

The Social Development of Young Children with Externalizing Behavior Problems

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Abstract

We investigated the social development of young children with externalizing behavior problems. The subjects were 1,498 nursery school children (1,250 typically developing children and 248 children requiring special care, including those with externalizing behavior issues). Our study revealed that children with externalizing behavior problems had difficulties in group activities, language development, and emotional development in early childhood. The results suggested that the “Social Development Checklist” was useful for understanding children with special needs and creating individual educational programs for them.

Key words: social development, externalizing behavior problems, young children, nursery school

Purpose

Recently, the number of children who have difficulty adapting to groups in daycare settings has increased (Hongo et al., 2003). Some children often get into trouble with their peers, while others cannot control their emotion and behavior well. Some of them are diagnosed, but others are not until they grow up and become adolescents. Regardless of the diagnosis of disabilities, such children need more support than others. In general, they not only have problems with intellectual development, but social development as well. Accordingly, it is necessary to understand their social development and design individual educational programs for them.

To evaluate children’s social development, Hongo et al. (2015) created the “Social Development Checklist”, which has five domains: (1) Group activities, (2) Peer relationships, (3) Language development, (4) Cognitive development, and (5) Emotional development. Hongo et al. (2016) investigated the characteristics of social development among children requiring special

care. We found that children needing special care faced challenges in group activities and peer relationships, as well as delays in language, cognitive, and emotional development.

It is likely that the features of social development differ depending on children's problems. Oh-uchi, Nagao, and Sakurai (2008) revealed that there was a positive correlation between self-assertiveness and externalizing problems, but a negative correlation between self-assertiveness and internalizing problems. It is especially hard for nursery school teachers to understand and care for children with externalizing behavior issues. Therefore, our study aimed to explore the traits of young children with externalizing behavior problems in relation to their social development.

Method

1. Subjects

The subjects were 1,498 nursery school children. They included 1,250 typically developing (TD) children (294 two-year-olds, 233 three-year-olds, 244 four-year-olds, 284 five-year-olds, and 195 six-year-olds); 248 children with no specific medical diagnosis requiring special care, who face challenges adapting to groups in the nursery schools (47 two-year-olds, 56 three-year-olds, 55 four-year-olds, 60 five-year-olds, and 30 six-year-olds). We divided children needing special care in two groups: children with low externalizing behavior problems (EX-Low) and those with high externalizing behavior problems (EX-High).

We asked nursery school teachers to check on the social development of the children in their classrooms using the "Social Development Checklist". Furthermore, in case there were children requiring special care in their classrooms, we asked the teachers to complete the "Behavior Checklist for Children Requiring Special Care".

2. Research Period

We asked nursery school teachers to complete the "Social Development Checklist" and the "Behavior Checklist for Children Requiring Special Care" from November 2013 to February 2014.

3. Measures

(1) The "Behavior Checklist for Children Requiring Special Care" was used to determine the characteristics of children with special needs. There were 14 items in the checklist; six were about externalizing behavior problems (Table 1). We assigned a score of 2 points to the answer "He/She most likely does it," 1 point to "He/She likely does it," and 0 to "He/She likely does not do it."

The scores for externalizing behavior problems varied between 0 and 12. We divided

children requiring special care into two groups. The total score of externalizing behavior problems among EX-High children was 6 and over. The total score of externalizing behavior problems among EX-Low children was under 6.

Table 1 Items of Externalizing Behavior Problems

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1. He/She cannot listen to the teacher throughout the whole activity.
 2. He/She does not follow the teacher's directions to "wait."
 3. He/She moves to a different topic in the middle of a conversation.
 4. He/She breaks the rules of play and acts selfishly.
 5. He/She does not follow the directions when moving with a group.
 6. He/She makes noise under the influence of other children.
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(2) The "Social Development Checklist" was used to evaluate children's social development. The checklist consists of five domains: (1) Group activities, (2) Peer relationships, (3) Language development, (4) Cognitive development, and (5) Emotional development. Each domain has 10 items. Table 2 displays the items of group activities, language development, and emotional development. We assigned 1 point to the answer "He/She can or could do it," and 0 to the answer "He/She cannot or could not do it" or "I don't know."

Table 2 Items of Social Development Checklist

Group activities

- G1. He/She can move with other children.
 - G2. He/She can reproduce actions of daily life during play (e.g., eating).
 - G3. He/She can play at house by himself/herself.
 - G4. He/She can move in line without using the rope.
 - G5. He/She can engage in social pretend play with other children.
 - G6. He/She can play a game with simple rules.
 - G7. He/She can engage in cooperative play with four or five children
 - G8. He/She can concentrate on listening to his/her teachers for about 15 minutes.
 - G9. He/She can create an original scenario with other children and engage in social pretend play using this scenario.
 - G10. He/She can play a group game using rules without the teacher's help.
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Language development

- L1. He/She can point to things in a picture book.
- L2. He/She can say the names of things more than three times.
- L3. He/She can speak in two-word sentences ("mom milk").
- L4. He/She understands both "big" and "small."

- L5. He/She can correctly answer the question, "When you are hungry, what do you do for yourself?"
- L6. He/She understands both "strong" and "weak."
- L7. He/She can talk about events that happened yesterday.
- L8. He/She can say the names of three kinds of flowers.
- L9. He/She can play a game of riddles.
- L10. He/She can name the day before Friday (Thursday).

Emotional development

- E1. He/She can understand a crying face and a laughing face.
 - E2. If he/she is praised, he/she repeats the same behavior over and over.
 - E3. He/She tries to do everything by himself/herself.
 - E4. He/She wants to show the things that he/she made.
 - E5. He/She expresses his/her emotions using words (e.g., "I'm angry").
 - E6. Even if other children act unpleasantly toward him/her, he/she can control his/her emotions and say "Please stop it."
 - E7. He/She makes a sad facial expression when he/she listens to sad stories.
 - E8. He/She tries to hide his/her failure from others.
 - E9. He/She feels a thrill when caught on purpose during a game of tag.
 - E10. He/She tries to hide his/her face from others when crying.
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Results

1. Group activities

We examined the scores for group activities using a two-way ANOVA including age (5) and types of children (3) as factors. There were the main effect of age ($F(4,1483) = 350.69, p < .01$), the main effect of types of children ($F(2,1483) = 103.14, p < .01$), and the interaction of age \times types of children ($F(8,1483) = 3.52, p < .01$). Figure 1 displays the mean scores for group activities.

We examined the item success rates, which were the percentages where the score was 1 point for each item. We found clear differences between TD children, EX-Low children, and EX-High children for the item success rates of G8 regarding concentration (Figure 2) and G7 regarding cooperative play (Figure 3).

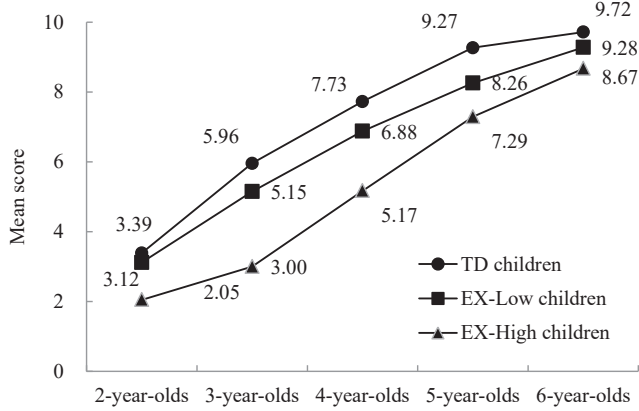


Figure 1 Mean scores for group activities

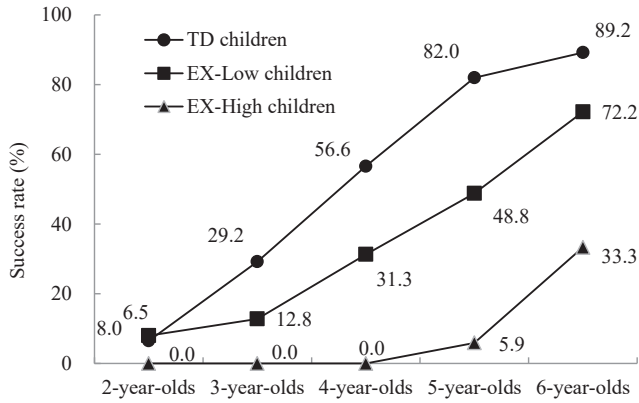


Figure 2 Success rates of G8 (concentration)

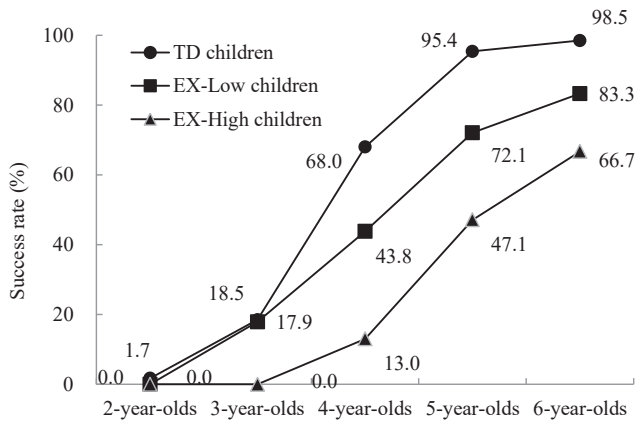


Figure 3 Success rates of G7 (cooperative play)

2. Language development

We examined the scores for language development using a two-way ANOVA including age (5) and types of children (3) as factors. There were the main effect of age ($F(4,1483) = 197.36, p < .01$), the main effect of types of children ($F(2,1483) = 62.13, p < .01$), and the interaction of age \times types of children ($F(8,1483) = 2.80, p < .01$). Figure 4 shows the mean scores for language development.

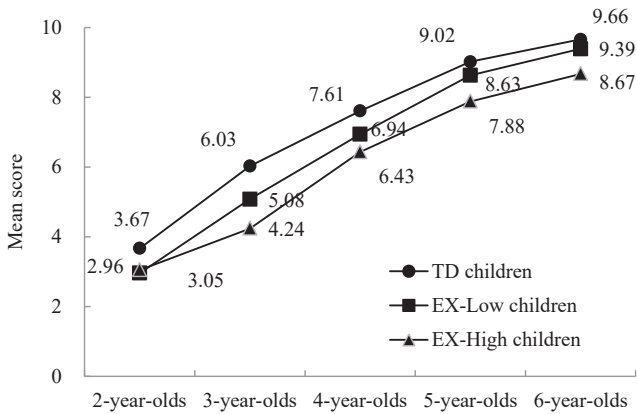


Figure 4 Mean scores for language development

We examined the item success rates and found notable differences between TD children, EX-Low children, and EX-High children for the item success rates of L8 (Figure 5), but no differences among them in the item success rates of L6 (Figure 6).

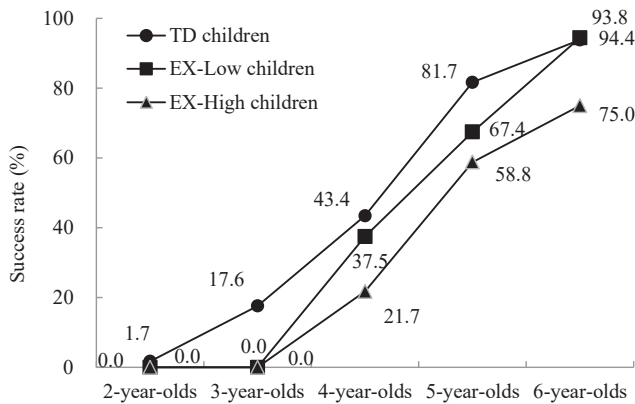


Figure 5 Success rates of L8 (the names of three kinds of flowers)

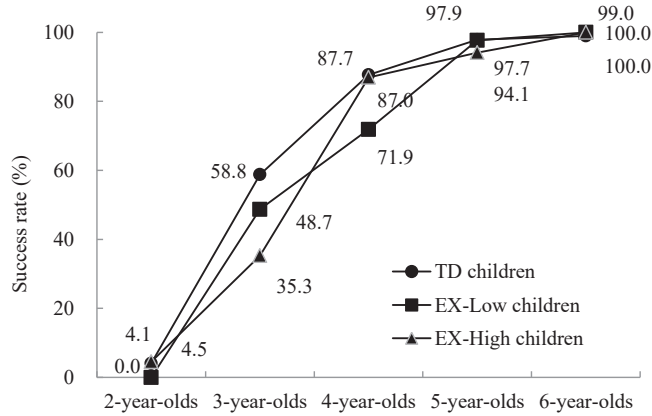


Figure 6 Success rates of L6 (understanding both "strong" and "weak")

3. Emotional development

We examined the scores for emotional development using a two-way ANOVA including age (5) and types of children (3) as factors. There were the main effect of age ($F(4,1483) = 470.56, p < .01$), the main effect of types of children, ($F(2,1483) = 148.13, p < .01$), and the interaction of age \times types of children ($F(8,1483) = 2.79, p < .01$). Figure 7 displays the mean scores for emotional development.

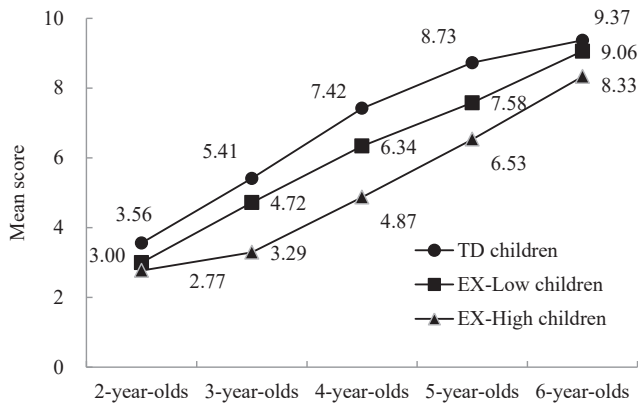


Figure 7 Mean scores for emotional development

We examined the item success rates and found clear differences between TD children, EX-Low children, and EX-High children for the item success rates of E6 (Figure 8), but no differences among them for the item success rates of E7 (Figure 9).

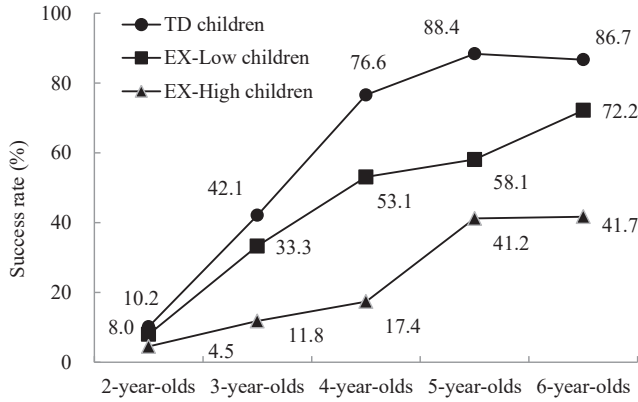


Figure 8 Success rates of E6 (regulation)

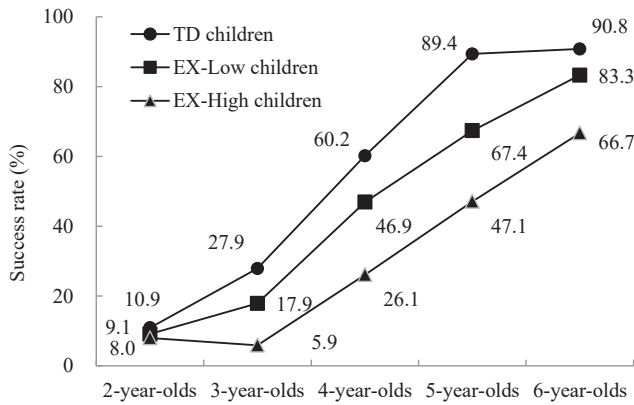


Figure 9 Success rates of E7 (empathy)

Discussion

These results suggest that children with externalizing behavior problems have difficulty in group activities, especially in terms of concentrating on activities and cooperative play. They also seem to face challenges regarding language development. There were apparent differences between TD children and those with externalizing behavior problems for the item “He/She can say the names of three kinds of flowers.” However, we found no differences for the item “He/She understands both ‘strong’ and ‘weak.’” This implies that children with externalizing behaviors have an imbalance in terms of language development. Regarding emotional development, we observed that children with externalizing behavioral problems faced delays, not only in terms of regulating their emotions, but also expressing them.

In this study, we used the “Social Development Checklist” (Hongo et al., 2015) to clarify the characteristics of children with externalizing behavior problems. The checklist revealed the traits of children with externalizing behavior problems especially in group activities and emotional development. The “Social Development Checklist” was useful for understanding children with special needs and creating individual educational programs for them.

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