STUDY INTO THE VIEWS OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS UPON INTEREST-BASED LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine and evaluate the views of classroom teachers teaching in primary schools over the approaches toward Interest-based Learning in classroom. We asked three open ended questions to the participant teachers to obtain the data: How do you determine the interests of your students? , "What do you usually do to promote your students' skills and interest in learning?" and "How do your students react your attitude to Interest-based Learning Strategy?" A qualitative research method was used to evaluate and compare the views of classroom teachers on the strategies for Interest-based Learning. The research was carried out with the participation of nineteen classroom teachers working in various Primary Schools in some cities in Turkey. The views of classroom teachers obtained through face-to-face interviews and e-mails suggest that their approaches toward what they do to promote the students' interest in learning include using adaptive learning for unattended students to foster their interest in learning, communicating with families about students' interests and skills in learning, providing children with preferences including culturally relevant materials and activities, taking the time to get to know the students and one-by one relations with the students. This paper draws attention to the views and practices of classroom teachers as a means of increasing awareness of Interest-based Learning in classroom environment.

Keywords: Interest-based learning, adaptive learning, classroom management, classroom teacher.

İLKOKULLARDA İLGİYE DAYALI ÖĞRENME ÜZERİNE SINIF ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN GÖRÜŞLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, ilköğretim okullarında öğretmenlik yapan sınıf öğretmenlerinin sınıf ortamında ilgi temelli öğrenme yaklaşımları üzerine görüşlerini belirlemek ve değerlendirmektir. Katılımcı öğretmenlere veriyi elde etmek için üç açık uçlu soru soruldu: Öğrencilerinizin ilgilerini nasıl tespit edersiniz? "Öğrencilerinizin öğrenmeye olan ilgi ve becerilerini arttırmak için genellikle neler yapıyorsunuz?" ve "Öğrencileriniz, ilgi Alanına Dayalı Öğrenme Stratejisine karşı tutumunuza nasıl tepki gösteriyor?" Öğretmenlerin İlgi Alanına Dayalı Öğrenme stratejileri hakkındaki görüşlerini değerlendirmek ve karşılaştırmak için nitel bir

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araştırma yöntemi kullanıldı. Araştırma, Türkiye'deki bazı şehirlerde çeşitli ilköğretim okullarında çalışan on dokuz sınıf öğretmenin katılımı ile yürütülmüştür. Yüz yüze görüşmeler ve e-postalar yoluyla elde edilen sınıf öğretmenlerinin görüşleri öğrencilerin öğrenme konusundaki ilgilerini artırmak için ne yapmaları gerektiği konusundaki yaklaşımları ilgisiz ve devamsız öğrencilerin öğrenmeye olan ilgilerini artırabilmek için uyarlamalı öğrenme stratejileri kullanmayı, ailelerle iletişim kurmayı, öğrencilere kültürel olarak uygun materyaller ve faaliyetler içeren tercihler sağlamayı, öğrencileri çok iyi tanıyabilmek için onlara vakit ayırmayı, onlarla birebir ilgilenmeyi içermektedir. Bu çalışma, sınıf ortamında İlgi Alanına Dayalı Öğrenmenin farkındalığını artırmak için sınıf öğretmenlerinin görüş ve uygulamalarına dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İlgi alanına dayalı öğrenme, uyarlamalı öğrenme, sınıf yönetimi, sınıf öğretmeni.

1. Introduction

The studies conducted in the field of learning show that individuals are different from each other in terms of learning speed and style (Kayalar and Kayalar, 2016). As a matter of fact, some people learn faster and easier, whereas others learn more slowly or hardly learn. In other words, individual differences in learning are of great importance. For this reason, when the individual is trained, it becomes an obligation to pass through educational environments that take individual differences and the learners' interests and skills into consideration. The learners become much more motivated, efficient, productive and successful as long as they are exposed to learning style appropriate to their interests (Kayalar, 2016). Certain internal and external factors affect motivation to learn. External factors are very diverse, while internal factors are related to intrinsic causes, such as attitudes, interests, and personality traits, which are important to learning and success. Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that is created by the individual's own needs (Reece and Walker, 2007). The sources of intrinsic motivation include the curiosity, interest, learning need, proficiency and developmental emotion of the individual. It is necessary for individual to be autonomous, to be successful, to belong to a community or group, and to be well-being. From this point of view, interest-based learning is directly concerned with motivation of learners. In the study we tried to determine how do the classroom teachers determine the interests of their students what the teachers do to meet the interests of their students, and what strategies they use for Interest-based learning in their classes and courses in terms of effective classroom management.

1.1. Interest Based Learning

Various definitions have been made for Interest based Learning, one of the learning-teaching approaches, and it is argued to have similar aspects to Personalized Learning. It is defined as the process of changing the functionality, interface, information content or distinctiveness of a system to enhance the individual's appropriateness to his or her personality

(Blom, 2000). It is argued to be the adaptation of pedagogy, curriculum and learning environments in terms of different learning needs and desires of learners (Kışla and Şahin, 2015).

In the development of Interest-based Learning environments, the idea of a learning environment in which individual differences are considered for each learner plays an important role in effective learning. These individual differences include learning styles, learning speeds, talents, expectations, readiness, experiences and motivations of the learners. At this point, Interest-based Learning environments offer a place for learners to learn when and where they want, appropriate to their own pace and learning style in a more flexible structure (Sampson *et al*. 2002). In learning context, Interest-based Learning is to provide learning experiences that are tailored to each learner's interest and learning style. It aims to provide learning experiences that take into account individual differences, avoiding the idea that a single model presented is suitable for everyone (Özarslan, 2010).

It is important to make use of children's interests to provide engaging and meaningful learning experiences, but it is also the teachers' role as educators to introduce new ideas and interests. Using children's interests effectively requires the teachers to be selective, and it remains impossible to plan for everyone's interests at once. Rather than extending every passing interest, the teachers need to develop skills to identify and select interests that are worth extending (NQS, 2012).

There is curiosity on the basis of interest-based learning. The teacher can keep the curiosity in children alive by asking questions that require discovery, by making research and experiments, and by sharing the emerging products.

If a teacher can arouse curiosity and put the learner into the process of exploring, he can make him/her interested in everything. As student learns what he / she is curious about, so does he/she academically develop. The curiosity brings learning, the learning brings interest, and interest brings curiosity. In this way, this cycle continues for life.

Interest-based learning can be delivered online and through small group instruction. Interest-based Learning and Teaching approach is an applicable education system which can also be used both in individual courses and in the classroom environment.

2. Literature Review

Wardrip *et al* (2014) investigated badging system and its connection to Interest-based Learning, drawing two motivational theories which are Cognitive Evaluation Theory supported by Deci and Ryan (1985), Ryan and Deci (2000) and Expectancy-Value Theory by Eccles *et al*.

(1983), Eccles (1987), Wigfield and Eccles (2000), Eccles and Wigfield (2002). They used a lot of theories to study into the Interest-based Learning. The relationship of these two theories to children's motivation was released by a variety of theories.

In interest-based studies, interest has been found to play an energizing role on cognitive functioning, and it has a strong effect on learner motivation and in predicting future intention (Alexander *et al.*, 1995).

Some researchers such as Boscolo and Mason (2003), Hidi (2006), Schiefele (1992), and Schraw & Lehman (2001) emphasized in their studies that interest is positively associated with learning from texts, and it is not known why the positive association between interest and learning from texts occurs.

The study carried out by Braswell and Brown (1992) revealed that females reviewed instructions through video devices more frequently and spent more time on tasks than males in an interactive video learning environment.

In a similar study in ninety-nine kindergarten children (44 girls and 46 boys), Passig and Levin (1999, 2000) investigated gender differences among students in terms of their preferences to various designs of multimedia learning environments. The researchers found out some features of multimedia interfaces that interest boys and girls. It was revealed that boys were more attracted to movement such as fast navigation, control, and choice, whereas girls were more attracted to visual aspects such as color, drawing, and writing.

In earlier studies, according to Hancock *et al.* (1996) and Leong and Hawamdeh (1999), the reason why boys did not like to read static screens consisting of text on a computer screen is probably due to the fact that boys more associate computers with dynamic games animation than girls do.

Fan and Macredie (2006) carried out a research on Personalized Learning, which indicated that females showed less favourable attitudes towards computers. They argued that this could be due to many of today's computer software packages and games being aimed at male interests and preferences.

Souto *et al.* (2006) studied into how to trace the interactions of learners with the pedagogical material over the Internet and tried to find answers to the questions of how the learner's behaviour could be computationally analysed and interpreted along his/her learning process, and how the psycho and pedagogical characteristics of the learners could be modelled. As a result of their research, they found out that learning style, cognitive style and emotions are great importance to adapt the instruction in a suitable manner.

3. Materials and Method

3.1 Problem Statement and Purpose

The aim of the study on Interest-based Learning in Classroom Environment is to determine the similar and different views of classroom teachers teaching in primary schools, and to evaluate the feasibility of Interest-based learning strategy in their classes and courses. To fulfil the purpose of the study we asked the classroom teachers "How can they determine the interests of their students", "What they can usually do to promote their students' skills and interest in learning" and "How their students react their attitude to Interest-based Learning Strategy?"

3.2. Methods and Research Design

We used a qualitative research method to determine and evaluate classroom teachers' views and intention in Interest-based Learning. This kind of methodological approach was chosen as it enables researchers to interpret and make judgement about immeasurable data (O'Tool and Beckett, 2010: 28). We conducted this research with the views of primary school teachers in Erzincan city. For this reason we relied on case study design for the purpose of our enquiry. The case study design in research is chosen as it reduces the use of positivist or post positivist perspectives, accepts postmodern sensibilities, captures the individual's point of view, examines the constraints of everyday life, and secures rich descriptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

3.3. Participants

The participants in our study were nineteen classroom teachers working in some primary schools in Erzincan city, Turkey. As shown in Table 1, the youngest participant is female, with 5 years of teaching experience, while the eldest is male, with twenty-five years of teaching experience. We preferred and used easily accessible sample technique in the research, as it increases the speed of collecting data and enables researchers to access the sample easily (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). We obtained the data from 19 classroom teachers who admitted to be involved in the interview for the research. The participants were asked whether they were contented to answer to the questions, and then we applied the tool. The names of the teachers are coded with letters and numbers.

Table 1: *Statistical data as to Gender, Age, Grade and Years of Experience*

GENDER		%	AGE		%	GRADE		%	EXPERINCE		%
Male	6	32%	25-30 years	6	32%	1st grade	4	21%	1-5 year	1	5%
Female	13	68%	31-35 years	8	42%	2nd grade	6	32%	6-10 years	9	47%
			36-40 years	3	16%	3rd grade	7	37%	11-15 years	5	27%
			over 40 years	2	10%	4th grade	2	10%	over 16 years	4	21%

3.4. Research Instrument

In the study, we used the tool with semi structured interview form to gather data from classroom teachers. We asked three open ended questions to the participants. The questions were designed in accordance with the main characteristics of Interest-based Learning strategy. The questions of the interview were formed by the final judgement of three experts in the field, who are teaching staff in the Department of Educational Sciences in Erzincan University.

3.5. Data analysis

We obtained the data through one by one and face to face interview with the participants; the replies to the interview questions were abstracted and made into pure data. The data were then transferred and digitalized into computer in order to form digital data. We used content analysis with the percentage and frequency values.

4. Findings

The oral statements given by the classroom teachers working in primary schools for the questions in the semi-structured interview form were typed, arranged, summarized, filtered and extracted. The final statements are given below.

The questions asked to the classroom teachers are "How can you determine the interests of your students", "What do you usually do to promote your students' skills and interests in learning" and "How do your students react your attitude to Interest-based Learning Strategy?" The sample statements for the first question are given as followings.

(Z. A., Female, 2nd Grade Classroom Teacher): "….The first step to determine the interests of my students is to find out what they care about and like to do. I use two methods, Student Surveys and Learning Profile Cards to collect data about my student. I usually ask their parents and other students what the students' interests are to provide these details. I set up social media such as WhatsApp and Messenger to communicate with them and find out their interests in learning. That is a powerful method for me to know my students.…"

(P. T., Female, 3rd Grade Classroom Teacher): "…At the start of the first term, I invite all of students to offer and create their own preferences and option to determine their interests,

based on the learning criteria. I listen to their parents' proposals, trying to find out learning styles of the students. I review the proposals in terms of their feasibility in classroom environment…"

(S. B., Female, 3rd Grade Classroom Teacher): "… I am the most experienced veteran teacher in the school. I appreciate the interests and learning styles of my students. I strongly rely on the benefits of Interest based learning particularly for those with engagement problems. I always try to know the features of my students, their parents and their socioeconomic situations, cultural values, moral values *ect*. This helps me determine the most suitable teaching strategy to implement in my class…"

Individual recognition includes many features such as interests and abilities, achievements and failures, levels of personal and social cohesion, problems, attitudes and values, weaknesses and strengths, developmental and inhibitory effects of the environment in which they are trained. The information collected about the individual is not only necessary for education, instruction, guidance and psychological counselling and management services in the school environment but also for adult individuals working in all parts of the industry, outside the school, in public and private sector services.

From the statements of the participant teachers in the study, we can argue that the teachers appreciate the recognition of their students to cater them efficient learning environment appropriate for their interests so that they can academically have achievements and they can be trained through the best and the most suitable learning style for them. The parents are of the key importance to provide valuable information about the characteristics of their children. In this way the teachers can easily have necessary information so as to drive the students into the way of their interests in learning.

For the second question "What do you usually do to promote your students' skills and interests in learning", the participant teachers gave their views through the statements below;

(T. G. A., Female, 4th Grade Classroom Teacher): "…I want my students to walk into the classroom with no seating plans. I give them chance wherever they like. I ask them to get comfortable; I put a pile of carefully selected picture books side by side on the table. They closely look over all the books, and I ask them which books I shall read first. I pay attention to the preference of indifferent students. After reading, I quietly wait for their reactions till they begin to talk to share their thoughts. It's important that they are the ones to speak first, not me… With student centred classroom environment they feel pleased with my practice and they can learn what they want first …. "

(A. T., Male, 2nd Grade Classroom Teacher): "…It is my priority to ensure full engagement of my students in courses. I try to provide meaningful activities for them so as to promote their interest in class. To ensure the activities to be personally pleasant and meaningful, I get to know them well and gather their interests with their previous knowledge and experiences. I help them choose a model appropriate for their learning styles …"

In a study carried out by Kayalar and Güler Arı (2016), it is stated that "Every student has different personality traits, features and characteristics such as autonomic, sociotropic, shy, social, asocial, aggressive, enthusiastic, obsessive etc. Also every student has different skills of learning, making decision and conflict resolution. For this reason language teachers should treat language learners according to their personality traits and individual differences".

In order to promote the skills and interest of the students in learning, there are some important points that the teachers should do in school environment. The teachers are required to recognize the physical, mental, emotional, psycho-motor and socio-economic characteristics, to learn the group relations and learning styles, to determine the level of readiness, and to observe the interests and abilities of the students.

The seating arrangement has an enormous influence in that an effective and lasting learning can be achieved and students can participate actively in a willing and active manner.

The classroom teachers participating in our study argued that the students who are sitting in the back row do not participate in the classes very much and that the achievements are low, however, these students are more social and have more confidence in their social relations and their self-confidence is higher. According to another teacher, boy students determine where they will take their seat in the classroom, however girls are very careful to choose their friends to sit together, and girls are more interested in courses than boys.

From the statements of the classroom teachers in the study, the engagement, autonomy and self-esteem can be ensured by giving choice of seat to the students. The more flexible seating plan in classroom, the more comfortable and readiness the students feel in the courses. For this reason, the teachers would prefer give opportunities of seat choice rather than force them to sit as to teacher's order. Student-choice seat order contributes to promoting the interest and attention of the students to the courses and the other activities in classroom environment.

(F. Z., Female, 4th Grade Classroom Teacher): "…I always create an interesting topic to attract my students to the subject. I assign students a role for their self-esteem and encourage them to take risks, then I make them feel free to make mistakes and keep this consistently…."

(N. N., Male, 4th Grade Classroom Teacher): "…I create discussion groups and ask each group to discuss a different topic according to their interests. In the meantime, I make sure that these students travel around the different groups and participate in discussions.…"

The strategy in teaching is the order of learning activities to achieve an effective method. Discussion, one of the learning activities, is the negotiations for a specific purpose and the argumentation of any group over the questions that concern everyone within a certain order under someone else's management. It stimulates the students' interest and attention. It develops the students' evaluating and critical thinking skills. The discussion method requires active learning. It means that all students have to exchange information, ideas and attitudes about the subject that interest them in the direction of the course objectives. It is a very effective method in terms of ensuring teacher-student and student-student interaction.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the school environment, educational, professional, personal, social-emotional information about the individual contributes much to the managers, teachers, parents, psychological service personnel and the individual himself.

With the information obtained from the parents as to the interests of the students, the teachers and principals can make more realistic planning and arrangements in the school program and educational activities, make special programs and classes, using the necessary changes and improvements, information about the qualifications and development levels of the students in the school.

Teachers can better recognise the characteristics of the students and can accordingly provide individual and academic assistance. They can better see and understand the developmental situation of students in their school work. Teachers can have the opportunity to give more detailed and objective information about the children in the interviews they have done individually or as a group with the parents. Getting to know the students greatly affects the success of both the students and the teachers. Recognition of students increases the possibility of finding appropriate solutions to their problems and preparing programs that are suited to their interests and needs.

Guidance teachers or psychological counsellors use the data for The Guidance and Psychological Counsellor (GPC) Program, individual and group work. It is rather impossible for the school GPC program and related activities to be conducted effectively and assist to the students without information about the individual.

Parents can better recognize their children realistically through information about their various characteristics. They can understand and realise personal, educational and professional developments and directions regarding their children, so they can be more helpful to their children and school.

The requirements to be dealt with in the student-recognition studies should include the economic situation of the family of the learner, student-family relations, physical development and health, mental and linguistic development, emotional and social development, school education and achievement status, participation in after-school activities, the interests and talents of the learners, future plans and occupational trends.

Individual personality is formed by the combination of many features. Body structure, temperament, interests, psychological needs, talents, habits and attitudes are some of the things that make up the personality. It seems impossible to know all of them about the person. But, It is necessary for us to know what the situation is in terms of features such as leadership, independence, emotional stability, cooperation with others, the student's readiness to read, and our relationships with teachers and friends.

One of the things that the person should know about is knowing the characteristics of the environment he lives in. The economic and cultural level of the family is important factors affecting the success and harmony of the school because of the child's attitude towards school, education and reading. The number of siblings, being the first or last child and being the only child influence the personality development of the child. For this reason, it is necessary to obtain information about the child's family environment, how he / she lives a significant part of his / her life, and what kind of environment he / she is living in. The fact that our schools do not have sufficient education counsellors leads to difficulty in recognizing the students and finding solutions to their problems. Each school should have at least one counsellor, the classroom teacher and the counsellor should work together, and the information and results should be evaluated together for the recognition of the students and the guidance for them. It will be helpful for teachers to improve their communication with the child at school. The teacher should be able to communicate better with the student and produce a solution to the problem, which enables teacher to recognise the students in terms of cognitive, emotional and social development.

As the necessity of interest-based learning, teachers should often talk with the students and parents, exchange information about them, try to learn and find out their interests and wishes, discuss about the group of friends, talk about their attitudes and behaviours at home

with parents, give information to the parents about academic achievement of the students at school, know the reasons of success and failure, and choose the most appropriate method.

Acknowledgement

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