The Effectiveness of an Assertiveness Training Programme on Adolescents’ Assertiveness Level

A. Rezan Çeçen-Eroğul2 Mustafa Zengel3

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of an assertiveness training programme on adolescents’ assertiveness level. To select subjects for experimental and control groups, it was considered some criteria such as “Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)” scores, voluntariness, teachers’ opinion, and permission of students’ parents. The data was collected through “Rathus Assertiveness Schedule”. For the experimental group assertiveness enhancing programme as an independent variable was carried out by the school counsellor, during 50-70 minutes lasting 12 weeks. During this period the control group did not receive any treatment. The ANCOVA analysis results have shown that assertiveness training program was effective on adolescents’ assertiveness level. The results were discussed in the light of related literature.

Key Words: Assertiveness training, adolescents, quasi experimental study

Introduction

Adolescence is defined as the period during which physically, mentally, socially and emotionally the biggest changes happen. The use of assertiveness training as a part of program to enhance social skills has been shown to have positive benefits for adolescents’ self concept (Stake, DeVille & Pennel, 1983), lowered self-abasement and improved locus of control (Jackson, 1979; Waksman, 1984b). Assertiveness training which emphasizes self-expression in socially acceptable ways, is particularly appropriate at the beginning of adolescence (Wise, Bundy, Bundy, Wise, 1991).

Assertiveness training was found to be effective in improving the social coping skills of general populations of adolescents (Rotheram ve Armstrong, 1980; Howing, Wodarski, Kurtz, & Gaudin, 1990) and unassertive adolescents (McNeilly & Yorke, 1990), modifying adolescents' aggressive behavior (Huey, 1988), and preventing adolescents from using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (Metz, Fuemmeler, Brown, 2006). Eskin (2003) characterized assertiveness as “an important social skill that promotes personal well-being” (p.7). Korsgaard, Roberson, and Rymph (1998) reported that the acquisition of assertion skills enhances personal relationships and interactions between people. Assertiveness training can improve individuals’ social skills and emotional health (Eskin, 2003; Glueckauf & Quittner, 1992). Dwairy (2004) viewed assertiveness training as a process of learning to stand up for one’s rights and cope assertively, not passively or aggressively.

Assertion; standing up for your rights without violating the rights of others. Assertion takes into account the other person’s feelings and is not a negative confrontation. Assertion is an appropriate expression of one’s feelings, beliefs and opinions (Morganett, 1990; Vernon, 1989). Aggression; Stating your position in a dominating humiliating way. Aggression doesn’t take into account the other person’s feelings or rights. It is an attack on the other person (Morganett, 1990; Vernon, 1989). Nonassertion; Being afraid to stand up for your rights or express your opinions. Nonassertive people want to avoid conflict. They keep their feelings bottled up inside but are often very angry because they are allowing themselves to be stepped on by others (Morganett, 1990; Vernon, 1989).

According to Bandura (2003), “Humans have evolved an advanced cognitive capacity for observational learning that enables them to shape and structure their lives through the power of modeling” (p. 167).

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) offers the explanation that people learn by observing others and then imitating that behavior. Bandura suggests that people use symbols as internal models to guide their behaviour and as a means for estimating outcomes of their actions (Bandura, 1986;
Wise, Bundy, Bundy, Wise, (1991) and through practices and experiences they can facilitate self-efficacy.

According to Morganett (1990) the group-based intervention programs are beneficial especially for adolescents. Counseling groups provide an atmosphere of acceptance, encouragement and safe experimentation for new behaviors. In addition since peers strongly influence the young adolescent, group counseling enhances the possibility that youths will attempt new behaviours practiced and modeled by their peers and significant others (Gazda, 1989). If group members provide good models for assertive behavior, they can learn assertive behavior from their peers easily. So that the peers strongly influence the young adolescent, group counseling enhances the possibility that youths will attempt new behaviours practiced and modeled by their peers and significant others (Gazda, 1989). This study was designed more heavily on social learning theory.

Because assertiveness training is potentially beneficial for adolescents, it is important to demonstrate its effectiveness is worthwhile (Wise et al., 1991). If we investigate the Turkish literature it can be seen that there are limited assertiveness training studies on children and adolescents (Aydın, 1991; Görüs, 1999; Kapıkiran, 1993; Uğurluoğlu, 1996; Yatağan, 2005). In the light of the literature, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of an assertiveness training programme on middle school students’ assertiveness levels. The following hypothesis was proposed for testing within the present study. Subjects who received treatment have significantly higher score on the assertiveness schedule than the subjects who did not receive.

**METHOD**

**Subjects**

In this study subjects were selected from Ticaret Borsası Middle School in Adana, Turkey. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule applied to 140 students who were attending 7th grade to determine the assertiveness levels. To assign subjects for experimental and control groups some criteria such as Rathus Assertiveness Schedule scores, voluntariness, teachers’ opinion, and permission of students’ parents were considered. In the related literature, it is indicated that all group members should not be nonassertive or aggressive for adolescents group process. (Morganett, 1990; Jacobs, Harvill, Mason, 1987; Corey, 1995). Thus, three assertive students were assigned for modeling to experimental group and totaly 15 subject were assigned to experimental (9 female, 6 male) and control group (10 female 5 male). Since the subjects groups were not assigned to experimental and control groups randomly, a control grouped pretest- posttest quasi experimental design was used. To determine between experimental and control group pre-test scores whether significantly differentiated “t” test was used. There was no significant difference between two groups. Subjects mean age was 13.6, and the age range was 12-14.

**Procedure**

For the experimental group, assertiveness training programme as an independent variable was carried out by the school counsellor, during 50-70 minutes lasting 12 weeks. The session’s topics and contents were determined based on reviewing related literature by the researchers (such as Altunay, 1999; Akkök, 1999; Cartledge & Milburn, 1995; Langelier, 2001; Morganett, 1990; Öğülmüş, 2001; Vernon, 1989; Voltan, 1980).

Rathus Assertiveness Schedule was administered to experimental and control group as a pretest. The assertiveness training program was consisted of twelve sessions. The first session includes structuring, group rules, confidentiality, the goals of program and goals of group members, second session includes feedback, “I” sentences, discrimination of thinking, feeling and behaving, third session includes our essential personal rights, fourth and fifth session includes identification and discrimination assertive, aggressive and passive behaviours, sixth-seventh session includes the barriers for assertive behaviours, recognizing alternative thinking, the members’ experience related to assertive, aggressive and passive behaviour, eight-nine session includes developing communication skills including body language, ten-eleven session includes developing self-worth and social skills and twelve session includes evaluation of all sessions and graduation from assertiveness training program. Role playing, behaviour rehearsal, feedback, modeling, scenarios, debate, homework assignments,
self-reinforcement, self-monitoring techniques were used through sessions. At a posttraining session, students were presented with certificates for successful completion of the program and encouraged to behave in a responsible, assertive way in the future.

During this period the control group has not received any treatment and after training program post test was applied to both groups. One of the group members from experimental group dropped out. Thus, the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) technique was applied on 14 subjects obtained from experimental and control groups. If random assignment is not possible to assign experimental and control group, ANCOVA technique should be preferred (Tabachnick ve Fidell, 1996).

Measurement

**Personal Demographic Information Questionnaire:** This questionnaire designed to describe the students’ demographic information, such as gender, age and class.

**Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS):** The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS; Rathus, 1973) consists of 30 statements describing assertive behaviour. Subjects respond on a six point scale from +3 (strongly characteristic of me) to -3 (strongly uncharacteristic of me) yielding a total assertiveness score between -90 (least assertive) and +90 (most assertive). A positive score indicates assertiveness and a negative score indicates nonassertiveness.

The RAS had acceptable evidence of internal consistency and stability. Split half reliability was .77, test retest reliability over an 8-week period was .78. The RAS has good criterion validity as scores on the instrument have been shown to correlate with measures of boldness, outspokenness, assertiveness, aggressiveness, and confidence. Strong concurrent validity is seen in the correlation between RAS scores and trained raters’ rankings of assertiveness. The RAS was adapted into Turkish sample by Voltan (1980) and she reported the scale is reliable and valid for the Turkish adolescent sample. For validity; the scale applied to both students and the teachers who know the students very well. The correlation between students’ rate and teachers’ rate was found .70. Voltan (1980) also reported RAS test-retest reliability over an 2-week was .92. In the Turkish literature the RAS has been used in many different studies and adolescents (Çulha ve Dereli, 1987; Gökalan, 2000; Kaya, 2001; Kilç, 2005; Örgün, 2000; Şahiner, 1994; Tataker, 2003; Yatağan, 2005). In this study cronbach alpha coefficient was computed and found .69.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 has shown means and standard deviations of experimental and control groups’ Rathus Assertiveness Schedule.

**Table 1: Experiment and Control Groups’ Pretest-Posttest Assertiveness Schedule Scores.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>X = -12.66</td>
<td>SD = 14.3</td>
<td>X = 15</td>
<td>N =14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.60</td>
<td>17.49</td>
<td>8.81</td>
<td>20.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we investigate Table 1 it can be seen experimental and control groups pre-test scores mean were close to each other [ experimental group (X = -12.66; SD=14.30), control group (X = -15.00; SD=8.83)]. Experimental group post-test Rathus Assertiveness Schedule mean scores (X=25.60; SD=17.49) were higher than control group mean scores (X=8.81; SD=20.88). However control group post test scores (X=8.81; SD=20.88) were also higher than pretest control group scores(X= -15.00; SD=8.83).

The Covariance technique was applied to investigate whether these differences were significant or not. The findings have shown on Table 2.
Table 2: Covariance Analysis Results Related To Experiment and Control Groups’ Post-test Assertiveness Schedule Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>Sum.Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Variable controlled (pretest scores)</td>
<td>18.653</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.653</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>0.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Effect</td>
<td>1930.56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1930.56</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2017.52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1008.76</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>10362.44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>398.556</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12379.97</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05

As it can be seen from Table 2 group main effect was significant (F= 4.84; p<.05). The students’ scores who attended assertiveness training programme were significantly higher than the control group scores.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicated that the group experience based on the assertiveness training programme had a significant positive effect on adolescents’ assertiveness levels. When considered assertiveness levels of both experimental and control groups the research hypothesis was accepted as expected direction. This is consistent with previous findings that indicated the assertiveness training programme had a significant effect on experimental group (Çulha, 1987; Englander-Golden, 1984; Huey, 1988; Lee, Hallberg, & 1985; McNeilly & Yorke, 1990; Pentz, 1980; Rotheram & Armstrong, 1980; Voltan, 1980; Yatağan, 2005). It is important to note that besides experimental group, control group post-test scores were also increased. This means that some changes occurred independently from any intervention. The control group students may exhibit more assertive behaviour because they are developing cognitively and socially, that is not a result of the treatment. This situation can be interpreted that adolescents change and they develop skills naturally through maturation over time however experimental group scores still higher than control group. This result was the similar to Yatağan’s (2005) experimental study result that 7th grade control group assertiveness scores slightly increased at the post test (Yatağan, 2005).

According to Morganett (1990) the group-based intervention programs are beneficial especially for adolescents. Counseling groups provide an atmosphere of acceptance, encouragement and safe experimentation for new behaviors. In addition since the peers strongly influence the young adolescent, group counseling enhances the possibility that youths will attempt new behaviors practiced and modeled by their peers and significant others (Gazda, 1989). If group members provide good models for assertive behavior, they can learn assertive behavior from their peers easily. The curriculum for this program was carefully planned, focusing exclusively on peer interactions. It emphasized the concept of responsible assertion, which focuses on equal regard for the rights of self and others. It can be thought that positive group atmosphere, role play activities, modeling, immediate feedback, scenarios, debate, homework assignments which emphasized praise and encouragement rather than criticism, was given by peer observers as well as the instructors and self reinforcement, self monitoring techniques contributed increasing the experimental group assertiveness scores.

This study results are limited on this sample. Assertiveness training program can be applied on different samples and different age groups. Further studies are necessary to determine which variables contribute to enhance assertive behaviour. It is important to note that another limitation is related to instrument. In this study reliability of The Turkish version of Rathus Assertiveness Schedule was not
very high. Thus, for future research and researcher who wants to use this study results need to consider this situation.

As a conclusion an assertiveness training could be beneficial for developing adolescents’ assertive behaviours and this enhancing program could be incorporated into everyday curriculum in middle schools.

REFERENCES


Ergenlere Uygulanan Girişkenlik Eğitimi Programının Ergenlerin Girişkenlik Düzeyleri Üzerindeki Etkisi


Anahtar Kelimeler: Girişkenlik eğitimi, ergenler, yarı deneySEL desen

Amaç ve Öнем: Ergenlik fiziksel, zihinsel, sosyal ve duygusal alanlarda büyük değişimlere tabi bir dönemde bulunan ergenler için, girişkenlik eğitimi sosyal becerilerin geliştirilmesi ile ilgili beceri programlarının bir parçası olarak kullanıldığında ergenlerin benlik algıları ve benlik saygıları üzerinde olumlu etkileri olduğu (Stake, DeVille & Pennel,1983), kendini küçük görmemin azalıgını ve iç denetim odağının geliştirilmesine olumlu katkıları olduğu gösterilmiştir (Jackson,1979; Waksman, 1984b). Kendini ifade etmenin sosyal olarak kabul edilebilir bir şekilde olması vurgulan girişkenlik eğitimi özellikle ergenlik döneminde özellikle artırıcı etkisi yapabilir. 


Saldırıvanlıktan biyeyi içinde bulunduğu durumu bakan bir biçimde karşıda ki kişinin duyugularını ya da haklarını dikkate almakszın saldırıvanlıca ifade etmektedir. Girişken olmama (çekingen, pasif olma) ise bireylerin kendi düşüncelerini ve duyugularını açıklamaktan korkma ve çatsıma yaşamaktan kaçınma ile karakterize olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır (Morganett, 1990; Vernon, 1989).


