

**CHANGES IN STUDENTS' SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN
THE PERIOD PRIOR TO AND THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION
FOR THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAM***

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to compare selected elements of students' social interactions during the period prior to beginning preparation for university entrance examination and during the period of preparation for that examination. Data was collected from 300 freshmen students at the Ankara University Faculty of Educational Sciences. The researchers developed and prepared the survey instrument. The findings of the study demonstrated that the level of students' social interactions were changing in terms of selected variables in the period prior to preparation for taking the university entrance examinations and during the preparation period for that examination. The students' relationship with their families, their engagement in school activities and participation in social activities decreased significantly.

KEYWORDS

University entrance exam; social interactions; student's opinions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries, when the number of applications made to the university programs exceeds the existing quotas, a selection or elimination process among the applicants becomes compulsory. In Turkey, since the number of individuals who wish the receive university education is higher than the present quota of the programs at universities, university selection and placement exams are administered to the individuals in applicant pool. Decisions regarding applicants' admissions are made in accordance with the results of these exams (Özerman, 2007). In countries where university entrance exams are given (Japan, Turkey, etc...), students seeking university admission are compete with other

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students with the same goal and that period of intense preparation for the university entrance examination can leave a significant mark on their lives (Bastürk, 2011). These exams preparation process becomes one of the important periods in an individual's life, In studies it has been emphasized that while preparing for higher education entrance exams, such as selection and placement, individuals allocate less time for social activities (Aslan and Cansever, 2009) and experience problems with their friends and close environment. The study of Kelecioğlu (2002) showed that the students thought preparing for the exam had a negative influence on the time they allocated for their school lessons and on attendance. In addition, the students expressed that their interest in school decreased during the exam preparation process.

In the literature, when studies on university entrance exams and the effects of the exam are reached, those studies have generally been conducted on the social lives of individuals during the exam preparation process only (Aslan and Cansever, 2009; Kelecioğlu, 2002). No comparative studies have been conducted to whether the social lives of the same individuals' evidence change between the period prior to preparing for the exam and during the preparation periods. In conclusion, the authors of this study considered a comparative study identifying whether individuals' social lives evidence change when the period prior to preparing for the university entrance exam is compared to preparation period for exam to be both necessary and proper. The purpose of this study is to compare selected elements of students' social interactions in the period prior to preparation for taking the university entrance examinations and during the preparation period for that examination.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

2.1 Sample

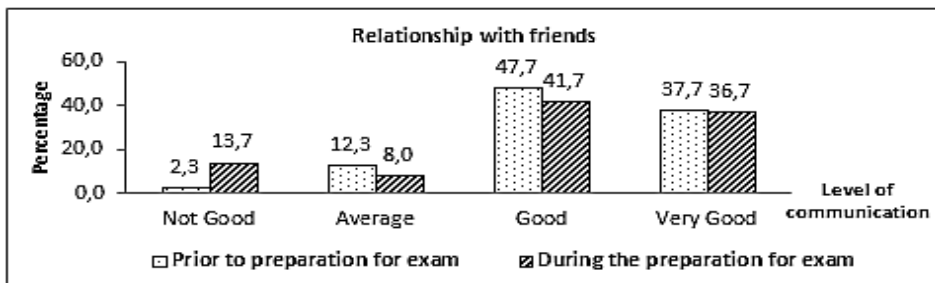
Data was obtained from 300 study subjects who were freshmen students of Ankara University Faculty of Educational Sciences in Turkey during the 2011/2012 academic year. The sample was created by using the purposive sampling method. As a non-random sampling method it allows a detailed study of situations, which are considered to contain significant and rich information.

2.1 Instrument and Data Analysis

A survey was prepared by the researchers. The survey included questions related to demographic characteristics and questions related to the five social interactions selected for analysis. The selected elements included: students' relationship with their friends, students' relationship with their families, their engagement in school activities and participation in social events and interest in current events. A likert scale: "not good (1); average (2), good (3), very good (4)" was used. The percentage distribution of the study subjects' responses was documented. The z test was used to analyses and interpreted any significant differences between the percentage distributions in the two periods of interest.

3. RESULT

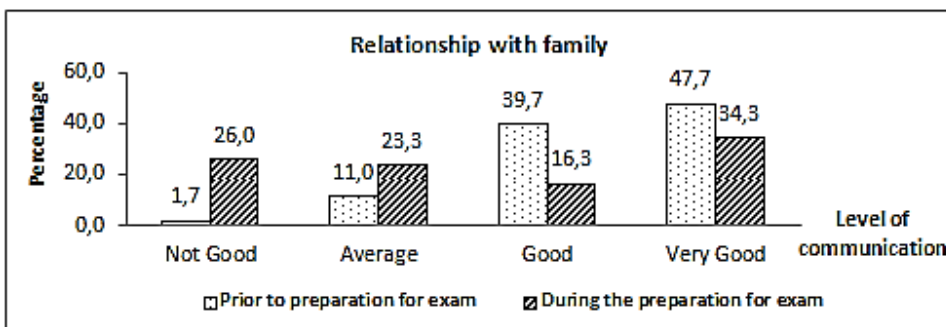
The distribution of the students' opinions about the relationship with their friends during the period prior to preparing for the university entrance examination and during the preparation period was presented in Graphic 1.



Graphic 1: Relationship with Friends in Both Periods

When the Graphic 1 was analyzed, the percentage of subjects’ negative opinions prior to university entrance examination increased while preparing for it. There were no significant differences between the relationship levels of the subjects with their friends in both periods ($p>0.05$).

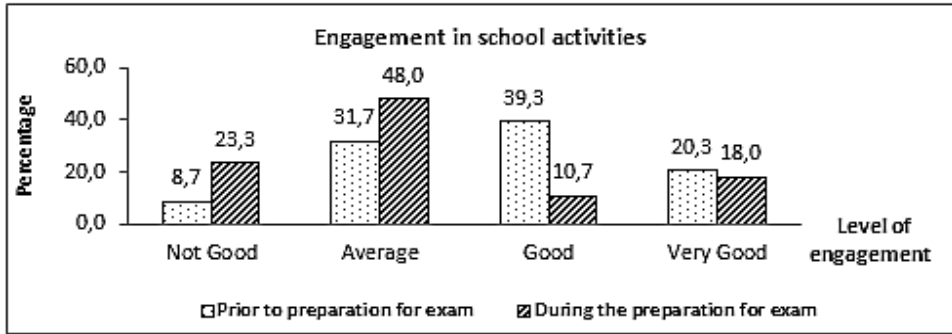
The distribution of study subjects’ opinions about the relationship with their families during prior to the preparing for the university entrance examination and during their preparation period was presented in Graphic 2.



Graphic 2: Relationship with Family in Both Periods

Graphic 2 displayed that the distribution of subject opinions about relationship with their families was changing in concern with periods. In particular, the percentage of subjects who had positive relationship (good and very good) with their families before the examination decreased while preparing for it. These difference were significant (good $z(166) = 3.070$; $p<0.05$ and very good $z(244) = 2.108$; $p<0.05$). The percentage of students who had negative or average relationship before the examination increased during their preparation period but these differences weren’t significant (not good $z(81) = -1.525$; $p>0.05$ and average $z(101) = -1.545$; $p>0.05$).

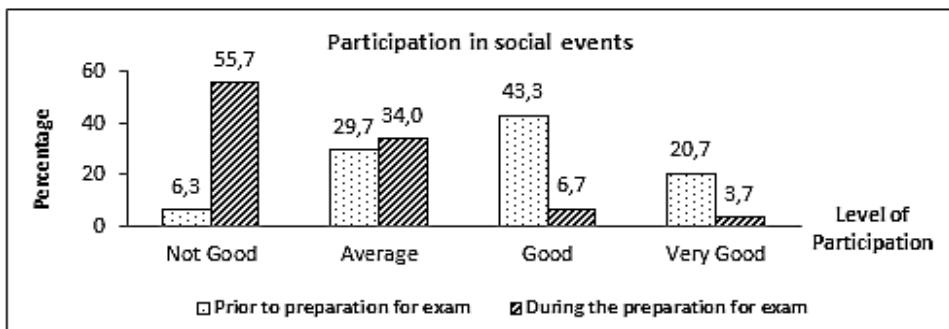
The third result of the study was about engagement in school activities. Graphic displayed the distribution of the opinions of subjects on their engagement in school activities in both study periods.



Graphic 3: Engagement in School Activities in Both Periods

The distribution of the subjects' opinions in both periods in terms of their level of engagement in school activities changed. The percentage of students who had an average or negative opinions increased during their preparation period that examination. A significant difference was observed between the percentage of opinions which was an average level ($z(237) = -2.519$; $p < 0.05$), but it wasn't found any significant difference between the changes of subject's opinions who had a negative engagement level ($z(94) = -1.734$; $p > 0.05$). When the positive categories were analyzed, the percentage of subjects' opinions decreased during their preparation period for it. The difference was significant for "good" category ($z(288) = 2.108$; $p < 0.05$) but not for "very good" category ($z(148) = 0.313$; $p > 0.05$). In general, the level of subject's engagement in school activities decreased while preparing for the university entrance examination.

It was also tested the changes of subjects' opinions between both periods. Graphic 4 displayed the distribution of the opinions of subjects on their participation in social events.

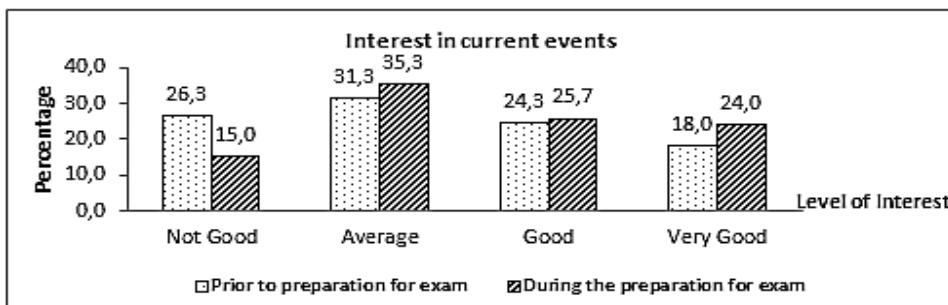


Graphic 4: Participation in Social Events in Both Periods

The percentage of subjects' negative opinions increased significantly while preparing for the exam. The difference was significant only for "not good" category (not good $z(184) = -4.409$; $p < 0.05$). However, the percentage of positive opinions decreased while preparing for it. This decrease was significant when the "good" category was taken into

account (good $z(148) = 3.314$; $p < 0.05$). In general, it may be stated that there was a decrease in the students' participation percentage in social events while preparing for the university entrance exam in comparison to prior to that exam.

The distribution of the subjects' opinions on interest in current events during both periods was displayed in Graphic 5.



Graphic 5: Interest in Current Events in Both Periods

When the Graphic 5 was taken into account, in general the interest level of subjects for current events increased, but these changes between levels didn't found as significant ($p > 0.05$). The upward trend in the percentage of subjects who stated that they interested in current events while preparing for the examination is noteworthy.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As the findings of the study showed that the social interaction levels of students before beginning preparing for the exam and while preparing for the exam differentiates in terms of selected variables, it can be significant or not. For example there is no significant differentiation between the levels of relationship the study subjects maintain with their friends. However, the percentage of students who stated that they established positive relationship with their friends while preparing for the exam was higher than those who expressed negative views. In the socialization process, peer groups have an important role in the life of the individual (Gander and Gardner 1981). When the level of relationship the students maintain with their families prior to the exam and while preparing for the exam is analyzed, it is observed that level of relationship with family decreased while preparing for the exam in comparison to the period prior to the exam. Individuals who study for the university exam may have the tendency to distance themselves from their families. During this period, which coincides with the adolescence period, individuals may draw a line between themselves and their families to feel independent and to eliminate domestic pressure of families (Finkenauer, Frinjs, Engel, Kerkhof, 2005; Kabasakal, 2013). However, during their preparation period for the exam, it is known that students have an experience with academic, social and emotional problems (Clarke and Gregory, 2003; Dereli –İman, 2013).

Since education-teaching activities are essentially a communication process, the ability to establish effective communication at high functional level should be a goal of

students, families, and other stakeholders (Gordon, 2003). In this respect, it has been observed that students who establish effective communication with their friends, families, and teachers are more successful at school. Students, who are raised in an environment which is strong and effective, express themselves better and think more positively about themselves (Arseven, 1986).

It is noteworthy that the students' engagement in school decreased while preparing for the exam in comparison to the period prior to the exam. In Turkey, being successful at the university entrance exam is not easily achieved. Private teaching institutions thereby assume a dominant role in the process of achieving success on the university entrance exam (TED, 2005). During the preparation period for the exam, students focus their attentions on lessons provided by these private teaching institutions. This situation results in students disengaging from the broader context of school life and its associated activities. Another change noted when the data from two study periods are compared is the amount of the time spent participating in social events. The students' participation in social events decreased while preparing for the exam. Parallel to this study's finding, Eşme and Temel (2004), studied to determine the importance of the university entrance exam for the students. The findings showed that students allocate a large amount of time to exam preparation and therefore reduce or cease in normal age related social events.

A critical element of the study's social Interactions analysis is the students' interest in the current events. Contrary to other selected social interactions it is observed that there is a tendency for students engaged in examination preparation to increase their level of awareness of current events. This increased focus facilitates an awareness of their relationship with the world they live in and enables a connection between learned information and real life. Further there is improved ability to solve problems in real life and to develop their critical thinking skills (Kaltsounis, 1987; Street, 2002).

As study data documents, students preparing for the university entrance examination participate less in social activities and their communication skills become weak. Therefore, it is suggested that students be directed to activities that allow them to better know themselves, discover their abilities, and enhance their communication skills. By implementing educational programs that support social life and guide students, it may be possible to reduce this negative effect of preparation of the university entrance examination.

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