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Relationship between attitudes to reading and time allotted to writing in primary education

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Writing is the expression of emotions, thoughts, wishes and plans in written form. Writing requires skill rather than knowledge. Skilful writing a process that necessitates hard work, reading, writing through drawing conclusions from reading texts, and years of practice. Development of the writing skill is possible through continuous and planned practice. This work should not be limited to the work done with the teacher or the Turkish language lessons. Writing essays, stories, anecdotes, poems etc. outside school work will help students to master their writing skills. For students to effectively express themselves in writing, they need to allocate time to writing every day.

Aim of the Study: The aim of this study is to determine the relationship between attitudes to writing and time spent writing among 4th and 5th year primary education students.

Method of the Study: Descriptive method was used in the study to identify trends in the situation. The study was conducted on 4th and 5th year students at primary education and the relationship between attitudes to writing and daily time spent writing was examined.

Sampling: The study was conducted on 402 (208 girls, 194 boys) students in 4th and 5th years attending 7 primary education schools in İzmir/Buca. 51.7% of the participants were female and 48.3% were male. Stratified sampling method was used for determining the sample.

Data Collection Instrument: To determine students' attitudes to writing, an "Attitudes to Writing Scale" (AWS) was used. Information about the daily time that participants spend writing (stated in minutes as a unit of time) was obtained through the personal information form included in the scale. The daily writing work denotes the writing activities that students undertake outside school work in their free time.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: As a result of the analyses, attitudes to writing were found to be a significant predictor of time allotted to writing ($R^2=0.30$, $p=0.00$). According to the result obtained, it can be stated that there is a positive significant relationship at a medium between attitudes to writing and time allotted to writing.

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Keywords: Attitudes to writing; time spent writing; relationship; primary education.

1. Introduction

Writing is the expression of feelings, thoughts, wishes and schemes in black and white. Writing needs more skill than knowledge; but the skill develops by practice (Graves 1983; Calkins, 1986; Öz, 2006). Writing is a complex skill to master, and it places multiple demands on writers. Mastering the writing process requires hard work, skill development, and years of practice. Many students do not write clearly or express their ideas well when they write (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1986; Ganopole, 1988; Collins & Cross, 1993; Collins & Parkhurst, 1996).

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Teaching the mother tongue involves developing the four basic language skills. The listening and reading skills encompass comprehension skills while speaking and writing skills relate to the skills of expression. These four basic skills have distinct definitions; however, they are intertwined when used as communication tools, called language, and the practice on any one of these skills have an effect on the development of the others. According to Sever (2004), the writing skill is not considered as a separate skill from the other language skills, and interacts with all of the others (2004:28). Writing is not only a language skill but also a technique which enables higher level thinking. It is a complex task which takes place in stages including steps that require such cognitive control mechanisms as synthesizing, planning, transforming, and reviewing (Maltepe, 2006: 21).

Written expression is the basis of success in other lessons. Irregularity and disorder in written expression generally causes one to encounter problems in other lessons as well. For this reason, it is necessary to enable all students to acquire a minimum degree of the written skill. “As children’s writing skills develop, their skills of transferring knowledge, revision and organization of thoughts will be more effective. This will facilitate their higher level writing to emerge. However, individuals whose writing skills have not developed fail to interpret the text that they are reading and integrate with their own background knowledge, thus ending up copying the original text, which is originally aimed for transferring knowledge” (Akyol, 2006: 93).

In our schools, writing work is still being undertaken based on traditional methods. Accordingly, writing is not viewed as an enjoyable activity for children. Among the reasons of this approach to writing can be listed adhering to the rules when writing, keeping the sheets clean, writing in an orderly way, and using appropriate grammar rules. Such instructions force children to pay attention to form instead of content, and impose the same writing standard on them (Oral, 2003). Tompkins (1982) suggests seven reasons why children should be involved in creative writing of stories : 1) to entertain; 2) to foster artistic expression; 3) to explore the functions and values of writing; 4) to stimulate imagination; 5) to clarify thinking; 6) to search for identity; and 7) to learn to read and write. With these compelling reasons in mind, it is hard to justify not making creative writing an important part of the elementary school classroom day. It is important that the reasons for writing be made clear to administrators and parents, who may automatically categorize creative writing as merely frivolous play, something akin to recess.

There are many factors which influence writing achievement. Improving students’ writing motivation cannot be explained by the method used only in classrooms (Johnson & Layng, 1992; Marx, 1991; Lindsley, 1995; Brewster, 1989). A powerful wish for writing is important, and accordingly, students’ motivation for writing also requires a positive attitude towards writing.

One of the important problems related to writing instruction is attitudes to writing. Most of the written composition lessons are viewed as tedious, monotonous, and boring, which also brings failure. Eliminating this problem is possible through positive attitudes to practice on written expression. It should be noted that the events that students experience and the topics that they are interested in may be the best topics to write about and writing on these topics may foster development of positive attitudes in students.

“Attitudes are learned self-tendencies which guide an individual’s thoughts and feelings and which emerges as being for or against an object or an abstract concept. Attitudes are certain orientations which cannot be observed themselves but are assumed to lead to certain observable behaviors. It is known that attitudes are composed of cognitive, emotional and behavioral constituents, and show changes and development in time” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1992: 53).

Insufficient writing skill most likely depends on an insufficient attitude toward writing. Other reasons could be a poor life-style, poor health and insufficient reading habits due to parents’ low socio-economic status. Writing attitude is highly effective on improving writing achievement (Bartscher, Lawler, Ramirez and Schinault, 2001). In this study, one of the factors that may affect attitudes to writing may be the time allotted to writing every day. The study focuses on this topic.

Interesting subject matter could increase students' writing motivation. Moreover, Different and original writing efforts are also highly effective on developing students' thinking skills. These efforts will have an impact on students' writing attitudes in their academic life (Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore & Dreznez, 1998; Manning, Glasner & Smith, 1996; Risemberg & Zimmerman, 1992).

In line with these considerations, the aim of the researcher in this study was to determine and evaluate the relationship between students’ attitudes to writing and daily time that they spend writing among 4th and 5th grade primary school students. With this aim, the sub-problem of this study was stated as the following: Is there a relationship between students’ attitudes to writing and daily time that they spend writing?

2. Method

The aim of this study is to determine the relationship between students' attitudes to writing and daily time that they spend writing. For this reason, the relational model was used in the study process (Baştürk, 2009; Karasar, 2005; Büyüköztürk, 2002; Baykul, 1999). Students' attitudes to writing were determined using the data obtained through a scale, and daily time spent writing was determined through the information gathered in the question included in the personal information form. The average amount of time that students spend writing (poetry, composition, songs, etc.) every day out of class time was determined in terms of minutes

2. 1. Sampling

This study was administered on students at 4th and 5th grades in primary schools in İzmir/Buca. In this study, the "Stratified Sampling Method" was used to determine the sample in this relational study aiming for situation analysis. The study was conducted in a total of 7 primary schools. The scale was administered on 208 female and 194 male (n=402) students. 51.7% of the participants of the study were girls and 48.3% were boys.

2. 2. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, "Attitude to Writing Scale (AWS)", developed by Susar Kırmızı (2009) was used. The scale aimed to determine the attitudes to writing among students at 4th and 5th grades of primary school (Susar Kırmızı, 2009).

In the formation of the scale, primarily literature review and students' views were consulted. The first form of the itemized scale was presented to expert views. To determine students' agreement level to these items, judgment of agreement to statements were presented in five scales in the Likert type items: "Strongly Agree, Highly Agree, Agree, Agree somewhat, Do not agree".

The pilot study of the 52-item scale was conducted in on students at 4th and 5th grades of state and private primary schools (n=258). To determine the construct validity of AWS, the data obtained in the pilot study were subjected to factor analysis. Before factor analysis was administered on the data from the pilot study, the suitability for factor analysis was examined. For this, KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value was taken as the reference value. The first results of the analysis of AWS showed that the KMO value of the scale was 0.90. Based on the results obtained from this analysis, the scale was deemed suitable (Pallant, 2001). Whether the data came from multiple variables in normal distribution was tested using the Bartlett test of sphericity value. The result obtained from the Bartlett test of sphericity administered on the data was Approx. Chi-Square=5864.589. The result of the Bartlett test of sphericity was found to be significant at 0.05 ($p=0.000$). Following these analyses, the data were found to be fit for factor analysis. Then, rotated factor analysis was administered. When 18 items were eliminated, the final form of the scale was given with the remaining 34 items. Factor eigenvalues of the items ranged between 0.50 and 0.86. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was found as 0.90. The weighted raw score that each student might get was a minimum of 34 and a maximum of 170. High total scores indicate that students have positive attitudes and low total scores indicate that students have negative attitudes.

2. 3. Data Analysis Techniques

The validity and reliability of the scale used in this study were ensured using arithmetic means, standard deviation, and item correlation analyses in factor analyses. As a result of the implementation of the study, regression analysis was administered.

3. Findings

In order to answer the first sub-problem of the study, the linearity of the relationship between attitudes to writing and daily time devoted to writing work was tested. For this, "simple linear regression" analysis was administered. According to the results of the analysis, there is a linear relationship at a medium level in positive direction between daily time devoted to writing work and attitudes to writing [$\beta=.55$; $R=.55$; $R^2=.30$; $F=117.62$; $p=.000$; $p<.01$].

According to the results obtained, the significance was calculated as $p=.000$. Based on this, the daily time devoted to writing work is found to be a significant predictor of attitudes to writing. It can be stated that 30% of the total variance regarding attitudes to writing constitutes daily time devoted to writing. The scatter diagram and regression line related to both the variables are presented in Figure 1.

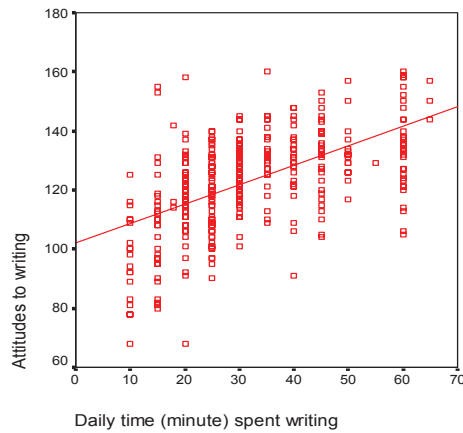


Figure 1. Scatter diagram and regression line related to attitudes to writing and daily time spent writing.

As can be seen in Figure 1, attitudes to writing and daily time spent writing have a linear relationship. The scatter points that indicate both the variables of the participants gather around one line.

4. Discussion and Suggestions

According to the results obtained in the study, 30% of the total variance regarding attitudes to writing can be explained by students' daily time spent writing. Having a positive attitude toward writing is rather important in realizing writing practices effectively. Writing is an important activity in individuals' lives. Expressing oneself by writing, and putting feelings into words can only be achieved by enjoying the activity of writing. Of course, students' ways of describing their feelings and thoughts through poetry or in written form in their free time may be rather effective in developing a positive attitude. On the other hand, students' actually investing their time to such work also indicates that they have a sensitive personality regarding writing. Primary school years when language skills and therefore writing skills are developed have a special importance in developing a positive attitude to writing. The reason is that a positive attitude to writing gained in these ages will be greatly effective on the students' written expression throughout their lives. According to Sever (1998), in primary years the writing practices that teachers conduct with the whole class is important in putting thoughts into writing. Boring writing work may negatively influence attitudes. However, students' attitudes to the course and perceptions of themselves have a positive effect on success on writing (Bates, 1984).

There is a belief in our society which states that "writing is a matter of talent, and thus not everyone can write". However, writing is not a matter of talent. Writing well may be a matter of talent, but good and correct writing and using Turkish language without mistakes is a task that everybody can successfully perform. Everyone can acquire the habit of good and accurate writing (Özbay, 1995: 224).

The following suggestions are made in light of the findings reached in this study:

1. Students should be explained that they need to devote some time in their free time to writing to increase their success in writing work,
2. Teachers should display encouraging behaviors rather than forcing students to write in their free time.
3. To develop positive attitudes to writing, work that will make writing interesting should be done in primary education years.
4. Students who put extra effort in writing practice should be rewarded.
5. Parents and teachers should cooperate to ensure that that students enjoy writing.
6. Further studies should be conducted to identify the variables that affect attitudes to writing. It is expected that developing positive attitudes is related to other variables.

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