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The effects of education program introducing Italy as a country and culture to 5-6 year-old children

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Abstract

In this study effectiveness of an intercultural education program that describing Italy with its various qualities as a country and culture was tested with an experimental study. The study is based on data from test and control groups. 5-6 year-old children attending the same pre-school are randomly assigned to test and control groups of 15 children. The test group is specifically presented with the program while the same subject (Italy) is presented to the control group with a more conventional approach. Information of the children in both test and control groups about the country in question is measured with a survey. The forms of survey were filled out by teachers and preliminary and post test examination. At the preliminary and post test evaluation the children are also presented face-to-face with a list of illustrated questions that are prepared in computer. The data are evaluated with appropriate statistical analysis methods. As a result of investigating effectiveness of the “Program Describing Italy as a Country and Culture” applied on children in test group, results according to self-evaluation of both teachers and children indicate a meaningful difference in the favour of test group.

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1. Introduction

Increasing number of migrants as a result of technological developments of this century and ease of migration due to ease of travel that such developments bring, economical difficulties and various political social pressures brought problem of harmony to the newly developed society with it. Because of conditions that necessitate cohabitation of human communities in the world reciprocal understanding and accepting differences, knowledge about different countries and cultures are becoming important. In order to achieve this, establishing a societal structure on the basis of mutual understanding, tolerance and accepting each other’s differences is necessary. Preparation of instruction programs on different countries and cultures could support such a social structure.

Educators agree that multi-cultural education influences developing programs, evaluating performance and school climate. (Saunders, 1982) It is a generally accepted educational aim for teachers to directly work against all kinds of

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discrimination between the children. Gay (1994) mentions that everybody that are related with education has to actively participate in applications of multi-cultural education. Herring and White (1995) also emphasize the importance of multi-cultural focus in educational programs.

Banks (2004), mentions that one of the significant aims of education is globalizing the students' though processes and that the teachers need to help the students in solving global problems and earning a deeper understanding. The importance of today's children getting exposed to different cultures in terms of knowing both themselves and others increases significance of education programs aiming at introducing different cultures. The way to accept and live together with differences necessitates a social structure based on knowing different cultures. For bringing up individuals that compose such a social structure introducing different countries and cultures emerges as an important aim. To this aim, education programs should include necessary factors to inform students about other cultures (Lindquist, 1997).

Starting multicultural education at an early age is very important in terms of bringing up the future generations as individuals who have positive self identity and who are respectful towards other's identities and cultures. It would be helpful to start multicultural education at pre-school. Moving from this fact, pre-school children need programs that would introduce and positively present different cultures. In the limited number of studies in this field (Önder, Unutkan, 2007; Unutkan, Önder, 2006; Unutkan, Önder, 2007; Unutkan, 2008), India, Egypt, Turkey, and China were introduced as country and culture to pre-school children in Istanbul at 5-6 years of age with programs applied for two or three weeks. In those studies information of experimental group was increased compared to control group.

In the process of learning different countries and their cultures and life styles multicultural education carries importance in terms of children's socialization through cultural information (Holmes, 1978, Saunders, 1982, Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky emphasizes experiences gained in culture influence individual development significantly and support mental development together with acquisition of language, symbols, and concepts (Arievitch and Stetsenko, 2000).

Education programs that are prepared to assist cultural learning package programs to reach their aim should be based on a learning by living method such as drama (Önder, 2003; 2005), on parent support methods such as parent participation (Oktay et al., 2003; Zembat and Unutkan, 2001), on different education methods and method that naturally attracts children's attention such as different storytelling styles (Lynch, 1986, Unutkan, 2006).

In this study effectiveness of an intercultural education program where Italy is described as a country and culture is evaluated with an experimental study. The study is based on data from experimental and control groups. 5-6 year-old children attending the same pre-school are randomly assigned to experimental and control groups of 15 children. The test group is specifically presented with the program while the same subject (Italy) was presented to the control group with a more conventional approach. Information of the children in both experimental and control groups about the country in question was measured with a survey filled out by teachers and preliminary and post test examination. At the preliminary and post test evaluation the children were also presented face-to-face with a list of illustrated questions that were designed by means of computer. The data were evaluated with appropriate statistical analysis methods. As a result of investigating effectiveness of the "Program Presenting Italy as a Country and Culture" applied on children in experimental group, results according to self-evaluation of both teachers and children indicate a meaningful difference in the favor of test group.

2. Problem

The study is experimental and is based on statistics applied on data from experimental and control groups.

2.1. Subjects

5-6 year-old children attending the same pre-school are randomly assigned to test and control groups of 15 children.

2.2. Process

The children in experimental group are presented with the special program where 2 or 3 activities are applied every day for two weeks of period (10 days total). The control group is also presented with the same subject (Italy) again every day for two weeks (10 days total) with a more conventional approach where only Turkish Language activity is used with flash cards. Information of the children in both experimental and control groups about the country in question is measured by teachers with a 12-question survey filled out for preliminary and post test examination. At the preliminary and post test evaluation the children are also presented face-to-face with a list of 12 illustrated questions that are prepared by means of computer.

2.3. Program Applied in Test Group

The activity types below that deal with Italy as a country and culture compose the program's foundation. Turkish Language activity is applied regularly every day for two weeks in conversation style with computer support. Other activities are distributed by turns as 2 or 3 per day in regular daily schedule applied in class. (Turkish: 10 activities, drama: 2 activities, games and act: 5 activities, music: 4 activities, art: 8 activities, science and mathematics: 4 activities, preparation to literacy: 6 activities, family participation: 10 activities)

2.4. Program Applied in Control Group

Italy is covered as a country and culture regularly every day for 2 weeks in scope of Turkish language activity and conversation style. The main tool used in control group is flash cards.

3. Results

Results of preliminary and post test applied to experimental and control groups where the children evaluate themselves under teacher supervision:

Table 1. Experimental and Control Groups Child Evaluation Preliminary Test Average Scores

	Group	N	X	SS	SH
Preliminary Test	Exp.	15	,0000	,0000	,0000
	Control	15	,0000	,0000	,0000

As it is seen on Table 1, there is no difference between average preliminary test scores based on self evaluation of children. Accordingly, there is no difference between test and control groups in terms of the program whose effects are investigated. It means that the groups are equal in terms of knowledge about Italy in the beginning.

Table 2. Experimental and Control Groups Child Evaluation Post Test Average Scores

	Group	N	X	SS	SH
Post Test	Exp.	15	12,0000	,0000	,0000
	Control	15	2,0000	1,5120	,3901

As it is seen on Table 2, there is a difference in favor of the test group in comparison based on children's evaluation (Experimental group X : 12,00, control group X: 2,00). Results of the t test applied to the said averages are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Experimental and Control Groups Child Evaluation Post Test t Test Scores

sd	SH	t	p
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Post Test	28	,3805	25,620	,000
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As it is seen on Table 3 there is a significant difference between post test evaluations of children in experimental and control groups ($t: 25,620$, $P < .001$)

Table 4. Experimental and Control Groups Teacher Evaluation Preliminary Test Average Scores

	Group	N	X	SS	SH
Preliminary Test	Exp.	15	,0000	,0000	,0000
	Control	15	,0000	,0000	,0000

As it is seen on Table 4, there is no difference between average preliminary test scores based on teacher evaluation. Accordingly, there is no difference between experimental and control groups in terms of the program whose effects are investigated. The groups are equal in the beginning in respect of knowledge about Italy.

Table 5. Experimental and Control Groups Teacher Evaluation Post Test Average Scores

	Group	N	X	SS	SH
Post Test	Exp.	15	13,0000	,0000	,0000
	Control	15	3,0000	1,2536	,3237

As it is seen on Table 5, there is a difference in favor of the experimental group in comparison based on teacher evaluation (Experimental group $X: 13,00$, control group $X: 3,00$). Results of the t test applied to the said averages are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Experimental and Control Groups Teacher Evaluation Post Test t Test Scores

	sd	SH	t	p
Post Test	28	,3225	30,882	,000

As it is seen on Table 6 there is a significant difference between post test evaluations of children in experimental and control groups ($t: 30,882$, $P < .001$).

4. Results and proposals

Results of the research proved a difference in the favor of experimental group according to both teacher and children evaluations. According to this, there is an increase in information about Italy and Italian culture of children in test group who acquired this information through various activities such as games and activities, science and mathematics, parent participation, etc. instead of conventional method when compared with children in control group. It can be said that the programme which was developed gave successful results.

When importance of pre-school is taken into consideration in bringing up qualified individuals, results of this research are important for teacher training.

Results of the study show that the multi-dimensional program prepared to present Italy as a country and culture has positive effects on 5-6 year-old children. In other words, children in experimental group gained information about Italy in the program content. Accordingly, the following suggestions can be made:

Moving from the success of the program developed with this study, pre-school programs about other countries and cultures are useful for teaching pre-school teachers.

In this study the number of children in experimental and control groups was limited with 15. In future studies, the number of children can be increased.

Such programs can be prepared and applied for younger age groups.

Future studies can be evaluated by considering gender of children as a variable.

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