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Comparing The Written Work Of Two Age Groups At The First Grade

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to compare the composition writing skills and helping behaviors of first grade students from different age groups. A mixed design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Study groups were determined by purposeful sampling. There was no statistical difference between the younger and older students in terms of composition writing points. The mean values of the students in the old age group are higher than the students in the young age group in terms of sentence, word, simple and compound sentence and textual features. The results indicated no difference in students' helping expressions between the age groups. Different development areas (like cognitive and psycho- motor) effect on writing skills can be searched.

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the primary school age was brought forward one year in accordance with changes in the Turkish Primary Education Law; children reaching the age of 66 months, instead of 72 months, at the end of December started school from the year of 2012-2013 (Ministry of Education, MEB, 2012). Some parents have registered their children at this early age whereas others have obtained medical reports excusing them from registering their children for primary school. This change has caused much public debate; critics of the law believe that children of 66 months are not ready to learn reading and writing (Eğitim Sen, 2012; Türk Eğitim Sen, 2012; Turkish Medical Association, 2012; Middle East University, 2012).

Children can be taught reading and writing at an early age; teaching of handwriting begins during pre-school

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education in practice, for example, in England and France (Sassoon, 2005; Vinter & Chartrel, 2010). Güneş (2007) states that the development of children is fast until the age of 6 and consequently this period can be more effective during which to teach reading and writing; there are examples of this in the Northern European countries. Readiness of the child is an important factor to consider in relation to his or her starting school. As an example physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of the child must be taken into consideration even though the student is ready to begin school. Readiness signifies a maturity level that allows the child to benefit from the organized education programmes and is based on talents and gained skills (Akyol, 2006). Readiness is an important factor affecting the child's reading and writing performances (Yangın, 2009). Children coming to school with the rich experience of reading – writing are successful in learning to read and write (Çelenk, 2003). The things the child gains from the moment he/she starts living prepare him/her for reading and writing (Akyol, 2006; Çelenk, 2003). Besides reading and writing skills, readiness explains developments in areas such as mind-language development as well as socio-emotional development. Writing is an important skill in the repertoire of the school age child (Schenk, 1991). The art of writing is complicated and difficult although it seems simple and easy after it has been fully learnt. The child frequently completes only half of this task even though he/she devotes eight years of his/her school life to writing (Taylor, 2010, 20). Writing is learnt in the forms of writing by copying from the board or the paper, or from dictation and by composition. The teaching of writing begins at pre-school and first grade by copying letters. After a while, dictation exercises are added to copying in the first grade. Composition studies are guided by simple questions directing them what to write when the students at the first grade gained some command of writing. In this study, composing task was guided by a few questions. The student carries out several mental operations at the same time, such as planning what he/she will write, writing a word correctly and structuring a sentence during the composing task (Graham, Struck, Santoro & Berninger, 2006). Various evaluation tools were developed to evaluate the writing. Every approach has its advantages and limitations. Global-holistic and analytical evaluation tools are subjective and simple to put into practice in the class technically as they are reachable and cheap. But coherency and validity of subjective evaluation tools are limited (Rosenblum, Weiss & Parush, 2003). Generally developed evaluating techniques can be classified as holistic evaluating systems and true/false measuring techniques (Graham, 1986). Even though it is essentially subjective, holistic evaluation that the teachers have to use to evaluate is an approach that is generally considered the most effective and valid in assessing writing skills. This approach has five dimensions, as follows: clearness; support; organizing; mechanics; and evaluating the wholeness of the writing (Miller, 1995). There are also studies evaluating in terms of the factors of external structure (format, spelling and punctuation), language and expression (vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs and expression), organization (title, introduction, story and conclusion) (Beyreli & Ari, 2009). Social development refers to the individual's relationships with other people that he/she has developed from birth to adulthood to encompass all of the behaviors that he/she has developed towards them and takes an interest in. To become a member of the society that he/she lives in and to comprehend and learn that he/she is a part of the society is his/her socializing. An individual's socialization describes and reflects his/her feelings totally, and serves as a bridge between the external world and him/herself, to enable the individual to become a person with his/her own identity. The development of various attitudes and behaviors in the individual is a product of social development. Personal characteristics develop under the effect of social environment and this continues throughout the life time. Social development involves individuals establishing good relations with people in society and performing agreeable behaviors in their social life. Social skills are essential to enable individuals to establish good relations with others whilst obeying social rules, taking responsibility, helping others and using his/her rights. The acquisition of social skills enable an individual to become a member of the society he/she lives in, his/her comprehending that he/she is a part of the society and fulfilling social responsibilities. Introducing social skills for students, to reinforce them and to transfer these skills into practice in different environments takes place among the important functions of primary education (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2006). When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that comparative studies of students' writing products in two different age groups are not found. There was much public debate regarding whether children younger than 71 months have the attributes to enable them to begin to learn reading and writing skills. Consequently, the aim of this study is to compare the writing products of the younger group of first grade students (under 71 months) with those of the older group of first grade students (over 71 months) in terms of composition writing skills and helping expressions in composition. In this context:

1. Is there a meaningful difference between the two groups of students' points of composition skills?

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