

Full Length Research Paper

Evaluation of reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education according to various variables

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Accepted 28 August, 2012

Reading skill is a cognitive process in which the words are perceived, given a meaning, comprehended and then interpreted. The last year in primary education is a critical period when this skill is changed into a habit. As reading attitudes are important for an individual throughout the life, it is necessary to determine according to which variables they differ in 8th grade students in primary education. In this sense, the aim of the study is to determine if the reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to various variables. Likert type attitude scale was used as a data collection tool in the research. According to research results, significant differences were identified in reading attitudes of students in terms of gender and internet use while there were no significant differences in terms of computer use and economic level of families.

Key words: Turkish education, reading, reading attitude, primary education.

INTRODUCTION

Skills acquired in primary education are very effective in formation of individuals' future life. The ones who gain a good reading skill and habit in this process will reach the higher level successes in future life. Listening and reading are two main linguistic ways of acquiring information. The child has an innate listening skill without an education while s/he needs a formal education to acquire reading skills. The reading skill of individual gained through an effective and efficient method will be keys to the success in future.

In an ABC book published in 1912, it is stated that "ABC book is the seed of science" (Abdulkadir, 1912). Considering this statement, reading is a tool for acquisition of any kind of information. "Comprehension" through gaining reading skill is the main objective of reading. It is seen that comprehension is emphasized in reading definitions. Harris and Sipay (1981) consider reading as a meaningful interpretation of written language. Tinker and McCullough (1968) point that reading affects recognizing, remembering and perceiving the written and printed symbols of meanings formed by past experiences.

It is aimed by reading education that individuals "understand exactly and accurately what they read" (Kavcar et al., 1998). Reading and comprehension process maintains continuity in both academic learning process at school and lifelong learning (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Reading, which is also defined as "process of brain's evaluation and giving meaning to signs and symbols perceived by eyes" (Özbay, 2007), is among the main goals of education to make a habit out of it. Reading habit is the key to success in other language domains. It is essential to be a good reader in order to speak and write well. Information use in developed countries is considered to be dynamics of development as well as an indicator for development (Yılmaz, 1998). The best way to increase information use and follow the latest developments for social development is to enable the individuals of society to gain a regular and constant reading habit.

The attitude developed towards reading is another point associated to making the individuals gain reading habit, reading and understanding what s/he reads.

Thurstone (1928) takes attitudes in a complicated wholeness as people's tendencies, emotions, prejudices, predetermined desires and inclinations, fears and beliefs on a specific matter. Allport defines attitude as affective and cognitive readiness which is organized after experiences and has directive or active effect on one's reactions against the related situation and object (Allport, 1967). In this definition, three qualities are pointed out: readiness for the action or attention related with attitude, organization through experiences and appearance when faced with the attitude-related object or situation (Erkuş, 2003).

The fact that attitudes are mostly defined as people's valuation of objects and ideas brings forward positive and negative reactions after process of valuation. In this respect, attitudes reflect individual preferences rather than an objective point of view (Aronson et al., 2004).

It is considered that attitudes are formed as a result of experiences to large extent and environmental factors are more effective on attitude formation (Bohner and Wänke, 2004; Tavşancıl, 2006). That the attitudes are acquired by learning later in life shows they may change though it is quite difficult (Baron and Byrne, 2002). It is probable to face resistance at the beginning of change process and thus it is not possible to determine the duration of change clearly (Krech and Crutchfield, 1980; Aronson et al., 2004). Attitudes may change in a very long period while they may differ in a very short period.

Attitudes have three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral (Aronson et al., 2004). Aesthetic pleasure that individual feels during reading make up affective dimension; beliefs and ideas that reading is appealing or necessary make up cognitive dimension and actualization of reading in suitable conditions make up behavioral dimension (Özbay and Uyar, 2009). Attitudes differ according to reader's level of reading skill, background, efforts and peer effects. Therefore, attitudes are individual and cannot be predicted certainly (Harris and Sipay, 1981). The fact that attitudes have a determinative effect on behaviors brings forward preparation of appropriate educational environment in order for attitudes to change in educational process. One of the most important steps of this change process is assessment of attitudes. The assessment is used both at the beginning and end of the educational process to determine the change level of attitudes.

Nowadays the scales based on individuals' reactions to fixed attitude statements are mostly used to assess attitudes (Erkuş, 2003). Attitude direction is tried to determine according to the grading in these scales. Bogardus Social Distance Scale, Guttman Cumulative Scale, Thurstone and Likert type scales are some of the frequently used ones. These scales, mostly called ratio scales, are often preferred due to the fact that they give the answerer enough time, are applied to crowded groups at the same time, make data analysis process easy and can be applied apart from face to face condi-

tions such as mail (Henerson et al., 1987). Making validity and reliability analyses of these scales considerably contributes to the scientific value of the results (Tavşancıl, 2006).

Importance of the study and problem statement

Aim of the study is to determine whether reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to various variables. Depending on content of the study, main problem statement was determined as: *"According to which variables do the reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ?"* These sub-problems below were sought an answer to analyze this main problem.

- i) Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their gender?
- ii) Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their computer usage?
- iii) Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their internet use?
- iv) Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to economic level of their family?

It is suggested by the studies in the literature that, no matter what level they are, reading attitudes of students differ according to some conditions. This study is important because reading attitudes of the students in secondary education - when they gain reading habit - were determined and because it is necessary to reveal which variables are effective on formation of these attitudes.

METHODS

Research model

This study is descriptive as it is based on collection of existing cases and their interpretation with statistical analyses. According to Erkuş (2009), descriptive studies serve the descriptive aim of science without an interest in relation or difference and they also provide prediction to produce hypothesis for subsequent studies and try to determine what's what.

Data collected through personal information forms filled by 8th grade students of primary education in Mersin (Turkey) were used to make a prediction on according to which variables their reading attitudes differ, and the results were evaluated by comparing other studies.

Population and sample

Population of the study consisted of 8th grade students of secondary education in spring semester of 2010 to 2011. Sample of the study consisted of 683 8th grade students of primary schools in city centre of Mersin.

Table 1. Some descriptive statistics about scores from attitude scale.

Parameter	Exhaustion scale
Number of people	683
Arithmetic mean	86.89
Standard error of the mean	0.47
Median	88
Variance	153.95
Standard deviation	12.40
The lowest score	52
The highest score	117
Range	65
Inter quartile range	18
Skewness	-0.302
Standard error of skewness	0.094
Kurtosis	-0.265
Standard error of kurtosis	0.187

Table 2. Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their gender?

Parameter		N	Average of sequence	Sum of sequence	U	P
Attitude scores	Female	328	401.61	131728.50	37683.5	0.000
	Male	352	283.56	99811.50		

Table 3. Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their computer usage?

Parameter		N	Average of sequence	Sum of sequence	U	P
Attitude	Yes	314	327.05	102693.50	53238.5	0.068
	No	369	354.72	130892.50		

Limitations

In respect of the area it covered and data used, the study is limited to determine whether the reading attitudes of 8th grade students (n = 683) of primary schools in city centre of Mersin in 2010 to 2011 differ according to gender, computer usage, internet use and economic level of their family.

Collection of data

Likert type attitude scale was used as a data collection tool in the study. A 25-item attitude scale which was prepared by Özbay and Uyar (2009) to determine reading attitudes of 8th grade students in secondary education was used by permission of the researchers. Validity and reliability degree of the scale was measured as 0.93 point.

Analysis of data

Data collected from the students were analyzed by using the computer program SPSS 11.5. The answers to each item in the attitude scale were given points as "strongly agree = 5", "agree = 4",

"neutral = 3", "disagree = 2" and "strongly disagree = 1". After data were entered, the points of negative items were changed as "strongly agree = 1", "agree = 2", "neutral = 3", "disagree = 4" and "strongly disagree = 5".

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Statistics about scores from attitude scale are presented in Tables 1 to 5.

According to the arithmetic mean, median and scores from coefficients of kurtosis and skewness divided by their standard errors in the table, it is seen that scores of attitude scale do not have a normal distribution. Tests for seeking an answer to research questions were applied in parallel with these findings.

Mann Whitney U test was done to study whether reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their gender. According to this, reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their gender and the

Table 4. Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to their internet use?

Parameter		N	Average of sequence	Sum of sequence	U	P
Attitude	Yes	257	316.02	81216.50	48063.5	0.009
	No	425	356.91	151686.50		

Table 5. Do reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to economic level of their family?

Economic income	N	Average of sequence	Sd		P
0-750 TL	237	327.02	3	3.477	0.324
751-1000 TL	188	328.29			
1001-1500 TL	120	292.13			
1501 and more	93	317.89			

difference is on behalf of female students ($U = 37683.5$, $p < 0.05$).

The data from this test show parallelism with the results of many researches over students of primary education (Kush and Watkins, 1996; Sainsbury, 2004; Black and Young, 2005; Çakıcı, 2007; Sallabaş, 2008; Balci, 2009a; Başaran and Ateş, 2009; Bağcı, 2010). Moreover, the findings of the research support the results of the studies on teacher candidates and undergraduates (Gömleksiz, 2004; Özbay et al., 2008; Yalınkılıç, 2007; Bozpolat, 2010).

Due to the similar results, it is necessary to search for main reasons why reading attitudes of male students differ from female students.

Mann Whitney U test was done to study whether reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to computer usage. According to this, reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education don't differ according to computer usage. ($U = 53238.5$, $p > 0.05$).

Mann Whitney U test was also done to study whether reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to internet use. According to this, reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to internet use and the difference is on behalf of the ones who don't use internet ($U = 480635$, $p < 0.05$).

When Tables 3 and 4 are taken together, it is seen that internet use has a negative effect on reading attitude while computer usage on its own does not have any negative effects on reading attitudes of students. The result of the study by Demirer et al. (2011) was parallels with the data acquired. In their study, it is seen that time spent on computer and internet affects regular reading habit of primary school students. It was revealed that one or two hours of use a week doesn't cause a decrease in regular reading habit while more than an hour of use a

day results in decrease in regular reading habit. It can be said according to this finding that more than an hour of use of internet and computer is an important factor which prevents regular reading (Demirer et al., 2011). It is seen in the research by Aksaçlıoğlu and Yılmaz (2007) on 5th grade students of primary school that students using computer read less.

Researchers show that computer has some negative effects on reading habit. These are the results such as decrease in pleasure from reading, decline in comprehension skills, sparing less time to read and poor imagination (Beentjes et al., 2001; Birkets, 2004; Brant, 2003; Markoff, 2000; O'Toole, 2000; Demirer et al., 2011). Birkets (2004) states that computer slows down and downgrades reading habit while Lieberman (1986) expresses that computer games cause pleasure from reading to wane and reading success to decline. 37% of the participants in a research done in the U.S.A. say that engaging technological devices causes sparing less time to read (Brant, 2003). In another research, for the question "Which activities has technology led you to do less?", 37% of the children gave the answer "reading", 29% "playing game", 27% "doing sports" and 8% "playing a musical instrument" (Brant, 2003).

Kruskal Wallis test was used to analyze whether average scores from attitude scale differ according to economic level of the families. As a result, it is seen that scores from attitude scale don't differ according to economic level of the families ($X^2 = 3.477$, $p > 0.05$).

The results aforementioned relatively show a parallelism with the results of the research "Study of Reading Habits of 5th, 6th and 7th Grade Students in Primary Education" by Gonen et al. (2004). It is confirmed by the data from the researches that female students read a bit more than male students and gender and socioeconomic differences do not have effects on children's love of reading.

The result that economic level of students has no effect on their reading attitudes is different from many researches on this topic. Güneş (1997) states in a study over primary school students that reading level of students differs according to socioeconomic level. In regard to Güneş's findings, students at higher socioeconomic level read much while students at middle and lower socioeconomic level read less compared to the ones at higher socioeconomic level. The researcher attributes this difference to the fact that students at higher socioeconomic level have higher level of word recognition.

In addition to Güneş's findings, Coşkun (2002) states in a research over high school students that there are significant differences in reading rate and comprehension level of students considering some socioeconomic factors (family's level of economic income, number of siblings, parents' level of education, etc.) and other factors about child's study environment (whether the child has a private room and desk, structural features of the house they live in, etc.).

Avcioğlu (2000) did a research on secondary school students of different socioeconomic levels in 1997-1998 academic year. It was discovered in this research that there is a significant difference in reading skills such as student's vocabulary, comprehension skills, directed reading and efficient reading according to their socioeconomic and class level.

Conclusion and suggestions

It was seen at the end of the study that reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to gender and this difference is on behalf of the female students. Reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education do not differ according to computer usage but they differ according to internet use and the difference is on behalf of the ones who don't use internet. Reading attitudes of 8th grade students in primary education differ according to economic level of their family.

It is determined in all the studies including the findings from this research no matter what is the target group that male students can not develop positive attitudes towards reading with regard to female students. Based on the findings from the study, it can be stated that female students have a more positive approach to reading and reading habit than male students.

It was seen at the end of the study that especially internet use has a negative effect on children's reading attitudes. The researches show that students have a strong tendency to computer usage. While "playing game" is mainly among the reasons for computer usage (Aksaçlıoğlu and Yılmaz, 2007), a decrease is seen in their reading rate as the time spent on computer usage increases (Demirer et al., 2011). Computer and internet

use has a negative effect especially on reading attitudes of male students (Balci, 2009a). It can be predicted, in this sense, that aspects of internet games which encourage children to read will affect children's reading attitudes positively.

According to the findings from the article in which meta-analysis of 518 studies over reading attitude from 1970s to 2010 was done, the studies in this field focus more on the relation between reading attitude and reading success. In terms of level of relation between reading attitude and reading success, there is a high rate for primary education students while it is lower for high school students. The reason why there is a high level of relation between reading attitude and reading success for primary education students is explained as: Student's self-confidence, parent help, environment, in-class activities, teacher and teaching methods are effective on student's reading attitude (Petscher, 2010).

It is possible from the current data obtained to suggest these:

Starting in the family, it is necessary to guide students to make a positive change in their reading attitudes. Parents are first role models for children. Parents should reinforce the child to improve his/her reading skill and they should give positive suggestions.

Teachers are another role model for students to improve their reading attitudes. Teachers' reading attitudes reflects on students. In this respect, it is necessary to create better environment for reading in class. Each class teacher should build up a class library and read books with students at least an hour a week.

In addition to these, Turkish language teachers are the most important power to lead students to libraries, treasure of books. Turkish language teachers must subscribe to the libraries near their schools and force students to subscribe to the library, too.

The methods and techniques used in reading education are also important for enhancing reading attitude. Therefore, teacher must know the mechanism of reading (physical and cognitive parts) first of all and convey this to the children in accordance with their level.

Though it is known in general terms that reading attitudes affect reading, it is seen that they can't explain comprehension level on their own. Regarding this finding, it shouldn't be forgotten that comprehension level of students must be improved by teaching appropriate reading strategies as well as enabling them to develop positive attitudes (Balci, 2009b).

Another aspect in developing positive reading attitudes is the principle of target group relativity. The child at secondary level (9 to 12 years old) gets accustomed to strict, objective world. Questions words such as how, what and why found mostly in their text help their reading and comprehension ability.

Curious child gets things around ambitiously. These must be presented as stories and experiences rather than boring lectures. Twenty fairytales and others are still

drawing interest in this period of transition based on realities. A desire for adventure has also begun at the same time (Bamberger, 1990).

If both class and Turkish language teachers are able to achieve reading education in the lights of these principles, it is possible to expect more sunshine in the future.

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