

The Effect of Group Counseling Program on 8th Grade Students' Assertiveness Levels

Grup Rehberlik Programının İlköğretim 8.Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Güvengenlik Düzeylerine Etkisi

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Abstract

This study is conducted to determine the effects of group counseling program on elementary school 8th grade students' assertiveness skills. Study group was formed of 100 students getting educated in Erzurum Kültür Elementary School in 2011-2012 education years. RAE-Rathus Assertiveness Schedule was applied on this group to gather data. 30 students getting lower scores from the inventory have been randomly divided into experimental and control groups. Each group is formed of 15 students. Group counseling program has been carried out for 8 weeks on the experimental group to improve the students' assertiveness skills. Single-way and two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) has been used in the analysis of the data. The data is analyzed with SPSS 19.00. The results of the study show that assertiveness skills of the students who participate in the group counseling program has increased significantly compared to the control group and to the pre-experimental circumstances. Besides, it is determined that the change observed in the experimental group has been occurred separately from the age and socio-economic level variables, and it is determined with the monitoring test applied after four months that this affect is continued. According to this result, it can be said that the applied group counseling program is an effective means to improve the assertiveness skills of elementary school students.

Key Words: Elementary, Assertiveness, Assertiveness inventory, Assertiveness education.

Özet

Bu araştırma grup rehberlik programının ilköğretim 8.sınıf öğrencilerinin güvengenlik becerileri üzerindeki etkisini belirlemek için yapılmıştır. Çalışma grubu 2011-2012 eğitim öğretim yılında Erzurum Kültür Kurumu İlköğretim Okulu'nda öğrenim görmekte olan 100 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplamak için Rathus Atılganlık Envanteri uygulanmıştır. Ölçekten düşük puan alan 30 öğrenci rastgele deney ve kontrol gruplarına dağıtılmışlardır. Gruplar 15'şer öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Deney grubuna 8 hafta süreyle güvengenlik becerilerini geliştirmeye dönük grup rehberlik programı uygulanmıştır. Verilerin

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analizinde tek faktörlü ve iki faktörlü Kovaryans analizi (ANCOVA) kullanılmıştır. Veriler SPSS 19.00 paket programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları grup rehberlik programına katılan öğrencilerin güvengenlik becerilerinin deney öncesine ve kontrol grubuna göre anlamlı olarak yükseldiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca deney grubunda gözlenen değişimin cinsiyet ve sosyoekonomik düzey değişkenlerinden bağımsız olarak gerçekleştiği ve bu etkinin 4 ay sonra yapılan izleme testi ile devam ettiği saptanmıştır. Bu sonuca göre uygulanan grup rehberlik programının ilköğretim öğrencilerinin güvengenlik becerilerini geliştirmede etkili bir araç olduğu söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İlköğretim, Güvengenlik, Atılganlık Envanteri, Güvengenlik eğitimi.

Introduction

Human beings, as a social creature, naturally need to be together with other people. In order to maintain a healthy synergy, the individual should have several social skills in the interpersonal relations. In this sense, 'assertiveness', one of the basic social skills, plays an important role in the interpersonal relations (Deniz, 1997). Assertive behavior having been used as assertiveness in recent years has been transformed into Turkish as enterprise (Akbaba, 2012). Voltan-Acar (1990) defined assertiveness as a form of interpersonal relations which is developed for the individuals to vindicate their rights without underestimating others and denying other's rights, and they also stated that it is not aggression, passiveness or introversion. And Smith (1998) defined assertiveness that the individual can convey that who he/she is, what he/she does and want, and what he/she expects from the life for others in social surroundings. According to Alberti and Emmons (2002), assertiveness is the behavioral features that individuals have as such that the individual can express himself as bare fact, transmit negative or positive feelings, withstand the requests that are adverse to him/her, have the ability to make requests from others and exercise his/her rights without overriding other's.

Lange and Jakubowski (1976) defined assertiveness as that the individual respects other's rights while vindicating his/hers in interpersonal relations, states his/her feelings, thoughts and beliefs honestly and appropriately. According to Voltan (1980), an assertive individual, with the advantage of being assertive, finds the opportunity to develop his/her other social skills, such as acquiring easily the things he/she is interested, utilizing the opportunities and accommodating more easily to the social surroundings. These individuals have the skills to say no to others and set boundaries with others.

Stumphauzer (1973) stated that individuals whose assertiveness skills are weak behave unaware of the rights, freedom and personal principles in social life and interpersonal relations, and they have irrational fear and thoughts, and moreover, they do not have the courage to assert their rights even though they are aware of these. The non-assertive individuals have difficulty in achieving their goals in social life and interpersonal relations, and they are usually filled with anger and the feeling of inadequacy (VoltanAcar, Whirter, 2000). On the contrary, assertive individuals are aware of their rights, freedom and personal principles and more successful in problem solving (Deurzen, 1988). Cowden (2002) stated that the anxiety levels of unassertive individuals will also be high as their social competence is indefinite and so they will be exposed to negative evaluation in the relations they have established. Phelps and Austion, (1997) expressed that assertive individuals can

express accurately and intelligibly what they want with few words, besides they use 'I language' effectively.

Hill (1989), Jackson, Towson and Narduzzi (1997) determined that the rejection anticipation of individuals who have lower assertiveness levels is high, competence expectations are high; Walsh (2002) determined that the unassertive individuals lack of social skills in interpersonal relations; Cooley and Novicki (1984) stated that unassertive ones are externally controlled and they use "negative loading styles" the more than assertive individuals

The assertiveness concept, which has been the topic of many multi-directional studies with its socio-cultural and psychological nature, has been analyzed in many dimensions and according to the obtained results, it is acknowledged that assertiveness is an improvable quality in adolescents by creating preconditions to develop assertiveness and curriculums to improve assertiveness become more popular. This view is supported with the hypothetical and experimental evidence propounded by many experts studying on this topic (Voltan, 1980, Sorias, 1986; Çulha and Dereli, 1987).

Assertiveness training teaches the individuals to confidently and appropriately express their own feelings and thoughts in social surroundings, the way to accept criticism, the way to cope with stress, to communicate themselves positively, to understand the difference between unsocial, sociable and aggressive behaviors and to vindicate their personal rights without getting up against others, pushing others and without allowing others to push themselves (Buzlu and Bilgin 2001; Ustun, Akgün and Partlak 2005).

Çeçen and Zengel (2009), Karahan (2005) determined that group counseling program improves assertiveness skills in adolescents. Öksüz (2004) determined that expressing feelings improves assertiveness skills of university students and so did Altun (2006) that expressing feelings improves assertiveness skills of primary education students. Glueckauf and Quittner (1992) and Stake, DeVille & Pennel (1983), McNeilly and Yorke (1990), Rotheram and Armstrong (1980) determined that assertiveness training is effective in improving assertiveness skills and social skills in adolescents. Besides, Howing et al. (1990) determined that it is effective in improving social skills and interpersonal relations and also in decreasing aggressiveness levels of adolescents. Tavakoli et al. (2009) established that the assertiveness training program applied on the foreign students who got educated in U.S. increased their assertiveness levels, on the contrary Metz et al. (2006) determined that assertiveness training decreases the risk of getting drug addict in adolescents. Akbaba (2012) stated that assertiveness training is a kind of therapy method; assertiveness training is given to the clients with various techniques. According to the related literature, it can be said that getting assertiveness education during pre-puberty can be an improving service for the future lives of the students. In this sense, it can be claimed that assertiveness education is a substantial education for the elementary school students.

The evidence of the related literature shows that assertiveness is an improvable quality with specific education programs.

Purpose

The study has been done on the purpose of determining the effect of group counseling program on 8th grade students' assertiveness skills. Considering

assertiveness is an important factor in interpersonal relations, the results of this study is important as they will help determine the effect of group counseling program on adolescents, demonstrate assertiveness is an improvable quality and present a source data for the scientists and psychological counselors who will study on this topic, and they will also contribute to fund of knowledge about assertiveness training in the related literature.

The questions below are answered in this study according to the aims mentioned above.

1. Is assertiveness education effective on the assertiveness skills of the elementary education students?
2. On checking the effect of the gender, is assertiveness education effective on the assertiveness skills of the elementary education students?
3. On checking the effect of socio-economic level, is assertiveness education effective on the assertiveness skills of the elementary education students?
4. Will the effect of assertiveness education applied on the experimental group be still continued with monitoring measurements that will be applied after four months?

Methodology

The study is a pretest-posttest-control group experimental study. The study group is formed of 100 students that have studied at Kültür Kurumu Elementary School in 2011-2012 academic years. RAE-Rathus Assertiveness Schedule developed by Voltan Acar (1980) is used to form the study group. To form a homogenic structure, 30 students who got low scores from the inventory have been randomly divided into experimental and control groups, 15 each, by sorting the students according to their scores from the inventory. The students of the experimental and control groups are formed of 16 female and 14 male students, 7 students are with low socio-economic status, 12 students are with average socio-economic status and 11 students are high socio-economic status.

Procedure

As part of the study, specific procedures have been applied on the study group. At first, eight-session group counseling activities based on the related literature have been developed by the researchers to improve the assertiveness skills of the students in the experimental group. These activities have been carried out as a single session between 60-90 minutes a week, in total for 8 weeks. But counseling activities in the elementary education counseling curriculum have also been carried out on the control group for 8 weeks. The contents of the assertiveness training program carried on the experimental group are: 1. Session; meeting of the group members and preparing for the group process in the session, 2. Session; exemplifying that everybody has specific rights in social life and helping students to understand the appropriate ways to know their rights, 3. Session; reinforcing the difference between non-assertive, aggressive and assertive communication forms, 4. Session; helping students to transfer what they have learned about communication styles into real life situations, 5. Session; insuring students to enact assertive behaviors in the group, encouraging them to enact positive assertive behaviors towards others, 6 Session; enforcing students' opinions that everybody has basic personal rights and helping students to display how these

rights serve in their lives, 7. Session; getting students to realize the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness, and encouraging them to act assertive in appropriate situations, 8. Session; evaluating the past seven sessions and completing the group process by carrying out a general evaluation about assertiveness.

The counseling activities in the elementary school counseling curriculum has been applied on the control group.

Data Collection Instruments

In the study, RAE-Rathus Assertiveness Schedule adapted into Turkish by Voltan-Acar (1980) is used to determine the students' characteristics of assertiveness (Öner 1997; Voltan 1980). It is a scale which measures assertive and aggressive behaviors, is applicable on adolescents and adults as a group, it consists of 30 items, and the individual can fill it in on his/her own. An explanation text exists on the top of the question form and the students are asked to select and mark the options from -3 to +3 for each item. In the scoring, the values of 1.2.4.5.9.11.12.13.14.15.16.17.19.23.24.26.30 items are reversed and scoring is done in this way. The Turkish form's test-retest reliability coefficient is .92; coefficient of internal consistence is acquired by Searman-Brown formula. Cronbach alpha coefficient is found as .83 in the study. The scores that can be got from the scale range between 30 and 180. The high scores indicate assertiveness, and the low scores indicate shyness.

Analysis of Data

Single-way and two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) are used in the analysis of the obtained data. In the analysis of data, in order to determine whether the assumptions of the analysis of covariance are provided, it is observed that in such conditions that the groups have normal distribution, the variance and regression lines should be equal. Single-way and two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) test techniques have been used to determine the effect of the possible variables (gender, socio-economic condition) which can affect the study, and the results of study have been carried out on the experimental group.

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) provides to statistically control a variable or variables which are related to the dependent variable except the effect of one factor or factors tested in a research. In this sense, ANCOVA has two basic advantages compared to ANOVA. These are; a) providing a major statistical strength due to decreasing the error variance, b) providing a decrease in the bias of an experiment when there are differences in the groups at the beginning of an experiment. In a pretest-posttest-control group design, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), in which the pretest is controlled as a common variable, is the most appropriate statistical procedure if the researcher focuses on the success of the experimental procedure (Field, 2009; Büyüköztürk, 2011; Seçer, 2013). All of the data has been analyzed with SPSS 19.00.

Findings

The obtained data related to the hypothesis of the research are analyzed and the results are indicated below. In the study which analyze the effect of group

counseling program aiming to improve the assertiveness skills of the elementary education students, the data related to the experimental and control groups are analyzed with Shapiro-Wilks Normality test to determine if they are parametric or not, and Skewness and Kurtosis values are analyzed and it has been determined that the groups show normal distribution.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of experimental and control groups

Group	n	Mean	Modified Mean
Experimental	15	43.9333	44.543
Control	15	37.7333	36.915

According to post-test scores modified after pre-test scores, it is seen that the students in the control group have higher mean values than the students in experimental group in terms of groups. The results of ANCOVA which have been done to determine whether the observed differences between modified means are significant are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of pretest and posttest points of experimental and control groups to single-way analysis of covariance

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	p	η^2
Groups	29.147	1	29.147	2.410	.133	.085
Pretests	409.953	1	409.953	33.901	.000	.566
Group-Pretest	8.752	1	8.752	.724	.403	.027
Error	314.409	26	12.093			
Sum	51159.000	30				

On analyzing Table 2, it is seen that the group effect on the assertiveness levels of students is not significant ($F_{(1,26)}=.2.410$, $p=.133$, $\eta^2=.085$). This evidence shows that the calculated lines of regression related to the prediction of the group effect on the assertiveness levels of students in experimental and control groups are equal, and the change observed in the assertiveness skills of the students is independently occurred.

On analyzing Table 2, it is seen that the change, related to the pretest points, occurred in the assertiveness levels of students is significant ($F_{(1,26)}=33.901$, $p=.000$, $\eta^2=.566$). According to this evidence, it can be said that the difference observed between the modified mean points of the students in experimental and control groups is significant, and the assertiveness training program carried out on the experimental group is effective on increasing the assertiveness levels of the students.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of gender and socio-economic status related to the common effect on the assertiveness levels of the students

Gender	Socio-Economic Status	n	Mean	Modified Mean
Male	Low	3	42.0000	36.524
	Middle	8	40.5000	39.822
	High	5	44.2000	41.903
Female	Low	4	38.0000	39.226

Middle	4	36.5000	33.777
High	6	42.6667	40.148

It is seen that there is a differentiation between the assertiveness points of the students in terms of gender and socio-economic status according to assertiveness test mean points. The results of two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) which is done to determine whether the difference observed between modified mean points are significant can be seen in table 4.

Table 4. Results of two-way analysis of covariance (ancova) related to the common effect of gender and socio-economic status on the assertiveness levels of students

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	p	η^2
Gender	11.250	1	11.250	.397	.537	.021
Socio-Economic Status	89.213	2	44.607	1.573	.235	.148
Pretests	263.997	1	263.997	9.309	.007	.340
Gender * socio-eco * pretests	168.029	5	33.606	1.185	.355	.248
Gender* socio-economic status	27.408	2	13.704	.483	.625	.051
Error	510.479	18	28.360			
Sum	51159.00	30				

On analyzing Table 4, the change of the assertiveness levels of students ($F_{(1, 18)} = 9.309$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .340$) is significant, but in terms of gender, it has been found that there is not a significant differentiation between the modified mean points related to students' assertiveness levels ($F_{(1, 18)} = .397$, $p = .537$, $\eta^2 = .021$). According to this evidence, it can be said that the applied training program is effective in increasing significantly the assertiveness levels of students, and this effect has been occurred independently from the gender coefficient.

It has been found that the change in the assertiveness levels of students ($F_{(1, 18)} = 9.309$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .340$) is significant, but there is not a significant differentiation in the modified mean points related to the assertiveness levels of the students who have different socio-economic status ($F_{(2, 18)} = .1573$, $p = .235$, $\eta^2 = .148$). According to this result, it can be said that there is a significant differentiation in the assertiveness levels of students compared to pretest case, and this differentiation is occurred independently from the socio-economic status coefficient.

It has been found that the common effect of *gender x socio-economic status* on assertiveness skills of students is not significant ($F_{(2, 18)} = .483$, $p = .625$, $\eta^2 = .051$). According to this evidence, it can be said that the calculated lines of regression related to the prediction of the common effect of gender and socio-economic status on the assertiveness skills of students in experimental and control groups are equal, and the change observed in the assertiveness skills of the students is not affected by gender and socio-economic status coefficients.

Besides, it is seen that the change occurred in the assertiveness levels of students and related to the pretest points is significant ($F_{(1, 26)} = 9.309$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .340$). This evidence can be considered in a way that there is a significant differentiation between the modified mean points of the students in the

experimental and control groups, and the assertiveness training program carried out on the experimental group is effective independently from gender and socio-economic status coefficients to improve the assertiveness levels of students.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of posttest and follow-up test of experimental and control groups

Group	n	Sum	Modified Sum
Experimental	15	43.6667	40.917
Control	15	37.4667	40.023

According to modified follow-up test mean points, it is seen that the students in the experimental group have higher mean values than the ones in the control group. The results of the covariance analysis (ANCOVA) which has been done to determine whether the difference observed between modified mean points are significant are shown in table 6.

Table 6. Results of the analysis of covariance (ancova) related to the results of the follow-up test applied to experimental and control groups

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Sum of Squares	F	p	η^2
Groups	.008	1	.008	.006	.941	.005
Posttests	429.689	1	429.689	287.497	.000	.905
Groups* Posttests	.281	1	.281	.188	.668	.012
Error	38.859	26	1.495			
Sum	49609.000	30				

On analyzing Table 6, it was found that the follow-up test points of experimental and control groups do not differentiate significantly according to posttest points ($F_{(1, 26)} = .188$, $p = .668$, $\eta^2 = .012$). According to this result, it can be said that the differentiation generated in the assertiveness levels of students according to follow-up test is not significant, and the effect provided experimentally continues after 4 months following the appliance of the training program. Accordingly, it can be said that the effect of the applied training program continues.

Discussion and conclusion

It is determined that group counseling program applied to improve the assertiveness skills of 8th grade students leaves a significant impression on the assertiveness skills of students, and the assertiveness skills of the students differentiate significantly compared to both the pre-experimental situation and to those in the control group. In the perspective of the related literature, it is seen that the similar studies about the assertiveness support the evidence of this study. Çeçen, Zengel (2009) determined that assertiveness training program leaves a significant impression on the elementary school students; Zengin (2008) determined that peacemaking and problem solving training program is effective on improving the assertiveness skills of 5th grade students; Ergül (2008) stated that peacemaking and problem solving training program increases the assertiveness skills of the high school students, particularly female students'. Morgan and Leung (1980), Göktürk (2009), Adana and et al. (2010), and Voltan-Acar (1990), Karahan (2005), Öksüz

(2005), Altun (2006), Glueckauf and Quittner (1992) and Stake. DeVille & Pennel (1983), McNeilly and Yorke (1990), Waksman (1984), Rotheram and Armstrong (1980), Eroğlu and Rezan (2009) determined that assertiveness training is effective on improving the social skills and assertiveness in adolescents. The research results regarding the related literature support the hypothesis that assertiveness is a learnable behavior.

The evidence of the study shows that the change observed in the assertiveness skills of students in the experimental group is not affected by the gender coefficient. In the related literature, it is seen that the research evidence about gender is not consistent. Some research evidence shows that males are more assertive than females (Kilkus (1993) Kimble Mars and Kiska (1984) Arı (1989); while some others show that females are more assertive than males (Rotheram and Armstrong (1980) Gemi (1997); and some other research evidence shows that assertiveness does not differentiate according to gender (Pardeck. Giannio. Anderson et al. (1991), Deluty (1985), Aydın (1991), Tegin (1990), Öngün (2000). It is seen that the evidence of the studies about gender is not consistent with each other. It is thought that this situation results from the effect of variables such as age, culture, education level and etc. along with gender on assertiveness. The research evidence shows that the observed change in the assertiveness levels of students is occurred independently from the gender variable. This evidence is compatible with the evidence of Yatağan's (2005) research in which he analyzed the effect of assertiveness training on elementary school students.

It is also seen that the related literature evidence regarding the socio-economic status variable, another variable whose effect was also analyzed within the study, is not consistent with each other. Some research evidence shows that assertiveness does not differentiate according to socio-economic status variable (Becet (1989), and some other research evidence shows that the individuals with higher-socio-economic status are more assertive (Voltan. 1980; Gemi. 1997; Topukçu. 1982; Görüş. 1999), but some others (Saruhan. 1996) shows that individuals with lower-socio-economic status are more assertive. The data of the related literature show that the evidence between the assertiveness and socio-economic status is not consistent. The results regarding the group counseling activities to improve assertiveness show that the observed change in the assertiveness levels of students is occurred independently from socio-economic status variable. This finding shows that group counseling program aiming to improve assertiveness is effective on improving the assertiveness levels of students, and this effect is occurred independently from socio-economic status variable.

There is also some other research evidence which has analyzed the effect of group counseling program on assertiveness. Karahan (2005) determined that training of communication and conflict solving skills improves the assertiveness levels of university students; Howing et al. (1990) determined that assertiveness training is effective on gaining social skills and decreasing aggressiveness in adolescents; Tavakoli et al. (2009) determined that the training program applied on foreign students studying in U.S. improves the assertiveness skills; Metz et al. (2006) determined that assertiveness training decreases the risk of becoming drug addict in adolescents; Lin et al. (2004) stated that their study carried out on psychiatric patients shows that assertiveness training affects the assertiveness skills positively and improves them; Yamagishi et al. (2007) determined that assertiveness

training is effective for nurses to gain stress management skills and to improve assertiveness skills.

The obtained research evidence and the data about the related literature show that group counseling program is effective to provide the targeted change in individuals. In this sense, it can be suggested that particularly in elementary schools, school counselors should use group counseling activities to teach the students, who are passive, unsocial, lack of self-confidence and lack of assertiveness skills, assertiveness skill by means of school psychological counseling and guidance service.

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