A connectivist learning activity for 8th grade students on peer bullying

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Abstract

This study was conducted in a holistic single case design to examine the peer bullying activity based on the connectivist learning approach for 8th grade middle school students. Thirteen eighth grade students attending a private educational institution that supports school programs in Bursa in the 2022-2023 academic year voluntarily participated in the study. In this study, in which the first 4 sessions of the 5-session Peer Bullying Awareness Program published by the Ministry of Education were implemented through blended learning, data were collected through focus group interviews, reflective diaries and Blogger environment records. The findings obtained from the research show that the students showed an average participation in the activities on Blogger, and the participation in the last activities decreased due to the short time left for high school entrance exam, that different network connections were not used sufficiently in the process, that although various difficulties were encountered, opinions were mostly positive about the activity, that a mobile application was preferred to the Blogger. As a result, most of the students gained awareness about peer bullying. Studies on a similar subject can be carried out at a different level than middle school and in a different social media environment than Blogger.

Keywords: Peer Bullying, Middle School, Connectivist Learning, Blogger, Blended Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying, a subset of aggression (Griffin & Gross, 2004), is defined as aggressive behavior involving attacks, humiliation, or exclusion directed by an individual or a group towards a weaker and more vulnerable individual (Salmivalli, 2010). In this context, peer bullying can be described as harm, humiliation, and torment inflicted by one or more students on another student whom they perceive as weaker and defenseless (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2021). Griffin and Gross (2004) categorize bullying behaviors into physical, verbal, and relational bullying. Physical bullying includes actions such as hitting, punching, and kicking; verbal bullying involves negative verbal expressions such as swearing, insulting, and gossiping, and relational bullying consists of behaviors like excluding and leaving someone alone. Additionally, cyberbullying has emerged as one of the bullying types in the 21st century with the widespread use of mobile phones and the internet (Smith, 2016). A meta-analysis conducted by Talu and Gümüş (2022) in Türkiye examined the prevalence of peer bullying among adolescents, revealing that students experienced bullying at least twice and engaged in bullying twice during an academic year. Children and adolescents witnessing peer bullying find themselves in a social dilemma as they attempt to understand and stop the behavior while simultaneously trying to secure their status and safety within the peer group (Salmivalli, 2010). However, peer bullying poses serious risks in terms of psychological and academic adjustment for students who play the roles of both the perpetrator and the victim, as well as those who witness it (Salmivalli, 2010).

Studies on peer bullying conducted in Türkiye have focused on various topics, including cyberbullying, identification of peer bullying, predictive characteristics of bullying, and factors influencing and accompanying bullying. Moreover, there is an increasing focus on studies that develop and implement educational programs to prevent bullying. For example, Kartal and Bilgin (2007), applied Garrity and colleagues' (2000) Bully-Proofing Your School Program to 40 fifth-grade students, resulting in positive changes in students' perspectives at the end of the training. In a study by Kantar and Uysal (2019), the impact of creative drama activities based on text types on the perception of peer bullying was examined. Findings from the experimental study with sixth-grade students revealed that before the intervention, peer bullying was perceived primarily in the physical dimension, whereas after the intervention, emotional and verbal dimensions were also recognized. In a study conducted by Kutlu and Karaca (2021), an awareness training program for peer bullying was developed and implemented in eight sessions for elementary school students. The findings suggest that, before the training, students' definitions of peer bullying shifted from physical fights to power imbalances, with bullying situations most commonly encountered in the schoolyard and during commuting to school. The study also revealed that the behaviors leading to bullying included disagreements during play in the pre-test, while in the post-test, they consisted of actions such as pushing for no reason. In a study led by Özbek and Taneri (2022), a bibliotherapy and creative drama-based peer bullying intervention program for elementary school students was found to raise awareness of peer bullying and contribute to finding solutions to combat bullying.

Despite the importance of peer bullying prevention/intervention programs, in Türkiye, there is no school-based program integrated into the curriculum aimed at preventing peer bullying (Doğan, 2022; Özbek, Taneri & Akduman, 2020). However, the Directorate of Special Education and Guidance Services provides brochures for teachers and parents on the topic of peer bullying, presentations for teachers and parents from preschool to high school, awareness programs, psycho-educational programs, and finally, storybooks for preschool and elementary school students (https://orgm.meb.gov.tr/www/akran-zorbaligi/icerik/2085). These programs have been developed by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) with the financial support of UNICEF (MEB, 2021). Among these, the Peer Bullying Awareness Program (PBAP) was published in separate booklets for preschool, primary school, middle school, and high school levels in 2021. It is recommended that these programs be implemented in schools by a guidance counselor or by the class guidance teacher under the control of a guidance

counselor. In the school implementation, the planning and execution of the program have been left to the responsibility of the school principals, and it is suggested that all materials needed for the implementation should be provided by the school administration. However, the irregular and unsystematic implementation of this program in schools may lead to students inevitably experiencing peer bullying, emphasizing the importance of addressing this issue. In addition to being incorporated into school programs, implementing this program as an extracurricular activity outside of school can contribute positively.

In the current digital age, it is evident that the use of information and communication technologies is essential for learners both in and out of school learning processes. Implementing PBAP as an extracurricular activity through a blend of face-to-face and e-learning processes can particularly meet the expectations of eighth-grade students. To achieve this, providing students with the opportunity for a blended learning experience is necessary. Blended learning, as the name suggests, represents the integration of online learning with more traditional learning methods, combining the innovative and technological advancements offered by online learning with the interaction and engagement provided in traditional learning (Thorne, 2003). In this study, blended learning has been implemented by uniquely combining the face-to-face learning process of the peer bullying activity with the learning processes in a blog page environment. The design of the learning processes for digital-age learners is based on the connectivist learning approach.

Siemens (2005) suggested that while behaviorist, cognitive, and constructivist theories are the three fundamental theories most utilized in learning environments, they emerged in times when learning wasn't influenced by technology. As an alternative theory, Siemens advocated for connectivism. Connectivism, which is based on the ubiquity of digital material and network connections between content, defines learning as the process of creating information, communication, and resource networks that are applied to real-world problems, and the learner's role is described as having the ability to find and apply information when and where needed (Anderson & Dron, 2011). Siemens (2005) emphasized that in this age of technology where knowledge changes every day, we cannot personally experience and acquire learning; it's crucial to benefit from others' experiences through networks. However, connectivism, being a new concept, has been criticized for being distant from traditional epistemological paradigms (Goldie, 2016) and not presenting a purely educational perspective on learning. It has also been criticized for reflecting a combination of ideas from previous theories and not being a novel learning theory, particularly due to its deviation from the traditional concepts of a teacher and teaching, providing learning solely from a virtual environment (Duke et al., 2013). Therefore, it seems appropriate to call this connectivist learning approach instead of connectivist learning theory.

As suggested, raising awareness of peer bullying among teenagers, namely 8th grade students in the case of this study, is critical. To achieve this, diverse engaging activities need to be planned in schools and special education institutions supporting schools (tutoring centers, prep schools, etc.) Furthermore, exploring the implementation of such activities for digital-age learners, informed by both the Web and the Peer Bullying Awareness Program (PBAP), is essential. In other words, it is important to focus on how activities related to PBAP can be designed based on connectivist learning principles, especially by exploring examples and results of extracurricular activities in the literature. In line with these needs, this study aims to examine the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity (CPBA), a peer bullying activity based on the connectivist learning approach, for 8th-grade middle school students. The research questions sought to be answered in line with this goal are as follows:
1. What is the participation status of students in the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity?
2. What are the thoughts and emotions of participating students regarding the process of the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity?
3. What are the thoughts and emotions of participating students regarding peer bullying at the end of the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity?

METHOD

Research Design

Conducted to examine a connectivist learning approach-based peer bullying activity implemented through a blended learning process in the Blogger environment for 8th-grade students, this qualitative study was designed as a holistic single-case design. The holistic single-case design involves the examination of a single analysis unit (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021), and is recommended when the underlying theory and/or approach have a holistic structure (Yin, 2018). Indeed, the specific case to be investigated in this study is a connectivist learning activity related to peer bullying, planned to be implemented in the Blogger environment within the scope of the guidance course.

Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity

The Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity was designed in a doctoral course related to e-learning offered by a graduate education institute at a Turkish university. The activity, designed by two doctoral students participating in the course and the course instructor specializing in e-learning and was reviewed by an expert in the field of counseling, was conducted both face-to-face and on the Blogger platform. The choice of a blog environment as the e-learning platform is due to the perception of blogs more like web pages compared to other social networking sites, while still allowing participant interactions and minimizing risks associated with other platforms. The study preferred the free blog service provided by Blogger. The Peer Bullying Awareness Program (PBAP) consists of 5 sessions: (1) What is Peer Bullying? (2) Building Empathy, (3) Resisting Peer Bullying, (4) Don't be Silent to Bullying, and (5) If It Were Me! However, the 3rd and 4th sessions, deemed to have closely related content, were combined into a single week. The integration of the 5 sessions of PBAP with the 4-week activity in this research involved operationalizing the session outcomes, incorporating them into the activity, and adding visual elements such as knowledge cards and examples from the program into interactive video content. The details of the activity, conducted weekly, are outlined below week by week:

- In the first-week activity, during the face-to-face guidance class, the Blogger environment was introduced to students. Students with email accounts were identified, and those without were assisted in obtaining one. The purpose and process of the activity were explained, students were informed of their roles and responsibilities, a WhatsApp group was created for weekly updates and interpersonal communication, and finally, a discussion on peer bullying took place. The first session of PBAP, focusing on "What is peer bullying?" covered physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying types, along with examples. In the Blogger environment, students were first presented with interactive video content developed with H5P, and they commented on the video within the blog environment. Later, students were asked to create a slogan for the topic of the first week. According to Siemens (2005), the skills that learners must have in connectionist learning include the ability to create/infer meaning and the ability to think creatively and critically. For this reason, it was aimed for students to acquire and reveal these skills with the task of creating a slogan at the end of each activity. Both the first and second researchers actively participated in creating the slogan, serving as models and initiating the first interaction in the blog environment.
- In the second-week activity, a discussion about emotions was conducted during the face-to-face Guidance class using a sample scenario. In the Blogger environment, the second session of PBAP, titled "Building Empathy," presented a scenario/story through video, discussing whether the incident in the story was bullying, the feelings of the individuals involved, and the feelings and thoughts of the bystanders. This activity aimed to raise awareness among students about the three roles of peer bullying: the bully, the victim, and the bystander. Video content was presented to students, prompting them to comment on their feelings within the blog environment by putting themselves in the shoes of the three roles. Additionally, students were presented with five-story cards from PBAP on the blog, and they were asked to choose a scenario, responding to questions in the comment section. These questions included: "How do

you think the bully feels? Try to think of at least 5 emotions they might have," "What might the victim of bullying feel?" and "What might other children who witness this situation (bystanders) feel and think?" Through these questions, students were expected to reflect on their ideas by empathizing with the three roles of bullying. Lastly, students generated a slogan suitable for the topic of the second week.

- For the third week, the activities from the third and fourth weeks of PBAP were combined. One of these activities is "I Stand Against Peer Bullying," focusing on a story where a person who has been bullied decides to act assertively. This activity revolves around the person's actions based on the questions "What if they acted with anger?", "What if they did nothing?", and "What would be effective?" The other activity in the third week is the fourth session of PBAP, "Don't Stay Silent to Bullying," which addresses what bystanders can do in such situations. Therefore, these two sessions were perceived in a similar context and combined. In the face-to-face Guidance class of the third week, a role-playing activity was conducted based on a sample scenario, asking students to imagine how they would act if they were in a bullying situation. A video recording of this activity was made, depicting different reactions to bullying behavior and discussing how good and bad outcomes could be. In the Blogger environment, an interactive video content developed with H5P was presented, focusing on a bullying incident on a school bus. In this context, a fill-in-the-blank section was added to remind students how the three roles of peer bullying were reflected in this video's first part. Another shared post in the Blogger environment presented four scenarios from PBAP, and students were asked to choose one and respond to the following questions in the comment section:
  - In the scenario you read, what actions by the students observing bullying would allow the bullying behavior to continue?
  - What actions, if taken, would represent an appropriate response to prevent bullying?
- The activity for the fourth week was planned as the fifth session of PBAP, titled "If I were in that situation (coping strategies with bullying)." However, due to the students' entrance exams for high schools, a short break was taken in the fourth week of the activity. Nevertheless, considering that some students would be going out of town and not continuing with the educational institution, two different focus group meetings were conducted to gather the students' opinions on the first three weeks of the activity.

In this context, the learning process on the Blogger page has been complemented with face-to-face activities, aligning with the blended learning approach. On the other hand, to ensure the engagement and continued sharing of voluntary students, the peer bullying page on the Blogger platform has remained active, following the activity plan. Additionally, considering the sensitivity of peer bullying as a concept, a decision has been made by the researchers to prepare an informative brochure at the end of the activity and share it on the Blogger page, aiming to prevent misconceptions among students. An example of the weekly activity plan is provided in Appendix 1, focusing on the first week.

Participants and Procedure
This study was conducted with thirteen 8th-grade students, attending a private educational institution supporting school programs in Bursa province during the 2022-2023 academic year. Early adolescence is associated with peak hormonal and physical changes, which have significant social and emotional implications (Hamilton et al., 2013), one of which includes difficulties in peer relations. As a result, the selection of participants—8th graders (ages 13-14)—was made based on the literature connecting the changes in early adolescence and peer bullying (e.g., Holt et al, 2017; Kennedy, 2021) Since one of the researchers works at this institution, the participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, which includes the most accessible situations and provides ease in terms of effort, money, and time for the researcher (Marshall, 1996). Students participated in the research voluntarily, and both

a voluntary participation form for students and a parental consent form was created to obtain parental approval due to the students being under 18 years of age. In addition, the researchers conducting the lessons, both face-to-face and on the Blogger platform, are inherently part of this study's participants, given the nature of qualitative research.

Information About the Researchers

The first two authors designed this activity as doctoral students participating in an e-learning doctoral course and implemented it under the supervision of the third and fourth researchers. The second researcher conducted focus group interviews and managed face-to-face processes. The third researcher guided the connectivist learning process as an instructor in the e-learning doctoral course, while the fourth researcher, as an expert in counseling, monitored and guided the content and processes related to peer bullying. The researchers collaborated in other processes.

Data Collection Techniques

In case studies, obtaining in-depth data related to the situation is essential by utilizing multiple sources of information such as observation, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials, and presenting an understanding based on this data (Creswell, 2013). In this context, the primary data was collected through focus group interviews using a semi-structured form. The secondary data collection tools consist of researcher logs and records of the activity environment conducted in the Blogger platform. Detailed information about the data collection tools is provided under subheadings.

Focus Group Student Interview Form for the Activity

The semi-structured interview form used in the study was created to obtain students' views on the peer bullying activity implemented in the Blogger environment based on their expressions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). When creating the interview form, the literature on connectivist learning was reviewed by the researchers. The interview form contains 10 open-ended questions. These questions are about students' opinions regarding the face-to-face Guidance course and Blogger environment activities, their participation in the activity, and what the contributions of the activity are. Later, a curriculum expert and a counseling expert reviewed the structure, clarity, and comprehensibility of the questions. Additionally, the questions in the interview form were examined for language and narrative suitability by a Turkish Language and Literature teacher. To prevent data loss in focus group interviews with students who voluntarily participated in the activity, audio recordings were taken with the students' permission. A total of 6 students participated in the first focus group and 7 in the second. Students who voluntarily participated in the focus group interviews were also actively involved in face-to-face classes. The interviews were conducted on June 5, 2023, in a suitable face to face environment and time for the students. After the interviews, the audio recordings were first transcribed into text, and the qualitative data obtained were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. In the analysis of the interviews, pseudonyms were given to students for direct quotations in the findings section.

Research Diaries

The first two researchers kept diaries reflecting their feelings, thoughts, and observations about the activity conducted each week. Researcher diaries were used to describe and interpret the findings revealed from the analysis of qualitative data collected from students and quantitative data obtained from the environment records.

Blogger Records

Interactive videos based on the connectivist learning approach were presented to students in the peer bullying activity conducted on the Blogger platform. Sample materials related to the Ministry of National Education (MEB) Peer Bullying Awareness Program were shared, and students commented on these posts, creating slogans for each week's topic. All content and interactions in the Blogger environment were recorded. The records in the Blogger

environment were keeped by the researchers by taking screenshots, in line with the approval of the students, and the students' status of participation in each activity was recorded and presented as a table in the findings section.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which involves the process of analyzing data based on similar, relational, and distinct aspects within a dataset (Gibson & Brown, 2009). In this context, the stages presented by Braun and Clarke (2021) for thematic analysis were followed in analyzing the data obtained from focus group interviews with students in this study, and these stages are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. *The Data Analysis Process Followed in Focus Group Interviews*

Data Analysis Steps	Procedure
(1) Familiarisation	In the first phase, data obtained through interviews were transformed into text and independently read multiple times by researchers. During this stage, a inductive approach was preferred, focusing on the meaning of each word, and an approach from the specific to the general was adopted.
(2) Doing Coding	In the second stage, similarities, differences, and interconnected points within the data were examined, leading to the creation of draft categories from recurring information.
(3) Generating Initial Themes	In the third stage, initial categories were formed by connecting codes derived from small units of meaning to create a more comprehensive semantic coherence.
(4) Developing and Reviewing Themes	In the fourth stage, the categories created in the previous phase were reviewed once again and further developed within the framework of research questions.
(5) Refining, Defining and Naming Themes	In the fifth stage, themes were finalized and named through continuous examination of the codes and interconnected categories derived from the dataset.
(6) Writing Matters for Analysis (Reporting)	In the sixth stage, the findings obtained within the thematic framework were presented. Direct quotations from participants' expressions were included, and the results were further contextualized and interpreted by relating them to findings from other studies in the literature and specific theoretical contexts.

Based on this, a total of 26 codes, 6 categories, and 3 main themes were identified as a result of thematic analysis. The emerging sub and main categories are presented in Figure 1:
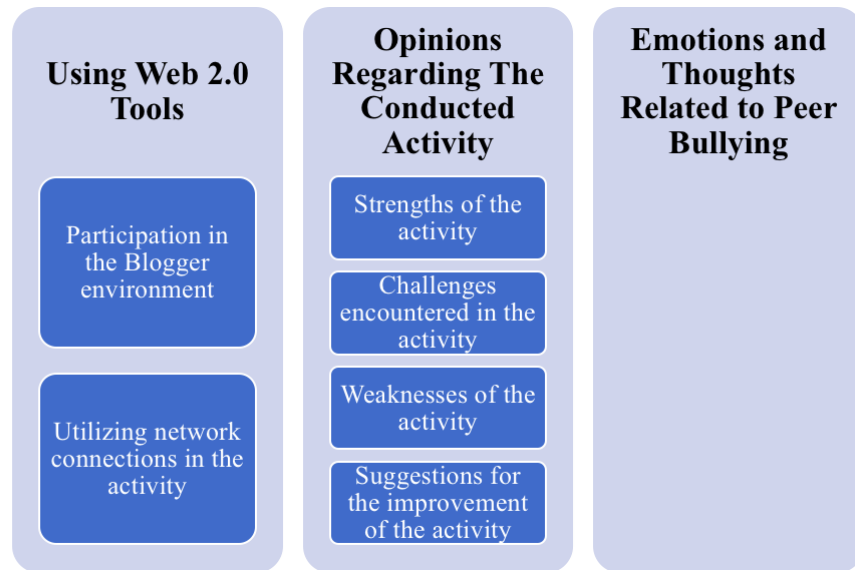

Figure 1. *Categories and Main Themes Derived from Data Analysis*

Validity & Reliability
The following measures were taken regarding validity and reliability in qualitative research:
- Both the activity and data collection tools were based on expert opinions.
- Prolonged engagement was formed between researchers and participants in Blogger and face to face courses.
- Data triangulation was ensured by using multiple data collection tools.
- The method and design of the research, as well as the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study group, were explained to ensure the repetition of similar procedures by different researchers and to reach consistent results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The step-by-step process of data analysis was also elaborated.
- Direct quotations from participants have been included in the findings section.
- A two-stage process was followed for inter-coder reliability throughout the thematic analysis. In the first stage, the first two researchers independently analyzed the entire dataset and worked collaboratively until reaching a consensus on the findings they obtained. In the second stage, the findings presented by the first two researchers, as well as the entire dataset, were examined by the third and fourth researchers. All four researchers reached a consensus on any discrepancies in their interpretations.

Ethical Concerns
Adherence to scientific ethics has been maintained, and approval (number 517100) has been obtained from the ethics committee of Anadolu University. Additionally, participants were provided with a voluntary participation form, parental consent form, voluntary participation form for Blogger environment records, and a voluntary participation form for student interviews, all of which were signed. The names of participating students have been kept confidential throughout the study, and pseudonyms have been assigned to each.

FINDINGS

The research findings have been examined and interpreted under two separate headings based on the two fundamental questions of the study.

Students' Participation in the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity

Findings related to the first research question were obtained from Blogger records, researchers' diaries, and focus group interviews. Students' participation status, both in face-to-face guidance classes and their contributions in the Blogger environment, is presented in Table 2:

Table 2. *Students' participation status in the activity*

	First Week Activities			Second Week Activities				Third Week Activities			
	Face to face	Blogger		Face to face	Blogger			Face to face	Blogger		
	Guidance class	H5P video comment	Creating a slogan	Guidance class	Video comments	Commenting on story cards	Creating a slogan	Guidance class	Video comments	Commenting on Scenarios	Creating a slogan
S1	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
S2	√	√	√	√	√			√		√	
S3	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		
S4	√	√	√	√	√			√			
S5	√	√		√	√			√			√
S6	√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√
S7	√		√	√	√			√			
S8	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
S9	√		√	√	√			√			
S10	√			√	√	√		√			√
S11	√			√			√	√			
S12	√			√				√			√
S13	√			√				√			

As seen in Table 2, since students made contributions in the Blogger environment using self-created pseudonyms, and the researchers did not know which pseudonym belonged to which student, student names were provided using code names (e.g., S1, S2). A total of 13 students voluntarily participated in the activity. In the weekly Guidance class, face-to-face interactions were allowed, and in the Blogger environment, activities were organized for four weeks. However, due to the High School Entrance Exam (LGS), the activity for the fourth week could not be completed. Within the first three weeks, a total of three face-to-face Guidance classes and eight Blogger activities took place. Although all students (n=13) participated in the face-to-face Guidance class, participation in the Blogger environment was not uniform. Some students actively participated in most of the Blogger activities (S1, S3, S6, S8), while others participated in less than half of the activities (S2, S4, S5, S10). Furthermore, only four students participated in just one of the Blogger activities (S7, S9, S11, S12), and S13 did not participate in any Blogger activities. Particularly in the first two weeks, student participation was higher, but it decreased towards the end of the activity. The slogan creation task was the activity with the highest student participation. The reflective diary of the first researcher includes the following statements regarding this:

> "Today, we posted the task of creating slogans for children on Blogger. To set an example, I created the first slogan: 'Don't give nicknames, don't bully.' The participation of children is great; a total of 7 students, including myself and Bünyamin teacher, participated" (Researcher 1 Reflective Diary No. 1, 16/05/2023, lines 1-4).

In addition, regarding the students' participation status, under the main theme of using Web 2.0 tools determined as a result of data analysis, two categories were reached: (1) Participation in the Blogger environment, and (2) Utilizing network connections in the activity. The codes within each category are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. *Codes within the main theme of using Web 2.0 tools*

Main Theme	Category	Codes
Use of Web 2.0 tools	Participation in the blogger environment	- Participating in all activities - Participating in some of the activities - Not participating in any of the activities
	Utilizing network connections in the activity	- Utilizing different sources for activity participation - Solely relying on individual views and efforts for participation (not utilizing different Web 2.0 tools)

As seen in Table 3, for the dimension of a connectivist learning activity conducted in the Blogger environment for 8th-grade students on the subject of peer bullying, the category of participation in the Blogger environment and a total of 3 related codes were identified. While most participants took part in all the activities on Blogger, some participated in only a portion, and very few students stated that they did not participate in any activity. This finding aligns with the data obtained from Blogger environment records.

The category of utilizing network connections in the activity is related to the research focus, which is the connectivist learning approach. It implies students benefit from web resources for the activity. Some participant expressions regarding the code of utilizing different sources for activity participation are as follows:

"I commented and utilized the internet" (Orhan, Focus Group Interview [FGI] 1).
"I sought a bit of help from the internet in challenging activities" (Ceren, FGI 1).
"I looked into the definition of peer bullying" (Merve, FGI 2)

On the other hand, exclusive reliance on individual perspectives and efforts in activity participation, specifically refraining from utilizing other network connections, particularly web resources, is evident in the statements of certain participants:

""I always used my dedication while commenting" (Muhammet, FGI 1).
"No, everything happened spontaneously" (Mehmet, FGI 2).

Students' Views on the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity
The second question of the research was answered through two main categories derived from data analysis: (1) opinions regarding the conducted activity and (2) emotions and thoughts related to peer bullying. Under the main theme of opinions regarding the conducted activity, a total of 4 categories were identified: (1) strengths of the activity, (2) challenges encountered in the activity, (3) weaknesses of the activity, and (4) suggestions for the improvement of the activity. The codes within each category are presented in Table 4:

Table 4. *Codes and Categories Present in Students' Views on the Connectivist Peer Bullying Activity*

Main Theme	Category	Codes
Views regarding the activity	Strengths of the activity	- Finding role-playing activities effective in face-to-face classes - Enjoying the activity - Liking the interactive videos on Blogger - Enjoying creating slogans - Finding the activities conducted beneficial
	Challenges encountered during the activity	- Difficulty in finding answers to some questions in interactive videos - Facing challenges in creating slogans - The impact of the LGS factor reducing participation in the activity - Inability to effectively use the Blogger platform
	Weaknesses of the activity	- Finding the activity durations too long - Finding the activity durations too short - Disliking the Blogger environment
	Suggestions for the Improvement of the activity	- Preferring a mobile application instead of the Blogger environment - Suggesting more participants - Recommending the activity to be conducted only in face-to-face settings
Feelings and thoughts regarding peer bullying		- Feeling hatred towards the bully - Feeling empathy towards the victim - Gaining awareness about peer bullying - Lack of contribution to learning due to prior knowledge of the concept - Continuing with bullying behavior - Disapproving of bullying behavior

As can be seen in Table 4, students' opinions about the activity are grouped under the categories of (1) strengths of the activity, (2) challenges encountered in the activity, (3) weaknesses of the activity, and (4) suggestions for the improvement of the activity. Regarding the strengths of the activity, students found the role-playing activity in the face-to-face class impactful, enjoyed the activity, liked the interactive videos on Blogger, enjoyed creating slogans, and found the conducted activities beneficial. Participant expressions regarding these opinions are as follows:

"Thanks to those scenarios, it will be more memorable and impactful now" (Muhammet, FGI 1).
"It would have been better if the education on Blogger was animated" (Muhammet, FGI 1).
"Sometimes, there were moments when I struggled a lot while thinking of slogans, but I am happy because I found the best slogan" (Tardu, FGI 1).

The challenges encountered in the activity include not being able to find answers to some questions in the interactive videos, facing difficulties in creating slogans, the LGS factor reducing participation in the activity, and not being able to use Blogger effectively. Examples of student expressions are as follows:

"I struggled a lot on Blogger; there was one question, and it was challenging. I looked on the internet, but still couldn't find it; it was very difficult" (Orhan, FGI 1).
"Writing slogans was challenging" (Merve, FGI 2).
"It was bad because it was close to the LGS (exam), I couldn't look at it" (Seda, FGI 2).
"I still don't know how to use Blogger; I just did it by looking at the internet" (Tardu, FGI 1).

It can be seen in the reflective diary written by the first researcher that students were unable to find answers to some questions in the interactive videos, but it is also noted that they did not show the expected level of effort to find them:

"In the interactive video added for the activity 'I Stand Against Peer Bullying' in the third week, we included a question for children to answer about the three roles in peer bullying at the beginning of the video. The video cannot progress until the question is answered correctly. Bünyamin, the teacher, thought that children might not remember these roles, and in such a case, they might not continue but leave it incomplete. However, like this study, the essence is for students to search for information, to access information sources. I thought that even if they forget, they can find the answer by looking at past shares or information on the internet. If they forget, the child can pause the video and research; after all, the goal is for them to access the forgotten information" (Researcher 1 Reflective Diary No. 4, 24/05/2023, lines 4-12).

The implementation of the activity close to the LGS (High School Entrance Exam) has significantly influenced the students' participation. About this, the sentences written in the reflective diary of the second researcher are as follows:

"The third activity started very shortly before the exam. Therefore, I do not expect much participation in the third activity. Some students did not participate in any activity anyway. I believe the reason for this is the pressure from their families and the pressure of exams. ... And considering it as a burden reduced their participation in this activity" (Researcher 2 Reflective Diary No. 5, 28/05/2023, lines 1-5).

Especially in the slogan creating activity, it was identified that a student did not generate his own slogan but directly copied it from the internet. The same student was observed to have copied the slogan of a previous friend in the slogan creation activity of the third week as well. Regarding this, the reflective diary of the first researcher includes the following sentences:

"One of the students has the same slogan as someone on the internet. This time, S3 wrote the same slogan as a friend who shared it about 10 minutes before. I thought, 'Could they have not read the comments above?' but there is no identical slogan on the internet. Writing the exact same slogan is too much of a coincidence. I realized that the students' determination and desire are important factors for a connectivist learning activity" (Researcher 1 Reflective Diary No. 5, 29/05/2023, lines 6-11).

On the other hand, finding the activity durations too long, finding the activity durations too short, and disliking the Blogger environment constitute the weaknesses of the activity. Participant expressions regarding this are as follows:

"The duration, in my opinion, was even too much; one day would have been enough for that small thing" (Muhammet, FGI 1).

"I think the time was insufficient; if one of us died, how would we manage that situation, if a close person died..." (Orhan, FGI 1).

"I'm not very pleased because sometimes it creates problems about the environment where blogs are created, but there was no problem with commenting" (Muhammet, FGI 1).

"Instead of Blogger, I think a live environment could have been better" (Mehmet, FGI 2).

Lastly, suggestions for the improvement of the activity include preferring a mobile application instead of the Blogger website environment, suggesting more participants, and proposing that the activity should be conducted only face-to-face. Some expressions regarding this are as follows:

"Wouldn't it be better if it was from Blogger's application instead of the browser?" (Orhan, FGI 1).

"It would be better if we conducted the activities entirely face-to-face" (Selda, FGI 1).

"Through increasing the number of participants..." (Ceren, FGI 1).

At the end of the activity, participants' emotions and thoughts related to peer bullying were grouped under a single theme. This included feeling hatred towards the bully, experiencing empathy towards the victim, disapproving of bullying behavior, gaining awareness about peer bullying, not contributing to learning from the activity for those who were already familiar with the concept, and even some students expressing 'I am still a bully.' Some expressions from the participants regarding this are as follows:

"I honestly felt hatred towards the bully" (Mehmet, FGI 2).

"I was extremely saddened; I thought about those who experience these things" (Selda, FGI 1).

"It was useful, and now I know what bullying is, and if someone becomes a bully, I'll report it immediately" (Orhan, FGI 1).

"Actually, it was good, and I think it provided us with very valuable information about the activities. I'm very happy because I learned more about bullying" (Tardu, FGI 1).

"I didn't learn much; I already knew a lot about bullying, so it was useless for me" (Ceren, FGI 1).

"I am still a bully" (Belma, FGI 1).

In the reflective diary of the second researcher after the face-to-face Guidance class where the role-playing activity took place, the following expressions about the students' emotions and gains are included:

> "In the third week of the guidance class, we enacted a scenario and recorded it as a video. The most valuable thing they probably learned here was developing an intervention against bullying. Personally, while filming this video and students were playing their roles, I observed very closely, especially our student in the role of the one being bullied genuinely feeling the impact of bullying. I can say that some of the audience, other students, genuinely felt those emotions related to bullying. Yes, some were still in the spirit of fun, but at least, I believe we managed to send a message to their subconscious. We also filmed a second video outside the activity. Here again, it was for students to understand those emotions. Of course, it was a video in a playful tone, but, as I mentioned, at least I think we managed to embed something like that in their subconscious" (Second Researcher Reflective Diary No. 6, 29/05/2023, lines 1-11)"

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This holistic single case study investigated a peer bullying activity utilizing a connectivist learning approach for 8th-grade middle school students. Thirteen 8th-grade students attending a private educational institution that supports school programs voluntarily participated. The study, which included the implementation of the first 4 sessions of the 5-session Peer Bullying Awareness Program by the Ministry of National Education through blended learning, was based on the data collected from focus group interviews, reflective diaries, and Blogger records. The findings indicate moderate participation in Blogger activities, with a decline in engagement due to the high school entrance exam that was approaching. Students faced challenges, yet overall, opinions about the activity were positive.

Specifically, findings related to the first research question indicate that some students participated in all activities of the project, while others attended only a few. However, a few students did not actively engage in the Blogger activity. Similarly, in a study conducted by Öztürk (2019), a connectivist mobile learning process was used to improve high school students' English-speaking skills. The findings revealed that students did not participate adequately in the activities due to reasons such as lack of time, technical issues, laziness, and lack of interest in the activities. Additionally, in this study, while some students utilized network connections for the activity, others contributed solely based on their existing knowledge and opinions. Some of the expected student tasks in the connectivist learning approach include connecting to different networks and demonstrating the skills to search, identify, and select the information needed to solve a problem. Siemens (2005) highlighted that learning occurs by navigating networks and benefiting from others' experiences. In this age of technology, where knowledge is constantly evolving, these skills are considered essential. From this perspective, it can be suggested that the participants of this study partially experienced the connectivist learning process. Expecting middle school students to exhibit roles and responsibilities in connectivist learning, which they are experiencing for the first time, might be unrealistic. Roles and responsibilities related to connectivist learning activities may be better fulfilled by students at the high school or higher education levels. For instance, a study conducted by Babayiğit et al., (2018) showed that university students experienced the connectivist learning process effectively.

The findings also indicate that participants had concerns about not being able to find answers to some questions in interactive videos and facing difficulties, especially in creativity, when generating slogans. Although most students completed the fundamental tasks expected of them during the activity, some of them lacked sufficient motivation to seek and find more information. However, in a connectivist learning activity, students are expected to be independent learners, take responsibility for their learning, and be motivated to explore and access information (Siemens, 2005). In this process, it is important for students to critically think about the validity, accuracy, and currency of the information they acquire while navigating

networks. Despite the expectation that 8th-grade students should have acquired skills such as taking learning responsibility since the early years of middle school education, conducting web research, choosing information critically, and creative thinking, the reality might be different. Especially considering that critical and creative thinking skills are essential higher-order thinking skills expected of learners in the age of networks, this situation is thought-provoking. Ersoy and Başer (2011) noted in their studies that students at the primary education level tend to have lower tendencies for critical thinking, indicating that students may not acquire higher-order thinking skills. This calls for a critical examination of the education program in terms of instilling the characteristics required for connectivist learning and higher-order thinking skills at each education level. In addition to these considerations, the High School Entrance Exam (LGS) in the Turkish education system affects all aspects of eighth-grade students' school and extracurricular experiences. Some participants in this study mentioned LGS as a reason for not having the desired level of participation in the activity.

The findings also indicate that students found the face-to-face role-playing activity effective, enjoyed the overall implementation of the activity, liked the interactive videos developed and presented with H5P on Blogger, enjoyed the weekly task of creating slogans, and generally found the activities beneficial. The blended learning process, incorporating both face-to-face and e-learning environments and opportunities, contributed to students experiencing more effective learning. The use of blended learning that extends beyond face-to-face settings to include e-learning environments, especially in studies based on connectivism, has been shown to enhance teaching and learning performance (Al Maawali, 2022; Zedan, 2021).

It should be noted that this study utilized a learning environment outside the traditional face-to-face classroom, specifically a blogger platform. Participants expressed difficulties in effectively using the environment, as they were not familiar with Blogger. In a study conducted by Sarsar et al., (2015), aiming to determine the views of doctoral students regarding the use of social media in the teaching-learning process, Facebook was positively evaluated by all learners, while Blogger was deemed positive only by half of the learners. The current preference for social networking sites like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook over blogs, along with the popularity of Web 2.0 tools with mobile applications instead of web browsers, may explain these findings. One participant suggested using a mobile application instead of a website at the end of the activity.

Furthermore, students reported developing a sense of hatred towards the bully and empathy towards the victim role. In other words, the results show that students gained awareness about peer bullying and recognized it as inappropriate behavior. In a study by Akay (2019), various activities were developed to prevent peer bullying in primary school students, and the results indicated positive changes in emotions such as empathy and emotional awareness among students. In another study by Kartal and Bilgin (2007) where a 5-session peer bullying education was implemented with fifth-grade students, including activities such as slogan writing, story reading, and role-playing scenarios, positive changes were noted in students' views. Similarly, Özbek and Taneri (2022) demonstrated that a peer bullying intervention program based on bibliotherapy and creative drama created awareness about peer bullying and contributed to finding solutions to combat bullying among primary school students. Regarding the participants in this study, it can be suggested that the activity was beneficial for all but two students. One of these two students mentioned that the activity did not provide additional contributions because they had already learned about peer bullying in school. The recommendation for implementing similar activities in schools, especially those supporting the PBAP, aligns with the perspective of this student. However, the finding that this study was effective in gaining awareness about peer bullying for the majority of participants indicates that PBAP-related activities were potentially not included in school programs of these students, which raises concerns and questions.

One interesting finding of this study is that a student expressed being "still a bully" at the end of the activity. While this discovery is consistent with information suggesting that not every educational program can offer the same benefit to every student, it may also indicate a normalization of aggressive behaviors among adolescents. This normalization might be related to the prevalence of peer bullying resulting from peer pressure and the desire to follow group norms, specifically in schools (e.g., Ellwood & Davies, 2010; Thornberg, 2013; Wójcik, 2018). This also aligns with a recent research finding indicating that students in a bullying case developed shared beliefs about class dynamics and labeled behaviors, normalizing and conceptualizing bullying as a way to punish those who threatened class reputations (Wójcik & Mondry, 2020). To address this, Wójcik and Mondry (2020) recommended implementing targeted, non-punitive anti-bullying programs involving peers to reshape behavior and eliminate labels. Given this potential normalization of peer bullying, which can also be related to the prevalence of aggression in real and virtual environments, policymakers should consider proactive measures to create safer environments for children's development.

This study, which focused on peer bullying within the context of an activity with the participation of eighth-grade students in a private education institution, concluded that the activity enhanced peer bullying awareness, and empathy skills, and provided students with the opportunity to experience blended learning. However, within the specific context of the participating students in this study, it was observed that students demonstrated weaknesses in the skills essential for connectivist learning, such as conducting research on the web, selecting valid and reliable information, organizing, creatively rephrasing, and sharing information on the network. The findings of this study, which exemplifies how a connectivist learning activity for middle school students on the topic of peer bullying can be implemented, are expected to contribute as an exemplary activity for teachers, implementers of the PBAP, and researchers working on peer bullying who aim to increase awareness at the middle school level. Additionally, it is anticipated that this study will contribute to the relevant literature on examples of implementing connectivist learning approaches and provide insights into the application of a connectivist learning activity within a blended learning process for practitioners and researchers.

Limitations & Recommendations
There are also some limitations to this study, the first of which involves the use of a specific platform, Blogger, for the connectivist learning activity. Given that some students expressed difficulty effectively using the environment and were not familiar with Blogger, future research could explore connectivist learning activities on social media platforms other than Blogger. Another limitation of this study was the timing, which hindered a thorough application of the CPBA due to the approaching High School Transition Exam (LGS). Future research could benefit from better planning for the implementation process.

Statement of Researchers
Researchers contribution rate statement:
All researchers contributed equally to the study.

Conflict statement:
First Author declares that he/she has no conflict of interest.
Second Author declares that he/she has no conflict of interest.
Third Author declares that he/she has no conflict of interest.
Fourth Author declares that he/she has no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent
"All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study."

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