

## A Supported Playgroup for Children with and without Hearing Loss

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### Abstract

*This study aims to describe content and structure of a supported playgroup for children with and without hearing loss and evaluate its benefits according to teachers and mothers of participant children. It was designed as a qualitative case study. 14 mothers and 2 teachers of the deaf were the participants of the study. The data were collected through video recordings of the playgroups, semi-structured interviews with the participants, field notes and researcher's reflective journals. The data were analysed inductively. The results indicated that playgroup were consisted of 5 main parts including free play, structured group time, following activity, music and snack time. Age appropriate play materials were chosen purposefully to improve interaction skills of mothers and children. The benefits observed by parents and teachers were mostly related to improvement in socialization and language skills of children. The benefits and organization of the playgroup were discussed considering the findings and related literature.*

**Keywords:** Playgroups, parent-child programme, hearing loss, early education, early socialization, case study.

### 1. Introduction

Playgroups are regular, organised gatherings of parents and young children typically held once a week during school term for a few hours duration. They provide preschool-aged children with opportunities to socialise and to learn about their environment through play with other children and adults in a safe, supportive and fun environment (Jackson, 2011; McLean, et.al., 2014). Unlike child care, crèche or kindergarten arrangements, where children are customarily left in the care of others, parents stay for the duration of the playgroup and interact with their children. By this means, mothers and fathers also socialise with other parents, which may provide an opportunity to establish a valuable parenting support network (Jackson, 2013). Playgroups provide light-touch and low-cost parenting support through relatively informal weekly gatherings of parents and their young children for play-based activities (Williams, Berthelsen, Viviani & Nicholson, 2013; Williams et.al., 2018). In some countries, playgroups are common and constitute a major source of preschool experience for children. For example, in both England and Australia there are local and national playgroup associations (e.g. Preschool Playgroup Association in the UK; Playgroup Associations of Australia) with professional coordinators, and with established procedures for organising and running a group (e.g. Playgroup Associations of Australia,) (Needham & Jackson, 2012). In some countries however, playgroups are considerably less common and less formal, and do not receive support from national or state associations (Mize & Petit, 2010; Pakulski, 2011).

Generally two types of playgroups were defined. *Community playgroups* are self-managed by parents and *supported playgroups* which are targeted programmes designed to reach families in disadvantaged circumstances (McLean, Edwards & Morris, 2017). Supported playgroups are generally provided at no cost, while community playgroups attract a small membership fee (Williams, et.al., 2016).

Several benefits of playgroups were documented through several studies. In cross-sectional surveys of parents participating in playgroups and qualitative studies of supported playgroups indicated that attendance is associated with improvements in child language, cognition, and behaviour skills (ARTD Consultants 2008a, 2008b; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), State of Victoria 2012; Jackson 2013). Population representative Australian data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) has also linked playgroup participation of families with children aged from birth to 3 years, or other parent-child groups, to children's stronger learning competence and better social-emotional functioning at 4-5 years (Hackworth, et.al, 2018; Hancock et al. 2012). Improved parental outcomes from participation in supported playgroups have also been demonstrated in a number of qualitative research studies for example, improved parental understanding about early child development (Jackson, 2011; Warr, et.al.,2013), decreased social isolation (McLean et al. 2014; Jackson 2013; Mize&Petite, 2010), access to peer support (ARTD Consultants 2008a, 2008b; Jackson 2006; Playgroup Australia 2010) and supportive practices that assist newly arrived refugees and immigrants to manage social and cultural barriers (New 2012). Supported playgroups have also been found to increase parents' knowledge of other services within a community and capacity to access other family support services (McLean et al. 2014; Jackson 2011). Some other findings revealed the usefulness of playgroup experiences for scaffolding children's early peer interactions and for facilitating children's transition between home and more formal educational settings such as preschools and daycare (Mize & Petite, 2010). Supported playgroups were suggested to be used in prevention of childhood obesity, to promote healthy eating and active living as well (Lloyd, Jackson, Buffett & Qi, 2017; Monteiro-Sarajini et.al., 2011). Playgroup attendance when children were age 2 to 3 years was also associated with higher parental engagement in home learning activities when children were aged 4 years which, in turn, was associated with stronger expressive vocabulary scores for children in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (Williams, Berthelsen, Viviani & Nicholson, 2016).

Several studies indicated the benefits of the playgroups for children with special needs too. Jacko, et.al., (2013) recommended playgroups as a component of intervention in the educational development of visually impaired children in their Blind Babies Play Program. They argued that playgroups were a cost-effective approach that provided enhancements to learning skills of blind infants through play and socialization. Similarly children with autism spectrum disorders were found to improve their symbolic and social play skills by attending an integrated playgroup programme. The findings revealed significant gains in symbolic and social play that generalized to unsupported play with unfamiliar peers (Wolfberg, DeWitt, Young & Nguyen, 2014; Yang, Wolfberg, Wu & Hwu, 2003).

Green et.al., (2018) reported a functional relationship between the seven-week intervention and an increase in parent and child outcomes for language delayed children who attended a facilitated playgroup programme. They argued that a facilitated family-centred model provide participatory opportunities for families not only to strengthen existing practices, decisions, and choices, but to learn new skills that directly relate to improving their child's speech and language outcomes. The researchers stressed the importance of well prepared practitioners who provide opportunities to strengthen families' current knowledge to support their decisions and choices, as well as to enhance their parenting practices (Green, et.al., 2018). Similarly Pakulski (2011) reported satisfaction of parents of deaf and hard of children (DHH) who attended their professional training playgroup program. Parents and trainees reported significant benefit from playgroup and declared improvement in their use of language facilitating techniques and interaction quality with children. Parents made highly positive comments on the program and responded that they learned a great deal from the education and support component, including gaining resources and ideas to maximize their own child's development. The research also revealed the importance of staff training specialized on education of DHH in playgroups.

Despite the documented benefits and its low cost, supported playgroups are not a common practice in Turkey. There are a few special education centres which run playgroups mainly consist of free play and no research was held to describe their content or benefits for the parents and their children with special needs. This study was conducted to describe a Turkish supported playgroup for children with and without hearing loss and its benefits perceived by parents and teachers.

## 2. Method

This study was designed as a case study. The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. The present study aims to describe the playgroup as a part of an educational program for children with hearing loss and explain the benefits of the playgroup according to mothers' and teachers' evaluation. Therefore a case study design was suited for the purpose of the research.

### 2.1. The Research Setting

The research was conducted at an education and research centre for children with hearing loss which attached to a Turkish university. The centre adopted an auditory-verbal approach as the teaching methodology. It provides early intervention as well as serving a day school for children with hearing loss. The playgroups were held in the preschool classrooms of the school.

### 2.2. Participants

14 mothers and 2 teachers of the deaf were participants of this study.

#### 2.2.1. Mothers

The mothers of children with hearing loss were chosen purposefully. The files of the education centre were scanned for the families who attend the early intervention program. The families with children younger than 3 years old were determined and they were informed about the playgroup programme. 10 mother-child pair informed us about their attendance. However in time 3 of them left the program with varying reasons.

On the other hand to find out normal hearing children, acquaintances of the school staff were contacted. 10 mother-hearing child pairs were volunteered to attend the playgroup program. But 3 were unable to attend regularly and were excluded from data collection. At the end of the study 7 mothers of children with normal hearing and 7 mothers of children with hearing loss were regularly attended the playgroups. Two groups were established according to age of the children. One group consisted of children younger than 24 months old, the other group consisted of children ages varied 24-36 months old at the beginning of the school year 2017-2018. The data were collected during the spring term of 2017-2018.

The demographic information of the mothers of children with hearing loss were presented in table 1. Initials of the names were used to secure anonymity.

Table 1. Demographic information of mothers of children with hearing loss

Mother	Age	Education	Profession	Child's age (mths)	Monthly income
G.	30	Collage	Housewife	26 (1st child)	Minimum wage
S.	37	Middle school	Housewife	22 (3rd child)	Less than 5000 tl
B.	35	University	Engineer	15 (1st child)	Less than 10000 tl
F.	34	MSci.	Engineer	33 (2nd child)	Less than 5000 tl
T.	35	High school	Housewife	31 (2nd child)	Less than 5000 tl
F.	33	College	Emergency medical technician	19 (2 <sup>nd</sup> child)	Less than 10000tl
H.	37	College	Housewife	28 (3 <sup>rd</sup> child)	Less than 5000 tl

As it is seen from the demographic information most of the mothers both in hearing and hearing loss group were in middle-upper/middle SES.

In the older group some mothers could not arrange their working hours according to playgroup in every week. Therefore sometimes grandmothers or the childminders accompanied the child. If grandmothers or childminders attended more regularly, they were interviewed instead of mothers. Their ages varied between 45-65 years and their education level were between primary education and secondary education. Table 2 shows the demographic information of mothers of hearing children.

Table 2 Demographic information of mothers of hearing children

Mother	Age	Education	Profession	Child's age (mnts.)	Monthly income
A.	32	University	Lawyer	19 (first child)	Less than 10000 tl
A.	38	M.Ed.	TOD	24 (2nd child)	Less than 5000 tl
B.	40	University	Academician	32 (2nd child)	>10000 tl
I.	41	Ph.D.	Academician	31 (1st child)	>10000 tl
S.	32	M.Ed.	TOD	29 (1st child)	Less than 10000 tl
E.	37	University	Teacher	33 (1st child)	Less than 10000 tl
S.	30	University	Gym instructor	26 (1st child)	Less than 10000 tl

### 2.2.2. Teachers

Two teachers of the deaf acted as facilitator of the playgroups. Both teachers had experiences in working with preschool children with hearing loss and in playgroups. They also worked in early intervention programme of the centre. Teachers programmed the sessions, prepared materials and run the playgroups as two sessions in a week for two hours duration.

### 2.3. Data Collection

Data was collected through the video recordings of the playgroup sessions, field notes, reflective journals of the researcher, interviews with the mothers, the teachers. Table 3 shows the collected data.

Table 3. Data collected

Source of the data	Duration	
Video recordings of the playgroup sessions	16 sessions	32 hours
Field notes	8 sessions	20 pages
Researcher's reflective journal	16 sessions	25 pages
Interview with the mothers/grandmothers/childminders		40 mins
Interview with the teachers		45 mins
Social media accounts of the playgroup		

### 2.4. Trustworthiness

Collecting data from different sources, sharing the transcripts with mothers and teachers for confirmation and an extensive literature review were used to establish trustworthiness of the study.

### 2.5. Analysis of the Data

The data were analysed inductively. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, the video recordings were summarized according to the content and flow of the playgroup session, the reflective journal of the researcher and field notes were coded and used to support the themes established from the transcripts. The recurring events in the video recordings, and recurring expressions of the participants were used to create themes. Social media accounts of the playgroups were used to determine the information exchange among the participants. Two more researchers who work on qualitative methods cross checked the codes and themes to provide credibility too.

### 2.6. Research Ethics

All participants were informed about the research and written consent forms were given. The official permission was received from the school board. Anonymity of the participants was provided by using name initials. The data were preserved through the coded files.

## 3. Findings

5 themes were established by analysis of the data.

### Theme 1: Structure and content of the playgroup

Video recordings of the playgroup revealed that the playgroup consisted of 5 main parts: free play (60 mins.); group activities or story telling (10 mins); related activity to the story or group activity (10 mins); music (15 mins.); snack time (20 mins.).

Age appropriate materials such as puppets, dolls and doll houses, toy cars and lorries, tricycles, balls, books, variety of table play, soft toys, paper and crayons, etc. were used to facilitate interaction among children and mothers. Video recordings showed that children engaged in many activities during the free play. They usually played together with their mothers especially in the younger group. It was observed that during the second half of the free play 2-3 children with their mothers came together in parallel play. They shared the toys but did not involve in a group play; rather each child played separately and changed the toys from time to time.

At the end of the free play the classroom was organized for the 10 mins. Group activity. The teachers used story books, sequence cards, grouping and matching games during the group activities. They used these activities or stories to demonstrate the use of language facilitating techniques with children. Some of the techniques were asking questions, waiting for the children's contributions, expecting them to wait and take turns. They used appropriate supportive material such as dolls, stuffed toys; cups etc. to dramatize the story and extend the children's attention span. The same material was provided to each mother/child pair so that mothers can use them with their children while teacher was telling the story or demonstrating the activity.

After the group activity some art work was conducted which was related to it. For instance after looking at the story of the puppy who lost his mother, a puppy collage was made and it was used as reminder of the story and a retelling opportunity.

Music time included songs, nursery rhymes, movement with music, dance and games in the circle. Listening activities (like freezing when music stopped, or moving fast-slow-fast according to rhythm, making appropriate gestures following the words of the song) were used in music time to improve the listening skills of the children.

During the snack time mothers and children shared the snacks they brought from home and chatted about variety of subjects mainly about the daily life of their children. For instance in one occasion they talked about feeding goldfish at home and they all shared funny stories like grandad over feeding goldfish, jumping goldfish etc.

Interview with the teachers and examination of the session plans indicated that the toys and games grouped according to their use, and the play material which facilitates mother-child interaction like symbolic play were chosen purposefully. The toys were varied and changed in each session. Teacher A (teacher of the younger group) explained the careful need for preparation *"the content of the program should be decided at least a week ago. You can't make it within an hour. It should address the general group but variations among the children should be considered. In my group I had 2 and 1 year olds together. Especially in the group activities I prepared materials considering their developmental level for each child. We didn't have table games as much as the older group since they were too young to follow rules of the games and their fine motor skills were not developed fully yet"*. Both teachers admitted that they had difficulties working with such a young group in a more structured way at the beginning, but with the help from the school principal and from other colleagues they adjusted in a short period of time. Teacher S. (teacher of the older group) explained the difficulties as follows *"I work with 3 years in school and I also work with families in parent guidance program. But working with them as a group which contains both mothers and younger children was something quite different. It was hard to conduct group activities at first but in time we managed somehow"*. Teacher A. admits that it was very difficult for her not to interfere with the crawling babies during the group time *"you know... we expect them (school students) in class to sit properly, listen, raise hand and answer questions. But these little ones wouldn't do that. I was panicked at first when they crawled to me and tried to get the book or whatever in my hands. It was like pulling down my authority as a teacher. It really stressed me for a few weeks. In time I got used to it. It is okay for me now if they want to walk around during the group activities"*.

## **Theme 2: Purpose of the Playgroup**

The teachers evaluated the purpose of the playgroup as supporting the interaction between mother and child, providing an opportunity for socialization both for children with and without hearing loss and inclusion of children with hearing loss in a hearing society. Teacher A. explained her aim by saying *"I think we provide a safe environment for inclusion of children with hearing loss from an early age...we also help mothers to develop their play skills.....we set an example for them...for instance when I look at a storybook with children mothers*

*understand how to tell the story to a very young child.... I don't read the book but I tell the story using the pictures, I use supportive material...".*

### **Theme 3: Relationship among the Mothers**

Analysis of data indicated that mothers developed positive relationships with each other. They formed their relationships over their children's needs. Field notes, teachers' observations and social media accounts of the play group indicated that they usually conversed about different kinds of educational activities, different types of nutrition recipes for the children, their experiences in child rearing practices and some enjoyable moments in their daily lives. Social media accounts indicated that they took pictures and videos of their children quite often and shared them especially if the child had a new word or had reached to a new developmental milestone like walking more securely or following the rules properly in a new game. Some mothers said that they come together outside the playgroup and established a friendship which they claimed a very positive contribution of the playgroup. Teacher S. said that especially young mothers were "...very keen to socialise with others but not the grandmothers". She thought that the grandmothers "...think they have the experience and knowledge on child rearing practises, so they don't feel like in need to take advise from others...". One of the grandmothers supported the teacher's view "...I already raised my two boys and 3 other grandchildren...I am used to play with the children and looking after them". Teacher A. explained that mothers were made use of experiences of others and the young mothers in her group were eager to share their experiences. She also added their kindness to each other "they never offended each other....when they were to offer something related to child's behaviour or something else; they were very polite ... never used an underestimating tone....or you should do this or do that way...you know".

### **Theme 4: Benefits of the playgroup**

All mothers specified that they attended the playgroup for the socialization of their children. They all explained that they could not find social activities for this young age group outside home and the playgroup were above their expectations "I took A. for a playgroup in a private centre. But it was chaotic. In 90 minutes we rushed from one activity to another. Too many toys but teachers were pushing us from one to another. The children had no time to understand or enjoy the game... here everything was planned according to the children's pace...they have the time they needed". They all stated that their children were happy to come to the playgroup and get excited when they arrived at the university campus. One mother quoted that her child got very frustrated when she thought they would not get into the playgroup "...the other week there was no place at the parking lot...when we passed the school while looking for a parking place A. started to cry and said "no...no..stop..stop".

The children in the older group were reported to have better social behaviours. "E. was a bit negative towards other people. She never wanted them around. She used to hide behind me and yelled them to go away. Since we started to come here she is less shy and more positive. She is happy here". Two mothers of hearing children told that their children's language development were accelerated. "When we first started D. was using mostly one words or two word combinations. Within a few weeks she started to form better combinations and longer sentences. She is very fluent now (after 5 months)". All mothers reported that their child's attention span were improved especially in group activities. The children learned to listen the others in the group and followed the teacher for a longer period of time. One mother of a child with hearing loss stated that her child was "very active....could not wait longer than a few seconds... I am surprised to see him waiting until the end of the story. His attention time was improved incredibly".

Some mothers of hearing children in the older group also thought that their children had developed an awareness about hearing loss. They said that their children were curious about the hearing aids and cochlear implants at first but after their explanation they did not bother with the hearing aids/cochlear implant. The children were also adjusted their behaviour according to their friends with hearing loss. One mother said "sometimes she calls M.. If he does not answer she goes to him and touches his back to get his attention or she goes in front of him and repeats what she said". The mothers thought that being in the same environment with children with hearing loss would help their children to accept and respect for people with different needs in future "I am really surprised how quickly she accepted the hearing aids or cochlear implants on children. First day in playgroup she looked at them with curiosity. When we got home she asked me about the "things" that other children were wearing. We explained that they need them to hear better. The other week she was very comfortable. It is good for her to see

*different patterns of life.....to have an awareness of special needs. It will help her to be tolerant and respectful for people who are not like us”.*

On the other hand mothers of children with hearing loss explained that being in the same environment with hearing children encouraged their children to use speech. One mother said “*..when Y. play with his hearing friends he is more vocal...*”. Another mother told that during the snack time her child tried to engage in conversation with everyone at the table “*..M. makes these sounds to attract attention of the others during the snack time. Watches everyone cheerfully and tries to engage in a conversation. Makes a sound and waits to get a response...*”. Mothers of children with hearing loss also explained that they don’t see their children different than hearing ones, especially in the younger group. One mother in the younger group referred to gestures used by hearing infants while they communicate with others “*R. (hearing child) always points to the toys when he wants them.....and sometimes it is difficult to understand what he was trying to say... just like my boy”.*

The mothers of children with hearing loss explained that they already had an understanding in use of language facilitating techniques since they also attended the early intervention program of the centre; but they said they got lots of new ideas from other group members and their teacher. B.’s mother explained that “*...sometimes our teacher sends us some games she found on internet or short articles about play... the other day A. (another mother) sent all of us the pictures of lambs to use while singing the lamb song.*”. The mothers also found others’ child rearing practices very useful. “*..M. is my first child. Talking to other mothers who already had older children helps me a lot when I struggle with different issues related to M.*”.

All mothers find music section quiet useful. They explained that the children loved singing, nursery rhymes and dancing. “*A. loves songs we learned here. We taught the songs to her father and grandparents. When they could not sing the song she wanted, she becomes very upset”.*

Although mothers satisfied with the playgroup; they all preferred it to be held in the morning instead of the afternoons; since it overlapped the sleeping times of the children. Another suggestion made by mothers was to include more outdoor activities in the programme. One of the mothers proposed to visits to special places like zoo, farm or gardens. “*...you see we do lots of imaginary play like feeding the cat, washing the duck.....I think the children would love to see a real duck if we could manage to go to a farm or zoo. We can also spend more time in the gardens of the campus to see the trees, flowers, grass... or bugs. We all live in the apartments and children have such a little experience with nature”.*

#### **Theme 5: Interaction Between Teachers and Mothers**

All mothers reported their satisfaction with the teachers. Mother B. explained that “*I like our teacher’s relationship with us. She treats everyone equally*”. Mother E. commented as their teacher being very patient with their children “*she is always very calm.....I admire the way she deals with our children*”. Mother F. stated as “*..she is well equipped in teaching.....she explains the activities very clearly... shares many activities outside the playgroups on our social media account too”.*

On the other hand teacher A. evaluated her relationship with mothers as follows “*I think my role changes from time to time...sometimes they see me as a mother like themselves because I have a daughter at the same age. They asked me how I dealt with the difficulties at home...for example how I managed the terrible two phase (she laughs)...Sometimes as a teacher who knows about child development, hearing loss and teaching...they want to learn my opinion on activities they conduct at home...*”. Teacher S. explained her attitude towards the grandmothers and mothers as being cautious since she didn’t want them to feel criticized “*....when I need to offer something on their interaction with the child I think twice about how to say it... you know sometimes people can be sensitive about taking advice... especially grandmothers. There are more grandmothers in my group than the younger one. I observed that grandmothers think they know all about child rearing, because they already raised their children and some grandchildren.....therefore they might feel offended if I don’t find the right words”.*

#### **4. Discussion**

This study examined the content and structure of the playgroup for children with and without hearing loss and the benefits observed by mothers and teachers. The findings indicated that the playgroups run in an appropriate physical environment, a flexible yet predictable routine, and had a variety of age-appropriate infant activities. It was found that the programme required careful planning and adjustments for each session. The teachers planned

the playgroup a week before and changed the materials for each session. This practice was in accordance with other studies especially designed for children with special needs (Commerford & Robinson, 2017; Green, et.al., 2018; Pakulski, 2011; Wolfberg, et.al., 2015; Young, et.al., 2003) and it was rather expected to achieve specific goals in any level of education.

The major benefit reported by mothers was the socialization of the children. All mothers and teachers explained that the socialization of the children as the major goal of the playgroup and noted the children's willingness toward the participation to activities and their positive relationships with other children and their teacher. This finding is in accordance with other studies which found the common goal of the playgroup as to facilitate infant social skills (Chen, Hanline & Friedman, 1989; Commerford & Robinson, 2017; Hancock, et.al., 2015).

Previous studies revealed that playgroups were more beneficial for disadvantaged families. Mothers from more secure homes had reported lower satisfaction from the playgroup since they had other opportunities to socialize their children like having more stable connection with their friends and families and having adequate financing for other optional choices for their infants (Needham & Jackson, 2012; Warr, et.al., 2013; Williams et.al., 2018). Interestingly most of the mothers in this study were highly educated and working professionally. It was expected them to report less satisfaction considering the data from other studies. Nevertheless they attended the playgroups regularly and reported real enjoyment. This finding could be explained with two reasons. First there are no other organized group activities for infants and toddlers which include mothers in Turkish education system. Earliest age children can start pre-school is age 4 and no other state organized education provided for younger children. Some private schools offer places for younger children but it is rather expensive and most often only child care was provided in these programmes. Therefore mothers might have found it useful to socialize with their children in a developmentally established, secure and cost free environment. Secondly the interaction type occurred in the playgroup possibly encouraged the mothers to attend regularly. The interactions that occurred in the playgroups among mothers and teachers reflected the notion of socially constructed learning (Jackson, 2011; 2013). The playgroup environment encouraged parents to share their experiences with one another and enabled them to be 'scaffolded' by teachers if needed. It is not dictating "what to do" or "not to do" while raising their children. Teachers acted as role models while teaching the child and explained the underlining reasoning and principles of teaching strategies. They made explanations if mothers asked further questions. They formed a collaborative relationship with mothers where both parties shared their knowledge and ideas to support the children's development. This type of interaction were defined as empowerment and highly recommended in the family centred practices in special education (Haas, 1991; Pakulski, 2011; Tomasello, Manning & Dulmus, 2010).

Although mothers primarily aimed socialization of their children they also reported acceleration in language development, increased attention time and improved play skills of their children. They argued that attending playgroup helped them to raise their expectancies about their children, learned to play according to child's developmental level and added varieties to their interaction style with their children which in turn supported the development of the children. Similar results were reported in some other studies (Awcok & Habgood, 1998; Green et.al., 2018; Haas, 1991)

The provision of an opportunity for infants with hearing loss to socialize with hearing peers were reported as another benefit of the playgroup examined in this study. Mothers of hearing children in the older group explained the curiosity then acceptance of their children towards the children with hearing loss. They also expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to meet with mothers and children who have different needs in life. On the other hand mothers of children with hearing loss reported their observation on the similarities their children with hearing group. Depending on these findings certain advantages of inclusion of children with and without hearing loss during the infant-toddler years can be asserted as reported by Chen, Hanline & Taylor-Friedman (1988): First the differences in language development are not as problematic in infancy as in later years. Age-appropriate activities can be easily adapted for infants with hearing loss. These activities can provide a mutual basis for parents to share observations about the infants. All infants need some caregiver support during playgroup activities, so it is acceptable when infants with hearing loss need extra assistance. Second, typical infants and toddlers do not seem to discriminate against peers with hearing loss. Early inclusion experiences may facilitate the development of a positive attitude towards individuals with different needs.

Teachers seemed like to play a critical role in facilitating playgroups in this study. Mothers overwhelmingly reported their satisfaction of the teachers on some aspects. Teachers' knowledge on language facilitating



techniques, their repertoire on age appropriate activities and sharing information were mostly mentioned and valued by mothers. It was also observed that teachers' respect for individual differences of both parents and infants were recognized by mothers. On the basis of these findings it can be commented that educational staff should have sufficient information on the hearing loss and also should know about the developmental needs of typical infants and toddlers to prepare and run the playgroup. Parent participation programmes should also be individualized and sensitive to the different needs, values, and interactional styles of individual parents. The teachers in this study already experienced in working with young children and their families. Although they had some difficulties at the beginning, they were able to transform their knowledge. Novice teachers may need some training before they had the full responsibility of the playgroup for children with hearing loss (Pakulski, 2011)

The timing and the location of the playgroup seemed the major drawback of this study. All mothers were suggested the playgroup to be held in the mornings or in late afternoon since it overlapped the sleeping time with the children. Some mothers also had to leave the playgroup because the education centre was far away from their home. It can be suggested that the playgroups should be designed in different time periods during the day and established close to children's homes. This finding is in accordance with other studies conducted with different groups which evaluated the different aspects of playgroup as well as its reachability (Hammamberg, et.al., 2014; McLean, et.al., 2017; Jackson, 2011).

As a conclusion it can be argued that playgroups are valuable educational opportunities for infants with and without hearing loss and their mothers. They should be considered as a valuable tool to spread and implement early inclusive intervention in countries like Turkey with limited inclusive educational provisions for infants and toddlers with hearing loss. It is also an important tool for typically developing young children. It can be easily set in local preschool classrooms with a small cost. However the staff who run the playgroups may require some training before they start to work with parents and infants.

### 5. Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations. As noted, it was aimed to describe content and structure of the playgroup and the views of the participants. Therefore it was designed as a qualitative case study, and it does not conclude a causal association between playgroup participation and outcomes. The results are limited to a small group of mothers and their teachers on benefits of playgroup participation. There are many different types of playgroups, comprising different people (including both parents and facilitators) with different likes, dislikes, parenting styles and personalities. More studies are needed to reach more comprehensive conclusions.

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