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Lifelong learning and the willingness to read outside of school

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between, the elementary school students', who from the very first day of school are obliged to fulfill their schooling responsibilities, willingness to read and the process of lifelong learning. All of the students were registered in grade 4 and participated from three different elementary schools located in Bursa. According to results of the study, reading books in order to gain information shows that the reading of the students at the elementary stage is related to the course book, in other words because they are obliged to. The reflections of this in the long-term are that reading is conducted in compulsory situations, it is limited to schooling and that in the lifelong learning process it can hinder the willingness to learn.

Keywords: Lifelong learning; willingness to read; outside of school; pupils

1. Introduction

In recent years, the statement “lifelong learning” which until recently was in frequent use to describe learning, is replaced by the statement “from cradle to the grave”. The origin of learning being a long-lasting process is due to the curiosity of an individual as a learner starting from the beginning of his or her life towards what’s going on around him or her and the steps which are taken to satisfy this curiosity. One of the most effective ways of learning is reading. However, in order to be able to learn through this activity, an individual should learn to read or, rather than teaching an individual to read, it is necessary to focus on the acquisition of reading skills to be able to read. In order to learn to read or teach to read, a long period of time is not needed. On the other hand, in order to be able to; learn- for the acquisition of reading activity; make learning life-long; read/be able to read, appropriate steps directed at this action should be taken in a long-lasting way with the individual’s confronting proper and starting from the first years, even the first months of life the appropriate sources necessary for the reading activity. That is, starting from infancy. While taking these steps, without doubt, the most effective factor is parents’ attitudes. Firstly parents’ education levels, then their professions, income levels, that is, socio-economic factors have effects on the support given by parents to their children in this process. In our country, Turkey, related to the parent profile, unfortunately primarily in terms of the education level, a great majority of parents are primary or secondary school graduates and most of them have not completed their secondary education. This situation naturally reflects itself in the parents’ professions and income levels as well. As a result of these problems, unfortunately at least 57%, that is, more than half, of the children in our country start school without receiving pre-school experience (MNE, 2011). The “7 Very

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Late” campaign (Bekman, 1999) starting in the years when this rate was lower and still continuing today verifies this situation, too. This campaign emphasizes that the age of "Formal Education" is late for a child's starting his or her education and aims to make a contribution to the idea of “education for everyone” starting with pre-school education. Our children usually start school following a process during which most children do not receive pre-school experience or only go to nursery school for a year and mostly with no active parents' involvement. With this beginning, unfortunately our children newly reaching at the age of seven and starting to live the excitement of starting school months before are faced with activities which they have to perform in almost every lesson or responsibilities above their development levels starting from the very first days of the school rather than being encouraged and motivated to learn anything. Naturally, such a beginning causes our children to lose their desire to learn quickly starting from the very first weeks of the school and they are replaced by groups of students having lost their enthusiasm and curiosity.

2. Purpose of the study

This study aims to determine the relationship between reading in free time done by primary school students faced with school-related responsibilities, which they have to perform starting from the very first days of the school, and lifelong learning process.

3. Method

3.1. Method

Since this study aims to evaluate the opinions of 42 fourth grade voluntarily participated students studying at three different primary schools in Bursa through open-ended questions prepared by the researchers, it is a descriptive study.

3.2. Participants

The study was carried out with 42 fourth grade voluntarily participated students studying at three different primary schools in the provincial center of Bursa. The distributions indicating the participants' schools and genders are given in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to their schools and gender

Gender	Schools					
	School A		School B		School C	
	%	f	%	f	%	f
Girl	200	400	200	400	200	400
Boy	200	400	200	400	200	400
Total	400	200	400	200	400	200

3.3. Data Collection Tool

The research questions were prepared by the researchers as open-ended. In addition to the questions, the students were asked to write about their schools, classes and genders. The questions prepared were read by the classroom teachers of the classes under investigation, and related to the students' answering the questions, no difficulties or incomprehensibilities were determined. For this reason, the prepared questions were addressed to the students as they had been.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The research data was collected during non-instructional hours. In this process, while at one of the schools the administration was held in the library, at the other schools the students answered the questions at home and brought.

For this administration, the students were given a period of fifteen days. 42 of the total 53 documents were answered and handed in by the students. The students not having handed in the documents stated such reasons as forgetting at home, not willing to answer and not having time to answer.

4. Results and Comments

4.1. Finding related to the Primary School Students' Reasons for Reading Books

Related to the answers given by the primary school students, it was found that the students at three schools stated that they read primarily to “obtain information” (1st school: 7; 2nd school: 11; 3rd school: 3), secondly to have fun and thirdly to develop reading skills. In addition to these, the students also stated that they read books because; they liked reading, they wanted to develop grammar skills, they aimed to become creative, their parents did not put pressure on them, they desired to develop their vocabulary, they studied exams, they wanted to develop their imaginative power, they got pleasure from reading books, they promised their teachers to do so, they wished to develop personally, they wanted to become beneficial to the society, and they aimed to use what they read in real life. From among these answers, examples belonging to three students are: “Because when I read I learn a lot and can use those in real life (2nd school: S7); Actually I do not read very often, but in order to get rid of my parents' pressure (1st school: S5); Because I like books (but I need to choose and buy the book myself or I cannot concentrate on the book and comprehend what I read) (2nd school: S13)”. The primary school students' response to reading books most frequently in order to “obtain information” makes us consider that the students performed reading activities in relation mostly to course books and resources related to lessons. In this case, it is considered that the students did not read because of curiosity, interest or having fun. In other words, it was not because they desired it or needed it, but because they had to do so due to school responsibilities. Since the reasons for reading were not based on individual needs will lead children to lose their desire starting from early ages toward reading activity, which is one of the most effective tools in lifelong learning.

4.2. Finding related to the Primary School Students' Reasons for not being able to Read during Non-Instructional Hours

The students participating in the study stated that they could not do reading during non-instructional hours for these reasons: those enrolled in the 1st and 3rd schools read most frequently (f:16) when studying lessons and during non-instructional hours while, in order of frequency, the students of the 1st school stated that they could not read books because “they did not find the books appropriate for their ages (f:2), could not find time to read (f:2), they lived in crowded homes, they could not find books they liked and their reading skills were not good (f:1)”; the students of the 2nd school stated that they could not read because “they did not wish to read (f:9), they found reading books boring (f:7), there were not books appropriate for their levels (f:4), they had a lot of homework (f:5), they could not choose their books by themselves and their mothers' forcing them to read books (f:1)”; the students of the 3rd school stated that they could not read books because “they did not wish to read books and preferred to play games instead of reading books (f:1)”. Two of the answers are like these: “Because my mum forces me to read books (2nd school: S9); “Because I could not choose my own book (3rd school: S4)”.

The answers indicate that slightly more than 1/3 of the students can spare time for reading during non-instructional hours, that is, reading has become a part of their lives. On the other hand, that almost ¼ of the students did not wish to read books made us consider that these children did not feel a desire to read and within the course of time this situation would also lead to decrease in learning desire/enthusiasm and affect negatively school success. However, the actual function of the educational institute is to increase the desire of students belonging to this group about school and learning and get those students to continue their education as long as possible.

4.3. Finding related to the Primary School Students' Expectations from their Schools-Teachers-Parents so that They can Do Reading during Non-Instructional Hours

When the students taking education at three different schools were asked to express their expectations from their schools-teachers-parents so that they could do reading willingly during non-instructional hours, they stated that they could do it most frequently if their schools, teachers and parents asked them what kind of books they wanted to read (f:14), if they did not force them to read or their parents and teachers did not put pressure on them about this matter (f:11), if they read together with them (f:11) and if their schools bought more amusing books (f:9). Moreover, the students expressed their desire toward “being introduced the books which were recommended to read in a way that it would arouse their interest, buying books appropriate for their level, not buying boring books and their parents’ reading books together with them. Two of these answers are like these: “They could ask us what kind of books we would like to read (1st school: S2); “They could determine what kind of books we would like to read through questionnaires (2nd school: S13)”.

The participant students clearly would like their schools, teachers and parents to be sensitive to their interests and needs so that they can read. These thoughts indicate that primary school students are aware of their needs and the desire to read cannot be aroused “by force”. On the contrary, in order for individuals to be able to read other extracurricular resources voluntarily, curiosity toward these resources should be aroused by mentioning about appropriate resources, providing examples from them and telling about their reflections into real life. Moreover, since only 9.6% of the books examined within the scope of the study made by Gonen et al (2011) were adventure books and these books dealt with mostly social rules, family, moral issues and issues like friendship, it was found that the children’s books were not of quality to have children get pleasure from reading and have fun, that is, to meet the needs of children in this respect. In addition to these, the students wanted their families to support them about the matter of reading books most frequently by “reading books together”. Such an answer given to this question puts forward a very clear picture about their approaches especially related to their parents’ reading activities that “their parents’ do not read sufficiently”. However, according to the study results, the first of the factors having effect on the continuation of the reading activity in the individual’s life is parents’ being readers (Odabas, Odabas and Polat, 2008; McKool, 2007). The answers indicate that the students desire their parents to be sensitive to their preferences with respect to the matter of book selection. Actually, if this desire is taken into consideration, it is likely that they will see that their own desires are respected and willingly undertake the responsibility of reading books, and as a result, as stated by Manguel (2007: 20), they will learn with time that some things are not limited to “things which eyes can see, ears can hear, tongue can taste, fingers can feel” and enjoy reading to the full.

4.4. Finding related to the How the Primary School Students Spend Their Times during Non-Instructional Hours

Table 2. Distribution of Ways of Participants' Spending their Free Time

	1.	2.	3.		1.	2.	3.		1.	2.	3.
School A	f	f	f	School B	f	f	f	School C	f	f	f
Reading books	8	6		Reading books	10	1	1	Reading books	7		
Doing homework	1	2		Doing homework	2	2	2	Doing homework		2	
Playing games	1	1	5	Playing games	3	4	7	Playing games		1	1
Watching television	2	2	1	Watching television		6	2	Watching television			1
Playing computer games	1	2	3	Playing computer games	4	1	1	Playing computer games	2	1	1
Solving tests	1	1	1	Solving tests	1	1		Solving tests		1	2
Playing the violin		1		Having a good time	1			Helping with the housework		1	
Searching for something			1	Doing a sport		1		Doing a sport		1	
Relaxing			1	Visiting a friend			1	Having no free time		1	
				Listening to music			1	Searching for what is			
				Going to the cinema			1	wondered			1
				Painting pictures	1	1		Going to the library			1
								Writing poems			1
								Watching plays			1

Table 2 including the ways that the participant primary school students spent their times during non-instructional hours was examined, it was observed to include some findings which were not parallel to the answers given by the students regarding the reasons why they could not do reading during non-instructional hours. The most eye-catching of the values in the table was that while the frequency of the students stating that they can read during non-instructional hours was 16, a doubled number of students (f:33) stated that they spent most of their times on reading during non-instructional hours. This was followed by playing games, watching television and playing computer games. Primarily the research findings with respect to the students' reading rates during non-instructional hours and the rates of their spending spare time by reading do not go well together. While they explained about the reasons why they could not read, in this finding in the first three places they stated that they often read in their spare time. On the other hand, that playing games, watching television and playing computer games placed the second and the third reveals how they spend their times during non-instructional hours. Andreassen (2009: 194) claimed that all of the visual stimuli coming from television and films and most of those coming from the Internet are passive. According to the researcher, a child reading Robin Hood or Harry Potter learns to imagine and dream on his/her own. However, Claire's imagination with respect to Harry and Hogwarts, if arisen from reading, is formed actively rather than passively and becomes different from Owen's. However, in both Claire and Owen, after watching Harry and Hogwarts in the film, this strong image, with a great probability, replaces those created by them. In place of many Harries that many children create in their minds, there is only one "standard Harry", which children will accept passively, any more rather than creating their own ones. As Darwin stated, evolution results from variety.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In the study of "Turkey's Reading Habit Report Card" (2006) conducted in our country by the Children's Foundation, it was determined that the book placed the 235th. in the list of basic need items in Turkey, 90 kurush was spent per capita on books in a year and generally the rate of the habit of reading books regularly was one per thousand. According to Aytas (2005: 2), one of the main reasons why our country has remained behind other countries in terms of growth level is that reading training has been done more based on texts included in the coursebooks. However, in order for children to learn about reading skills that Manguel (2007: 19) defined as "acquiring a completely new sense", according to Rousseau (2003: 91), the first thing to do is to arouse the desire to learn to read in them. Moreover, PISA's focusing on the acquisition of reading skills for learning rather than students' learning to read and Rousseau's thought support one another. However, both the results of the present research and previous studies on this matter unfortunately indicate that reading in all the educational steps from primary education to higher education does not take place among priorities in an individual's life (Arici, 2008; Aksachoglu & Yilmaz, 2007; Kurulgan & Cekerol, 2008; Saracaloglu, Bozkurt & Serin, 2003). Among the reasons for this negative picture, which has not been able to be changed for long years, were, with no doubt, mainly our country's education and human training policies' being away from long-term and solution-focused approaches, the education budget's being 3,4%, the secondary education attendance rate's being 45%. In addition to these, in our country, individuals' continuously taking part in an exam-focused education process starting from the first years of primary education until undergraduate and even graduate years leads them to realize those which they are wanted and expected to do in their lives rather than their own desires and dreams. This situation decreases firstly the individuals' desire and enthusiasm to learn and then their curiosity and prevents them from doing something for themselves. At the same time, these approaches with such negative effects on learners not only cause parent-child relationships to be established only on course books and emotional needs to be ignored by weakening emotional ties, but also especially lead to decrease in the motivation of teachers servicing at schools and along with the importance of educational institutions. Moreover, one of the results brought by the domination of an exam-focused educational approach in our country is teachers' giving students a lot of written homework which takes too much time to do outside of school. Naturally, individuals sparing an important part of the day fulfilling the responsibilities which they undertake due to obligations continue their lives in a process in which they spend the remaining part of the day on developing personally or satisfying their curiosity, searching for matters which they are interested in and they can never question. This situation limits individuals to acquiring something enough to carry them to the next learning

step in their lives at a minimum level as an obligation rather than the need for thoughts about learning at very early period. For these reasons, in place of approaches limiting the learning process to school or classrooms, an educational approach taking into consideration students' needs and developmental characteristics, achieving parents' active participation and taking responsibilities is needed.

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