by 8 participants (20%) and family education by 5 participants (11%). Table 1 below contains the codes of the 'family' theme, and the opinions of the participants related to these codes.

**Table 1. Codes and participant views for family theme**

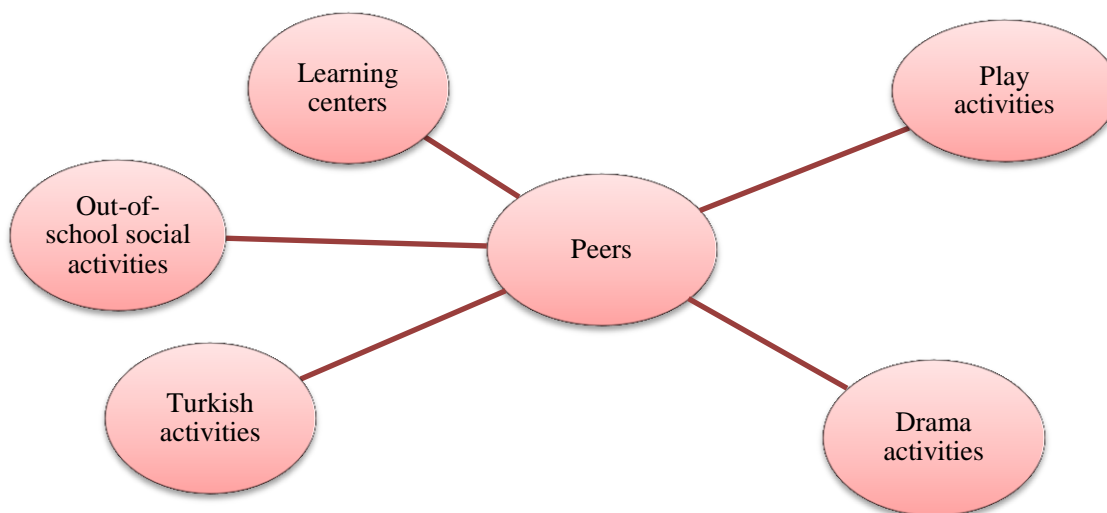
Theme	Codes	Participant Views
Family	Family participation in educational activities	In this process, teachers cooperate with parents and invite them to activities in the classroom, allowing the child and family to socialize and get to know each other better. They can socialize in games, drama events and culinary events (P.13).
	Performing activities at home with the family	The activities sent home as a continuation of the activities in the school and aimed at ensuring the participation of the family help the students to establish positive social relations between the parents and the family to participate in the education process (P.7).
	Meeting with the family	Maintains communication with classroom activities and after-school feedback. During the period we are in, we are in daily communication with instant messaging applications (P.23)
	Family education	Information is obtained about the families' perspective, attitude towards the child, and attitude at home, and the parents are helped on matters that require support. The child and family are supported with things like face-to-face meetings, activities with family participation, and work to be done in daily life, etc. (P.20).

When the findings regarding the first sub-problem of the study were examined, the majority of the participants stated that the practices that support family-child relationships are ensuring the participation of families in classroom activities. Considering that the family has an important place in the education of the child, family-child relationships can be supported by ensuring the participation of families in school activities. In other words, participants try to ensure that families participate in classroom activities in order to inform families about the activities at school and to adopt a common approach with the family in the development of the child. It was determined that the participants try to support the family-child relationship by having the children do various activities at home with their families. Conducting activities similar to school activities with families at home can increase the sharing of children with their families and support their relationships in a positive way. Thus, the achievements can be reinforced through cooperation between school and family. It was also

determined that the participants try to support family-child relationships by interviewing families and organizing training for families. In order to meet the needs of the child and family, parents should be informed about the development of the child. Thus, suitable environmental conditions can be provided to reveal the potential of the child.

## 2. Practices to support children's social relations with their peers

The second sub-problem of the study aims to determine preschool teachers' practices to support children's social relations with their peers. According to the experiences of preschool teachers, practices for supporting peer-child relationships are shown in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2. Practices to support the peer-child relationship**

When Figure 2 is examined, it is seen that the practices of preschool teachers to support children's social relations with their peers in the classroom are discussed in 5 dimensions. These practices aimed at supporting children's social relations with their peers were stated to be play activities by 18 participants (33%), learning centers by 15 participants (28%), out-of-school social activities by 9 participants (17%), drama activities by 8 participants (15%) and Turkish activities by 4 participants (7%). Table 2 below contains the codes of the 'peer' theme, and the opinions of the participants related to these codes.

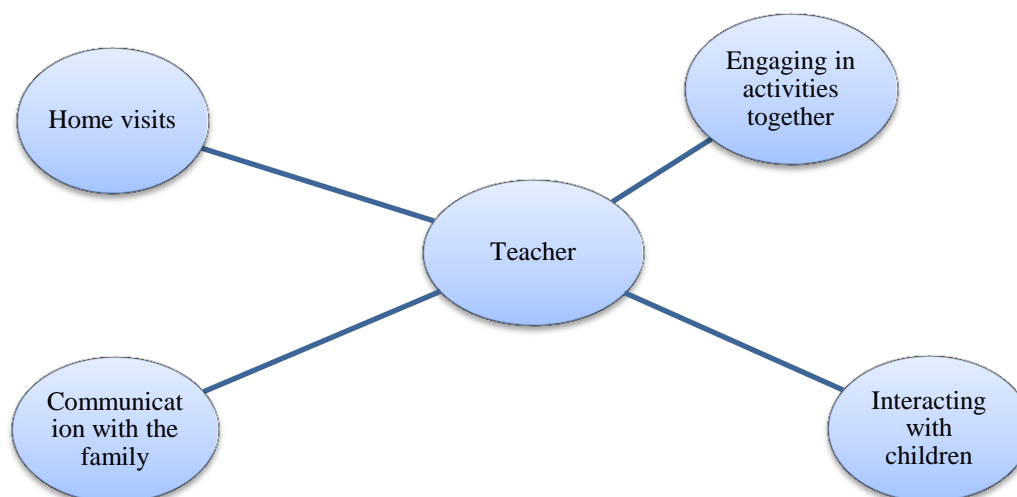
**Table 2. Peer theme, codes and participant views**

Theme	Codes	Participant Views
Peer	Play activities	Play is the most important socialization tool that allows children to form peer groups. Toys in playhouse, puppet and block centers are materials that allow children to interact more easily with each other and support social skills (P.11).
	Learning centers	Chatting with their peers at the start of the day's activity and communicating in various roles while playing games in the centers support their social relations (P.7).
	Out-of-school social activities	Social activities and group games with out-of-school friends are practices for children to socialize effectively with their peers (P.4).
	Drama activities	The teacher can enable the children to establish a mutual dialogue with the drama method, and the social relations of the children are supported with group drama plays (P.15).
	Turkish activities	Socialization is ensured through various story, conversation, drama activities, etc. (P.24).

When the findings related to the second sub-problem of the study were examined, most of the participants stated that play activities are one of the practices that will support the social relations of the child with their peers. Considering the importance of play in the development of the child, it can be said that teachers should use play activities to support social development. It is observed that the participants try to support peer relationships with different practices such as playing games with their peers, sharing toys, and cooperating in learning centers. It was determined that they think that especially free games and group games are practices that support social development and that they use these practices. It was revealed that the participants used story and drama activities to support peer relationships, and that they tried to raise awareness about friendship relationships in children through these activities. Participants also stated that there are practices that support children's peer relationships in social activities outside of school. It can be said that participants think that children's spending time together with their peers outside of school and taking part in various social activities will contribute to the development of friendship relations.

### 3. Practices to support children's social relationships with their teachers

The third sub-problem of the study aims to determine the practices of preschool teachers to support children's social relations with their teachers. According to the experiences of preschool teachers, practices to support teacher-child relationships are shown in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3. Practices to support the teacher-child relationship**

When Figure 3 is examined, it is seen that preschool teachers' practices to support children's social relations with their teachers in the classroom are discussed in 4 dimensions. These practices aimed at supporting children's social relations with their teachers were stated to be were stated to be engaging in activities together by 23 participants(44%), interacting with children by 15 participants (29%), home visits by 10 participants (19%) and communication with the family by 4 participants (8%). Table 3 below shows the codes of the 'teacher' theme, and the opinions of the participants related to these codes.



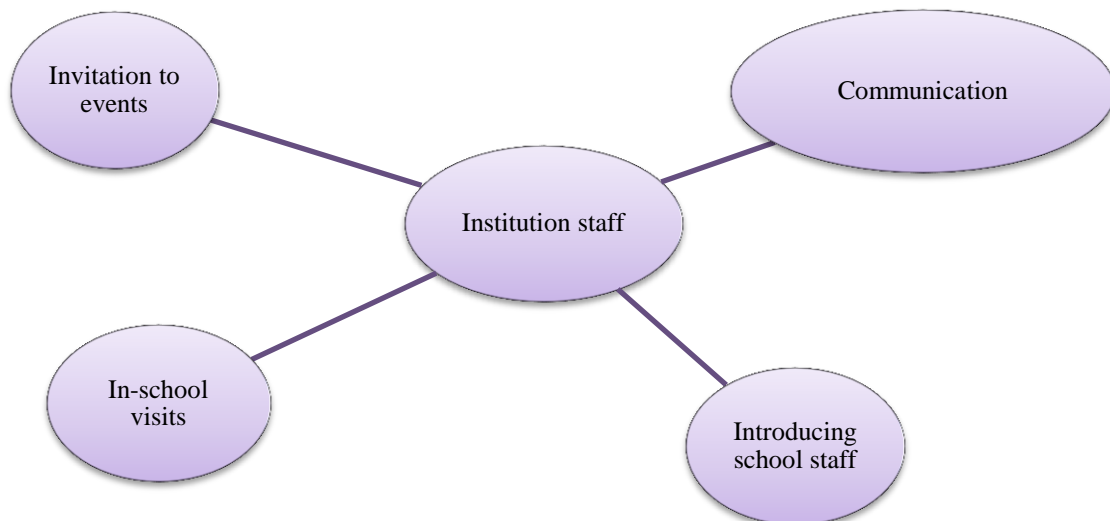
**Table 3. Teacher theme, codes and participant views**

Theme	Codes	Participant Views
Teacher	Doing activities together	The teacher supports social relations with the child by playing games or painting together in free time (P12).
	Interacting with the child	I try to make him understand that he is an important individual and is cared for by his teacher by greeting him with a morning greeting, giving feedback to each participation, and making eye contact while talking (P.21).
	Home visits	Home visits and interviews as well as classroom practices improve relations with the teacher (P.2).
	Communication with the family	After communicating with the family and obtaining deep information about the child, focusing on social and emotional development activities, preparing a special activity for establishing a bond with the child, making him trust me (P.16).

When the findings regarding the third sub-problem of the study were examined, most of the participants stated that the practices that support the teacher-child relationship are doing activities with the child. The teacher being with the child at the time of the activity and performing activities with him / her can support a positive teacher-child relationship. It can be said that the participants do activities together to establish close relationships with the child and to make the children feel closer to the teacher. Moreover, it was determined that the participants also emphasized the necessity of interaction with the child in social development. In this respect, accepting the child as an individual, showing respect and ensuring his trust were among the practices of teachers. Participants stated that home visits and communicating with the family are practices that support the teacher-child relationship. It can be said that they think that getting to know the child and their family is necessary to support the teacher-child relationship. Observing the child in the home environment and interacting with family members can positively support children's relationship with their teacher.

**4. Practices to support children's social relations with institution staff**

The fourth sub-problem of the study aims to determine the practices of preschool teachers to support children's social relations with the institution staff. Practices to support institution personnel-child relations according to the experiences of preschool teachers are included in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4. Practices to support the institution staff-child relationship**

When Figure 4 is examined, it is seen that the practices of preschool teachers to support children's social relations with the institution staff are discussed in 4 dimensions. These practices aimed at supporting children's social relations with institution staff were stated to be communication by 11 participants (30%), invitation to events by 11 participants (30%), introducing school staff by 10 participants (27%) and in-school visits by 5 participants (13%). Table 4 below contains the codes of the "institution personnel" theme, and the opinions of the participants related to these codes.

**Table 4. Institution staff theme, codes and participant views**

Theme	Codes	Participant Views
Institution staff	Communication	When the child leaves the house and comes to school, he encounters and gets to know more than one person. In this process, the teacher introduces the tasks of the people he / she encounters outside, and in addition, it is ensured that they communicate with the auxiliary staff, by saying good morning, good work and thank you (P.10).
	Invitation to activities	Enabling them to participate in activities in the classroom, participating by inviting them to school activities (P.5).
	Introducing school staff	Firstly, to introduce them and their position, then to greet them and explain that they can seek help when necessary (P.14).
	In-school visit	School trips, meeting with staff and activities for getting to know our environment are held (P.23).

When the findings related to the fourth sub-problem of the study were examined, it was determined that the participants stated that one of the practices that would support institution personnel-child relations is communicating with the personnel. Making the necessary explanations to children about greeting, talking to the school staff and asking for help when necessary were among the practices of the teachers. It can be said that teachers care about supporting the relationships of children not only with their teachers and friends but also with other adults at school, and various practices are made to this end. Inviting the staff of the institution to events and ensuring their participation on special occasions and celebrations are stated as practices that will support the relations of children with the staff. Teachers' other practices included introducing school staff and departments of the school to children in the first days of school. It can be said that these practices are aimed at making children feel more comfortable and safer at school.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The relationships of children with the individuals around them affect their adaptation to their environment and the acquisition of positive social behaviors. In the socialization process, many behaviors are learned through observation or modeling. For this reason, adults' evaluation of themselves in terms of social relations and using these behaviors to support children's social development helps children to survive this period successfully. Providing adult support for children's relationships with others also positively affects social development. In this study, it was aimed to examine teacher practices aimed at supporting the social relations of children with their families, peers, teachers and institution personnel in the preschool period.

When the findings related to the first sub-problem of the study were examined, most of the participants stated that the practices that support family-child relations are ensuring the participation of families in classroom activities. Because families have an important role in the education of the child, family-child relationships can be supported by ensuring families to participate in school activities. It can be said that the participants try to ensure that families participate in classroom activities in order to inform the families about the activities at school and to adopt a common approach with the family in the development of the child. Research reveals that the parent-child relationship affects social skills (Dryburgh et. al., 2020; Ferreira et. al., 2016; Heatly & Votruba-Drzal, 2017). It was determined that participants try to support the family-child relationship by enabling them to do various activities with their families at home. Conducting activities similar to school activities with families at home can increase the sharing of children with their families and support their relationships in a positive way. Thus, the achievements can be reinforced through cooperation between school and family. Research

findings show that the family's interaction with the child affects children's social behavior (Preston et al., 2016; Williams & Berthelsen, 2017) and that school-family collaboration is necessary (Sheridan, Smith, Moorman Kim, Beretvas & Park, 2019). It was also determined that the participants try to support family-child relationships by interviewing families and organizing training for families. The social behaviors of the child are affected by the social relationships they establish within the family. Open communication among family members supports the acquisition of positive social behavior. In this direction, parents should be informed about the development of the child in order to meet the needs of the child and the family. Thus, suitable environmental conditions can be provided to reveal the potential of the child. The supportive home environment plays a critical role in the development process of young children (Valadi, Gabbard & Hooshyari, 2020). Bronfenbrenner (1977) stated that mutual interactions including both imitation and reinforcement in parent-child relationship are necessary for the formation of strong bonds between the parent and child. Positive relationships established between family and school not only meet the social needs of children, but also make teachers and families feel valued and less stressed (Webster-Stratton, 1999). The results regarding the effect of family relations on the social development of the child support the results of the practices regarding the family-child relationship obtained in this study.

When the findings related to the second sub-problem of the study were examined, it was revealed that the participants utilized different activities in the classroom to support children's relationships with their peers. Most of the participants stated that play activities are among the practices that will support the social relations of the child with their peers. Considering the importance of play in social development, it can be said that this is an expected result. Games played with peers in early childhood support the learning of social behaviors such as cooperation, collaboration and sharing (Ridgway, Quiñones & Li, 2020). It is observed that the participants try to support peer relationships with different practices such as playing games with their peers, sharing toys, and cooperating in learning centers. It was determined that they think that especially free games and group games are practices that support social development and that they use these practices. Studies have revealed that independent games with natural materials support prosocial behavior (Brussoni, Ishikawa, Brunelle & Herrington, 2017) and that play is effective in developing long-term relationships in a social context (Coelho, Torres, Fernandes & Santos, 2017; Paulus, 2016). It was revealed that the participants used story and drama activities to support peer relationships, and that they tried to raise awareness about friendship relationships in children through these activities. Participants also stated that there are practices that support children's peer relationships in social activities outside of school. It can be said that participants think that children's spending time together with their peers outside of school and taking part in various social activities will contribute to the development of friendship relations. Social development is the process of learning the information children need to manage their behavior, and to establish and maintain relationships (Jones & Kahn, 2017). In this process, the support of children's relations with their peers by the teachers helps them to gain behaviors related to social development. Preschool teachers can create a positive social-emotional classroom climate by including democratic practices that which support social responsibility, equality and empathy among children (Howes, 2000). The practices of teachers to support children's social relations with their peers inside and outside the classroom are similar to the other research results.

When the findings regarding the third sub-problem of the study were examined, it was determined that preschool teachers emphasized the interaction with the child in the classroom and the importance of the family. Most of the participants stated that the practices that support the teacher-child relationship are doing activities with the child. The teacher being with the child at the time of the activity and performing activities with him / her can support a positive teacher-child relationship. It can be said that the participants do activities together to establish close relationships with the child and to make the children feel closer to the teacher. Moreover, it was determined that the participants also emphasized the necessity of interaction with the child in social development. In this respect, accepting the child as an individual, showing respect and ensuring his trust were among the practices of teachers. Research findings show that emotional support provided to children affects the teacher-student relationship (Moen, Sheridan, Schumacher & Cheng, 2019), that a positive teacher-child relationship plays an important role in learning social skills (Poulou, 2017; Wu, Hu, Fan, Zhang & Zhang, 2018)

and that a close relationship with the teacher has an effect on learning (Gagnon, Huelsman, Kidder-Ashley & Lewis, 2019). Research results are similar to the practices of teachers obtained in this study regarding closeness and interaction with the child. Participants stated that home visits and communicating with the family are practices that support the teacher-child relationship. It can be said that they think that getting to know the child and their family is necessary to support the teacher-child relationship. Observing the child in the home environment and interacting with family members can positively support children's relationship with their teacher. Research findings showed that teachers think that family support is important in child development (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016) and that parent-child attachment affects teacher-child relationships (Verissimo et. al., 2017). In this study, it was revealed that the relationships with the family, the first social environment of the child, were effective in supporting the social relations of the child with the teacher and that teachers performed various practices in this direction.

When the findings related to the fourth sub-problem of the study were examined, it was determined that the participants stated that one of the practices that will support institution personnel-child relations is communicating with the personnel. Making the necessary explanations to children about greeting, talking to the school staff and asking for help when necessary were among the practices of the teachers. It can be said that teachers care about supporting the relationships of children not only with their teachers and friends but also with other adults at school, and various practices are made to this end. School has a supportive role for children to be successful in their social life. Schools are environments where children gain experiences that will enable them to establish positive relationships with others and display them in daily life (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley & Weissberg, 2017). Inviting the staff of the institution to events and ensuring their participation on special occasions and celebrations are stated as practices that will support the relations of children with the staff. Teachers' other practices included introducing school staff and departments of the school to children in the first days of school. It can be said that these practices are aimed at making children feel more comfortable and safer at school. Studies show that social relationships based on trust among school members affect children's success (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), and that school-based social learning programs are effective (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak & Weissberg, 2017). In this respect, it can be said that developing the relationship of the child with the institution personnel is an application that supports social development.

When the practices of preschool teachers to support the social development of children were examined in line with the teachers' experiences, it was determined that the participants carried out various practices to support children's relations with family, peers, teachers and institution staff. In these practices obtained as a result of teacher experiences, it was determined that the participants made the family take part in educational activities in order to support the relations of the children with their families and that they tried to support their relations by doing various activities with their children at home. It was revealed that the participants thought that family support was necessary in the social development of the child and that they communicated with the family to ensure this. Parents were informed about child development and their relationship with the child through family training. It was determined that the participants carried out various activities in and out of the classroom to support children's peer relationships. It was revealed that the games that children play as a group with their friends are the most used activities in supporting peer relationships. It was determined that the teacher participated in activities with the child and interacted positively with the child in order to support children's relations with their teachers. At the same time, the participants stated that they obtained help from the family to support their relationship with the child. Finally, it was determined that the participants carried out various practices in order to support the relations of children with the institution staff, and that activities were carried out for children to communicate with these people.

Social development refers to the relationships of individuals with other individuals and their behaviors in this relationship. From the moment children are born, they go through a socialization process in order to adapt to their environment. In this process, they gain social behaviors such as establishing and maintaining relationships with others, obeying rules, taking responsibility and many more. Social behaviors acquired during childhood form the basis of later behaviors in social

development. In line with the results of the research, it may be suggested to include more applications to support the social development of children in early childhood education programs. Practices can be made systematic by preparing educational programs to support the social development of children. Attending to applied training programs can be suggested to teachers in order to improve their competence in this regard. Practical training activities for families, peers and institution personnel can be organized to support the social relations of children with individuals in their immediate surroundings.

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