



Examination of University Students' Empathy Level, Ageism and Attitudes Towards Old Age: A Social Responsibility Project

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Empati Düzeyi, Yaşlı Ayrımcılığı ve Yaşlılığa Yönelik Tutumlarının İncelenmesi: Bir Sosyal Sorumluluk Projesi

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the empathy level, ageism, and attitudes of university students towards the elderly. Investigating age discrimination by young individuals in the context of increasing intergenerational interactions is important for creating age-friendly societies. A quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group was used in this study, which was conducted in Istanbul, Turkey. The sample comprised 50 university students, split into the study (n=25) and comparison groups (n=25). The working group participated in workshops that lasted for six months, and the comparison group was not included in any application. The scales (Socio-Demographic Information Form, Empathy Level Determination Scale, Age Discrimination Attitude Scale, Attitude towards the Elderly Scale) were administered to the participants as pre-test and post-test after the project was completed. The analysis of the data obtained in this study was performed with SPSS 26.0, comparison analyzes were performed using t-test and relational analyzes using Pearson correlation. As a result of the research, the positive attitude levels of the students participating in the project towards the elderly were found to be higher than the comparison group. In addition, positive attitude towards the elderly, positive discrimination, emotional reaction and cognitive skill scores were found to be significantly higher in students who stated that they participated in the project. It was determined that the scores of negative attitudes towards the elderly were significantly higher in the participants who stated that they had not participated in the project before. This study contributes to the extant literature by providing new information from a different cultural context and aiding the exploration of the development of different intergenerational interaction practices. Intergenerational interaction programs can help university students develop positive attitudes towards the elderly and reduce instances and beliefs of ageism.

Keywords: Aged, Ageism, Empathy

Öz

Bu araştırma, üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşlılara yönelik empati düzeyi, yaş ayrımcılığı ve yaşlılığa yönelik tutumlarını incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Genç bireylerde yaş ayrımcılığını dikkate almak ve kuşaklar arası etkileşimlerin artırılması yaşlı dostu toplumlar yaratabilmek için önem arz etmektedir. İstanbul ilinde gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada ön test-son test kontrol gruplu yarı deneysel desen kullanılmıştır. Örneklem, çalışma (n=25) ve karşılaştırma gruplarına (n=25) bölünmüş 50 üniversite öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Çalışma grubu 6 ay süren atölye çalışmalarına katılmış olup, karşılaştırma grubu herhangi bir uygulamaya dâhil edilmemiştir. Katılımcılara ölçekler (Sosyo-Demografik Bilgi Formu, Empati Düzeyi Belirleme Ölçeği, Yaşlı Ayrımcılığı Tutum Ölçeği, Yaşlılara Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği) ön-test ve proje tamamlandıktan sonra son-test olarak uygulanmıştır. Bu çalışmada elde edilen verilerin analizi SPSS 26.0 ile yapılmış olup, karşılaştırma analizleri t-test ve ilişkisel analizler Pearson korelasyon kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, projeye katılan öğrencilerin yaşlılara karşı olumlu tutum düzeyleri, karşılaştırma grubuna göre daha yüksek bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, yaşlılara karşı olumlu tutum, olumlu ayrımcılık, duygusal tepki ve bilişsel beceri puanları çalışma grubunda anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek bulunmuştur. Yaşlılara karşı olumsuz tutum puanlarının karşılaştırma grubunda anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek olduğu saptanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın farklı bir kültürde yapılması ve farklı bir kuşaklararası etkileşim uygulamasının geliştirilmesine yeni bilgiler sunarak ilgili literatüre katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir. Üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşlı bireylere karşı olumlu tutumlar geliştirmelerinde ve yaşlı ayrımcılığının azaltılmasında kuşaklararası etkileşim programlarının yardımcı olabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaşlı, Yaş Ayrımcılığı, Empati

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid aging of the world population has become a problem that affects society. Aging is an inevitable biological process, and several challenging factors are related to aging (Mitrečić et al., 2020). The elderly often have to cope with increasing health problems as well as psychosocial, economic, and sociocultural problems. Sometimes, neglect, abuse, social isolation, and loneliness further compound these problems (Kanasi et al., 2016). There is a need for new policies on active and healthy aging that will improve the quality of life of the elderly. Such policies must cover all elderly people, whether they are living alone, living with their families, or living in long-term care homes.

Ageism is defined as discrimination against people because of their age. Old age is often perceived as characterized by having a disease, being dependent, and lacking insight (Jackson et al., 2019). Those who experience age discrimination, knowingly or unintentionally, can be commonly found across cultures and societies. Age discrimination, which includes prejudices against older individuals, has been viewed as a social problem that concerns all. When healthcare workers discriminate with respect to age, the quality of service provided to the elderly can dramatically decrease. This situation can also be associated with a decrease in the empathic understanding of people who discriminate against the elderly. Prejudice and discrimination against older people are thus prominent issues that need to be addressed. Additionally, there is an important relationship between age discrimination, interpersonal relationships, and physical health (Stokes & Moorman, 2020). Age discrimination negatively affects well-being and health. In addition, discrimination against the elderly may negatively affect their mental health (Lyons et al., 2018). Intergenerational interaction programs could help increase the well-being, health, and physical and social activities of the elderly (Zhong et al., 2020). In light of previous research and the prevailing views on this issue, intergenerational interaction programs could support good mental and physical health, productivity, being social, and being actively involved in society.

Empathy is defined as the ability to understand others' perspectives, feelings, and thoughts. Empathy includes three dimensions: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Empathy/sympathy is the ability to understand another's feelings, how they perceive situations, and the motivators of their behavior. In addition, empathy is used to reflect one's feelings toward other objects (Hall & Schwartz, 2019). As social beings, a person's ability to establish healthy relationships primarily depends on being aware of their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. As awareness of one's inner world increases, the ability to empathize improves. Empathy can also increase

the motivation to help others (Decety, 2020). Empathy is an interpersonal skill that aids communication, making it an important prerequisite for healthcare professionals. A high level of empathy among caregivers of elderly individuals contributes to the quality of service (Moudatsou et al., 2020). In addition, empathy can also be a determinant of relationships among older people. Older individuals with a more empathetic attitude use more constructive coping strategies for interpersonal problems (Huo et al., 2021).

Many elderly people have problems performing their daily living activities due to the physical, psychological, and social changes they experience. In old age, it may be more difficult to maintain existing relationships or to start new ones (Aw et al., 2017). Social isolation and loneliness can also be problematic in long-term care homes. This may be because it is difficult for people of different characteristics to live together. Increasing various activities, including intergenerational interactions in long-term care homes, could help reduce loneliness. Intergenerational interactions have been shown to have positive effects on quality of life and well-being in various age groups.

Therefore, studies on this subject have increased recently (Hall & Schwartz, 2019; Moudatsou et al., 2020; Aw et al., 2017). Intergenerational interaction programs can positively change attitudes towards older individuals. This research, which examines the empathy level, ageism, and attitudes of university students toward old age, aimed to develop positive attitudes towards elderly individuals, with the project carried out in line with the general purpose.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Participants

The sample comprised 50 students from Üsküdar University. Students in the study and comparison groups were studying in the third and fourth grades in the psychology department. Of the 40 university students who participated at the beginning of the project for the working group, 25 attended the workshops regularly. The number of students (sample) to take part in the project was determined on the basis of previous research (Augustin, & Freshman, 2016; Lowe & Medina, 2010). The number of students who will participate in the project has been determined as 40. Even though more students wanted to participate, only the determined number of students were included. Since the social responsibility project carried out was in the pandemic period and lasted for six months, 15 of the students could not participate regularly. The comparison group consisted of university students ($n = 25$) who were not included in the project team. Of the participants, 16% were male and 84% were female. Accessing male and

female participants for the study could not be maintained because the number of female students was higher in the department than in males. However, in terms of age, department, and class, participants were from the same population with similar socioeconomic features. The project (Project no: 55325) supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sports was conducted by a researcher on behalf of the Therapeutic Brain Mapping and Neurotechnology Association. Ethics committee approval was obtained for this study from the Üsküdar University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee (decision number 61351342/MART2021-63 dated 25.03.2021). The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. Measurement instruments

2.2.1. Personal information form

The form, created by the researcher, collected demographic information of the participants, such as age, gender, and parental education level.

2.2.2. Attitudes towards the elderly scale

The scale developed by Kogan was adapted to Turkish by Duyan and Gelbal (Kogan, 1961; Burnes et al., 2019). The Attitudes Towards the Elderly Scale comprised 34 items. The grading of the scale, which has two subscales, including positive and negative attitudes towards the elderly, is based on a 6-point Likert scale. A lower score indicates a negative attitude and a higher score indicates a positive attitude. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Kogan's Attitude towards Old People Scale was 0.81, and the scale comprised of one factor. The Cronbach's alpha reliability value of the total score was determined as 0.84 (Burnes et al., 2019).

2.2.3. Attitudes towards discrimination against the elderly (ADES)

This scale was developed by Vefikuluçay in 2008. The scale comprised 23 items. The Attitudes Towards Discrimination Against the Elderly (ADES) scale is a 5-point Likert scale. The lowest score obtained from the scale was 23, and the highest score was 115. As the score obtained from the scale increased, positive attitude towards ageism also increased. The scale comprises three subscales: "Restricting the Life of the Elderly," "Positive discrimination against the Elderly," and "Negative discrimination against the Elderly." Based on the internal consistency of the scale, the Cronbach Alpha reliability value of the total score was found as 0.80.

2.2.4. Empathy quotient (EQ)

The scale developed by Lawrence et al. in 2004 was adapted into Turkish by Barış and Çolakoğlu in 2015 (Lawrence et al., 2004; Barış & Çolakoğlu, 2015). The authors (Lawrence et al., 2004), the EQ was found to have high test–retest reliability over a period of 12 months. The empathy level determination scale comprised 13 items. “Social skills,” “Emotional Reaction” and “Cognitive Skills” constitute the relevant subscales. The scale was graded on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). An increasing scale score indicated a higher level of empathy. The Cronbach’s alpha value of the scale was 0.86.

2.3. General information about the project

The My Support is Everywhere with You (Destegim Seninle Her Yerde) project (project number 55325) was organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports within the scope of the Youth Projects Support Program through voluntary (elders and psychology students) participation. The primary purpose of this social responsibility project is to bring elderly individuals and university students together, spread awareness of ageism-related problems to encourage volunteers for such social responsibility projects, and draw attention to age-related issues in society. The project was conducted between March 2021 and August 2021.

The target audience for the project comprised two groups. The primary target audience was elderly individuals living in long-term care homes. These elderly individuals were not diagnosed with Alzheimer's, dementia, or any other long-term psychiatric disease. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, a limited number of elderly participants were recruited for the workshops (15 people). There are many areas where older people are physically and socially disadvantaged because of the pandemic as well as age-related conditions. Therefore, this project aimed to help elderly individuals to spend more social and active time. The second target audience comprised university students. They were students from the Department of Psychology (third and fourth grades) studying at the university.

The objectives of the project are:

- To increase the awareness and understanding among university students of their social responsibilities
- To help university students take on decision-making, designing, and implementing roles in a social responsibility project

- To provide the elderly with the opportunity to benefit from artistic, social, and innovative intellectual activities

- To contribute to the creation of age-friendly societies.

The project includes five workshops:

1. Training

- Adaptation to Aging and Active Aging

- Our Cultural and Traditional Values

- Technology and the Elderly

2. Art therapy workshop

3. Late adult writers workshop

4. Short documentary workshop

5. Music workshop

The project began with university students receiving training in caring for the elderly. Physical and psychosocial changes in the elderly, active aging, stress, ways of coping in the elderly, values, technology and aging, project development, and art therapy constitute the training topics given to university students. After a month of online training, the workshops started. Elderly individuals and university students were divided into groups and the workshops continued. Two sessions (1 hour each) were held in a week. Project coordinators and experts in their fields (clinical psychologists, art therapists, and social workers) also participated in these workshops. Workshops were conducted face to face. Elderly people at risk due to the pandemic participated in the workshops by keeping their numbers limited and dividing them into groups. A large hall where social distance can be adjusted has been preferred. Attention was paid to the use of masks. A weekly participation program was made by making a division of labor among the students.

3. RESULTS

When the sampling characteristics are examined in Table 1, 16% ($n=8$) of the participants are male and 84% ($n=42$) are female. The mother's education level is 40% ($n=20$), those with high school education are 30% ($n=15$), and those with university education are 30% ($n=15$). The rate

of father's education is 42% ($n=21$), those with high school education are 28% ($n=14$) and those with university education are 30% ($n=15$).

Table 1. *Sampling characteristics*

Demographic Variables	Groups	n	%	Age ($\bar{X}\pm sd$)
Gender	Male	8	16.0	22.39±1.06
	Female	42	84.0	22.95±1.91
Maternal Education	Primary school	20	40.0	
	High School	15	30.0	
	Undergraduate	15	30.0	
Paternal Education	Primary school	21	42.0	
	High School	14	28.0	
	Undergraduate	15	30.0	
	Total	50	100.0	

Table 2. *T-test findings for comparison of participants' pre-test and post-measure scores*

Subscales	Tests	n	\bar{X}	sd	$t(48)$	p
Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly	Pre-test	25	58.96	5.38	-17.14	<.01**
	Post-test	25	61.72	7.840		
Negative Attitudes towards the Elderly	Pre-test	25	38.72	7.045	-.39	.69
	Post-test	25	39.56	8.058		
ADES restricting the elderly's life	Pre-test	25	17.64	3.200	1.25	.21
	Post-test	25	16.24	4.549		
ADES positive discrimination	Pre-test	25	15.35	7.334	-11.60	<.01**
	Post-test	23	34.16	3.325		
ADES negative discrimination	Pre-test	25	15.80	4.491	.81	.42
	Post-test	25	14.72	4.895		

Social skills	Pre-test	25	15.96	1.719	2.54	.01*
	Post-test	25	14.84	1.374		
Emotional Reaction	Pre-test	25	18.64	1.075	1.66	.10
	Post-test	25	18.08	1.288		
Cognitive Skills	Pre-test	25	17.80	1.581	1.88	.06
	Post-test	25	16.84	1.993		

Note: ADES= Attitudes Towards Discrimination Against the Elderly Scale; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

According to the findings of the independent sample t-test performed to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the participants in Table 2, the Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly ($t(48)=-17.14$; $p < .01$) post-test scores of the participants were significantly higher. Additionally, ADES positive attitude sub-scale ($t(48)=-11.60$; $p < .01$) showed a significant increase in the post-test scores. Social skills ($t(48)=2.54$; $p < .01$) which is one of the empathy sub-scales, was found to decrease significantly in the post-test scores.

Table 3. Pearson correlation findings for examining the relationship between participants' attitudes towards the elderly and their empathy levels

Ölçekler / Alt Boyutlar	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9
1.Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly	1							
2.Negative Attitudes towards the Elderly	-.77**	1						
3.ADES restricting the elderly's life	-.55**	.67**	1					
4.ADES positive discrimination	.59**	-.57**	-.59**	1				
5.ADES negative discrimination	-.57**	.67**	.23	.09	1			
6.Social skills	-.16	-.26	-.13	-.01	-.05	1		
7.Emotional Reaction	.57**	-.60**	-.64**	.52**	-.38**	.60**	1	
8.Cognitive Skills	.54**	-.54**	-.55**	.37**	.27	.60**	.75**	1

Note: ADES= Attitudes Towards Discrimination Against the Elderly Scale; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

According to Pearson correlation findings in Table 3, positive attitudes towards the elderly and negative attitudes towards the elderly ($r = -.77$; $p < .01$), AES restricting the elderly's life ($r = -.55$; $p < .01$), ADES negative discrimination ($r = -.57$; $p < .01$) was negatively and significantly associated. In addition, Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly with ADES positive

discrimination ($r=.59$; $p<.01$), Emotional Reaction subscale ($r=.57$; $p<.01$), and Cognitive Skills subscale ($r=.54$; $p<.01$) was found to be positively and significantly correlated. ADES restricting the elderly's life ($r=.67$; $p<.01$), AES negative discrimination ($r=.67$; $p<.01$) positively; AES positive discrimination ($r=-.57$; $p<.01$), emotional skills subscale ($r=-.60$; $p<.01$), and Cognitive Skills subscale ($r=-.54$; $p<.01$) negatively and significantly correlated with negative attitudes towards the elderly.

According to the findings in Table 4, it was observed that there was a statistically significant difference in the scores of positive attitudes towards the elderly ($t(48)=3.92$; $p<.01$) and ADES positive discrimination ($t(48)=3.01$; $p<.01$). The participants who participated the project before reported significantly higher scores on positive attitudes towards the elderly subscale and ADES positive discrimination subscale than the participants who did not participated the project before.

According to the findings in Table 5, an independent sample t-test was applied to compare the attitudes and empathy levels towards the elderly among the students who participated in the "My Support is Everywhere with You" project and those who did not. According to the results, Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly ($t(48)=4.58$; $p<.01$); AES positive discrimination ($t(48)=3.52$; $p<.01$); Emotional Reaction ($t(48)=2.02$; $p<.05$) and Cognitive Skills ($t(48)=2.03$; $p<.05$) scores were found to be significantly higher in students who stated that they participated in the project. Also, Negative Attitudes towards the Elderly ($t(48)=-2.41$; $p<.05$), restricting the elderly's life ($t(48)=-2.89$; $p<.01$) and ADES negative discrimination ($t(48)=-2.91$; $p<.05$) scores were found to be significantly higher in participants who stated that they had not participated in the project before.

Table 4. *T-test findings for the comparison of pre-test scores among the participants according to their participation in the "My Support is Everywhere with You" project*

Subscales	Project Participation	<i>n</i>	\bar{X}	<i>sd</i>	<i>t</i> (48)	<i>p</i>
Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly	Yes	25	58.56	7.341	3.92	<.001**
	No	25	51.24	5.957		
Negative Attitudes towards the Elderly	Yes	25	41.56	7.433	-.88	.37
	No	25	43.33	7.276		
ADES restricting the elderly's life	Yes	25	21.72	5.276	-.97	.33
	No	25	22.95	3.217		
ADES positive discrimination	Yes	25	29.69	5.322	3.01	.004**
	No	25	25.52	4.697		
ADES negative discrimination	Yes	25	16.10	3.844	-.77	.44
	No	25	16.86	3.021		
Social skills	Yes	25	15.46	2.501	.51	.61
	No	25	15.14	1.740		
Emotional Reaction	Yes	25	17.87	2.885	.54	.58
	No	25	17.48	2.228		
Cognitive Skills	Yes	25	19.62	3.595	.82	.41
	No	25	18.76	4.253		

Note: ADES= Attitudes Towards Discrimination Against the Elderly Scale

According to the findings in Table 5, an independent sample t-test was applied to compare the attitudes and empathy levels towards the elderly among the students who participated in the "My Support is Everywhere with You" project and those who did not. According to the results, Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly ($t(48)=4.58$; $p<.01$); AES positive discrimination ($t(48)=3.52$; $p<.01$); Emotional Reaction ($t(48)=2.02$; $p<.05$) and Cognitive Skills ($t(48)=2.03$; $p<.05$) scores were found to be significantly higher in students who stated that they participated in the project. Also, Negative Attitudes towards the Elderly ($t(48)=-2.41$; $p<.05$), restricting the elderly's life ($t(48)=-2.89$; $p<.01$) and ADES negative discrimination ($t(48)= -2.91$; $p<.05$)

scores were found to be significantly higher in participants who stated that they had not participated in the project before.

Table 5. *T-test findings for the comparison of post-test scores among the participants according to their participation in the "My Support is Everywhere with You" project*

Subscales	Project Participation	<i>n</i>	\bar{X}	<i>sd</i>	<i>t</i> (48)	<i>p</i>
Positive Attitudes towards the Elderly	Yes	25	61.76	8.589	4.58	<.01**
	No	25	50.68	8.483		
Negative Attitudes towards the Elderly	Yes	25	39.16	8.370	-2.41	.02*
	No	25	46.00	11.398		
ADES restricting the elderly's life	Yes	25	18.36	3.828	-2.89	.01**
	No	25	21.68	4.259		
ADES positive discrimination	Yes	25	33.12	3.961	3.52	<.01**
	No	25	28.64	4.966		
ADES negative discrimination	Yes	25	15.04	4.148	-2.91	.01*
	No	25	18.16	3.387		
Social skills	Yes	25	15.12	1.423	1.41	.16
	No	25	14.36	2.289		
Emotional Reaction	Yes	25	18.04	1.513	2.02	.04*
	No	25	16.72	2.880		
Cognitive Skills	Yes	25	17.20	2.102	2.03	.04*
	No	25	15.52	3.549		

Note: ADES= Attitudes Towards Discrimination Against the Elderly Scale; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the attitudes of university students towards the elderly as a pilot application. The data, which include the results of an intergenerational interaction and social responsibility project (My Support is Everywhere with You Project), look promising for further research and application. We concluded that the positive attitude levels of university students who took part in the project (which lasted for six months and included various workshops)

increased significantly after its fruition. Additionally, a negative and significant correlation was found between positive and negative attitudes towards the elderly (the subscales of restricting the life of the elderly and negative discrimination). Among the other data obtained from the research, there was a positive and significant relationship between positive attitudes towards the elderly and ADES positive discrimination, the emotional response subscales, and the cognitive skills subscales. There are several studies that support the findings of this study (Zhong et al., 2020; Hall & Schwartz, 2019; Burnes et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2019; Wu, 2011). However, it was found that the social skill score, one of the subscales of the empathy quotient, decreased in the post-test measures; this result is contrary to expectations and not supported by similar studies. This could be related to the social comparison of university students, which affects their level of understanding. However, the relationship between young adults and older individuals causes changes in empathy levels and prejudice. As a result of these intergroup contacts, while the level of empathy increases, prejudices decrease (Allan et al., 2014).

Age-related differences between generations may explain why such individuals communicate less. University students have negative perceptions of elderly individuals (Gutiérrez & Mayordomo, 2019). These prejudices, which can occur between different generations, appear as communication barriers. Being old in a society with prejudices is challenging. Additionally, social participation is an important determinant of well-being, and a decrease in sociability may cause problems (Wu & Li, 2018). Intergenerational interaction programs contribute to the development of positive attitudes toward older individuals and new communication skills. It is important to eliminate prejudices to improve the well-being and quality of life of older individuals. Intergenerational interactions are an important factor in reducing age discrimination (Burnes et al., 2019). Intergenerational training and activities developed for these age groups can encourage social integration. Thus, social disconnections between old and young individuals can be resolved.

Before the workshops of this project commenced, students were trained to work with the elderly. The primary purpose was for university students to get to know the individuals they would work with. Many studies have reported that the training process increases positive attitudes toward the elderly. Training regarding the aging period reduces negative attitudes towards older individuals and contributes to the development of a more empathic attitude (Wu, 2011). Experiential learning, including service learning, field studies, and internships, can help change the way students think about ageism (Levy, 2018). For instance, it has been reported

that medical students who completed their geriatric internship developed a more positive attitude towards the elderly.

According to the results, positive attitudes towards the elderly, positive discrimination, emotional reactions, and cognitive skills scores of the students who stated that they participated in the project were found to be significantly higher. In addition, the scores for negative attitudes towards the elderly were found to be significantly higher in participants who stated that they did not participate in the project. The new experiences of university students enable them to develop positive attitudes (Lee et al., 2015). Intergenerational interaction programs are thought to help university students break away from prejudices. We also determined that the intergenerational interaction program gave rise to a positive change in attitude and sense of comfort between generations.

University students working with elderly individuals have the opportunity to acquire new perspectives on the aging process and the elderly. Additionally, they can grasp the unique sensitivities and importance of this period of life. They can also find opportunities to develop their teamwork and communication skills (Augustin & Freshman, 2016; Sun et al., 2019). The youth's awareness that they can make a difference in society will increase their motivation to impact change. Intergenerational interaction programs are thus for the common good of society. These programs act as bridges for the intergenerational transmission of wisdom, values, and social norms.

Limitations of the research

Despite the significant findings of this study, it is limited by small sample size. Among the participants of the study group, which included 40 people at the beginning of the study, only 25 regularly attended workshops. This could be because the study lasted for 6 months, causing drop-outs and discontinuations owing to the pandemic limitations. Another limitation was the uncertainty of the permanence of the positive impacts observed and obtained. In addition, as the study comprised a pre-test and a post-test, the elapsed time might have changed the participants' responses.

Consequently, generational change is possible and can bring significant benefits to both young volunteers and the elderly. At the same time, it may be said that awareness of activities that increase social interaction as well as social projects that emphasize community-based activities will contribute to the creation of age-friendly societies. Therefore, intergenerational interaction programs are beneficial for both older and younger people. In particular, elderly individuals

living in caregiving centers come together with their peers to increase their interactions. Through such projects, making a difference in the lives of elderly individuals enables university students to have more positive attitudes towards elderly individuals and to realize themselves through teamwork.

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