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Comparing The Written Work Of Two Age Groups At The First Grade

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to compare the composition writing skills and helping behaviors of first grade students from different age groups. A mixed design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Study groups were determined by purposeful sampling. There was no statistical difference between the younger and older students in terms of composition writing points. The mean values of the students in the old age group are higher than the students in the young age group in terms of sentence, word, simple and compound sentence and textual features. The results indicated no difference in students' helping expressions between the age groups. Different development areas (like cognitive and psycho- motor) effect on writing skills can be searched.

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the primary school age was brought forward one year in accordance with changes in the Turkish Primary Education Law; children reaching the age of 66 months, instead of 72 months, at the end of December started school from the year of 2012-2013 (Ministry of Education, MEB, 2012). Some parents have registered their children at this early age whereas others have obtained medical reports excusing them from registering their children for primary school. This change has caused much public debate; critics of the law believe that children of 66 months are not ready to learn reading and writing (Eğitim Sen, 2012; Türk Eğitim Sen, 2012; Turkish Medical Association, 2012; Middle East University, 2012).

Children can be taught reading and writing at an early age; teaching of handwriting begins during pre-school

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education in practice, for example, in England and France (Sassoon, 2005; Vinter & Chartrel, 2010). Güneş (2007) states that the development of children is fast until the age of 6 and consequently this period can be more effective during which to teach reading and writing; there are examples of this in the Northern European countries. Readiness of the child is an important factor to consider in relation to his or her starting school. As an example physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of the child must be taken into consideration even though the student is ready to begin school. Readiness signifies a maturity level that allows the child to benefit from the organized education programmes and is based on talents and gained skills (Akyol, 2006). Readiness is an important factor affecting the child's reading and writing performances (Yangın, 2009). Children coming to school with the rich experience of reading – writing are successful in learning to read and write (Çelenk, 2003). The things the child gains from the moment he/she starts living prepare him/her for reading and writing (Akyol, 2006; Çelenk, 2003). Besides reading and writing skills, readiness explains developments in areas such as mind-language development as well as socio-emotional development. Writing is an important skill in the repertoire of the school age child (Schenk, 1991). The art of writing is complicated and difficult although it seems simple and easy after it has been fully learnt. The child frequently completes only half of this task even though he/she devotes eight years of his/her school life to writing (Taylor, 2010, 20). Writing is learnt in the forms of writing by copying from the board or the paper, or from dictation and by composition. The teaching of writing begins at pre-school and first grade by copying letters. After a while, dictation exercises are added to copying in the first grade. Composition studies are guided by simple questions directing them what to write when the students at the first grade gained some command of writing. In this study, composing task was guided by a few questions. The student carries out several mental operations at the same time, such as planning what he/she will write, writing a word correctly and structuring a sentence during the composing task (Graham, Struck, Santoro & Berninger, 2006). Various evaluation tools were developed to evaluate the writing. Every approach has its advantages and limitations. Global-holistic and analytical evaluation tools are subjective and simple to put into practice in the class technically as they are reachable and cheap. But coherency and validity of subjective evaluation tools are limited (Rosenblum, Weiss & Parush, 2003). Generally developed evaluating techniques can be classified as holistic evaluating systems and true/false measuring techniques (Graham, 1986). Even though it is essentially subjective, holistic evaluation that the teachers have to use to evaluate is an approach that is generally considered the most effective and valid in assessing writing skills. This approach has five dimensions, as follows: clearness; support; organizing; mechanics; and evaluating the wholeness of the writing (Miller, 1995). There are also studies evaluating in terms of the factors of external structure (format, spelling and punctuation), language and expression (vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs and expression), organization (title, introduction, story and conclusion) (Beyreli & Ari, 2009). Social development refers to the individual's relationships with other people that he/she has developed from birth to adulthood to encompass all of the behaviors that he/she has developed towards them and takes an interest in. To become a member of the society that he/she lives in and to comprehend and learn that he/she is a part of the society is his/her socializing. An individual's socialization describes and reflects his/her feelings totally, and serves as a bridge between the external world and him/herself, to enable the individual to become a person with his/her own identity. The development of various attitudes and behaviors in the individual is a product of social development. Personal characteristics develop under the effect of social environment and this continues throughout the life time. Social development involves individuals establishing good relations with people in society and performing agreeable behaviors in their social life. Social skills are essential to enable individuals to establish good relations with others whilst obeying social rules, taking responsibility, helping others and using his/her rights. The acquisition of social skills enable an individual to become a member of the society he/she lives in, his/her comprehending that he/she is a part of the society and fulfilling social responsibilities. Introducing social skills for students, to reinforce them and to transfer these skills into practice in different environments takes place among the important functions of primary education (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2006). When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that comparative studies of students' writing products in two different age groups are not found. There was much public debate regarding whether children younger than 71 months have the attributes to enable them to begin to learn reading and writing skills. Consequently, the aim of this study is to compare the writing products of the younger group of first grade students (under 71 months) with those of the older group of first grade students (over 71 months) in terms of composition writing skills and helping expressions in composition. In this context:

1. Is there a meaningful difference between the two groups of students' points of composition skills?

2. What are the similarities and differences in the writing products of the two groups of students in terms of grammatical and textual features?
3. What are the students' helping expressions about the given text?

2. Method

2.1. Model

The study is of a mixed design because quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously. The research was designed to investigate the composition writing skills and helping behaviours of the students in the younger group aged between 66 and 71 months (Group 1) and the older group aged between 81-89 months (Group 2) comparatively.

2.2. Study groups

This study was carried out at one of the schools in the city center of Burdur. This school was chosen because the two different groups of students (the one from 67 to 78 and the other one from 81 to 89) were in different classes while they were mixed in other schools. Study groups were selected by a purposeful sampling technique as classes formed (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). In choosing the groups, the teachers' gender (both male); professional experience (both teachers' professional experience comprised more than 20 years); the period of their being the first grade teachers (more than 5 years); and their willingness to participate in the research were asked for. Regarding the two groups of children, the older group (81-89 months) consisted of 10 girls and 12 boys. There were 13 girls and 7 boys in the younger group (67-78 months) (Table 1).

Table 1. The demographic features of the participants in the groups

Groups	N	Gender	Birt Dates		
			2005 (81-89 months)	2006 (67-78 months)	2007
Older Group 1	22	Girl 10	12	22	-
Young Group 2	20	13	7	-	19

2.3. Developing the means of data collection, the scale of data analysis and evaluating form

A "Worksheet of Writing Skills" was used as the means of data collection in the research. The worksheet was prepared in the form of explanatory writing and provided opportunities for the students to display their emotions and thoughts in a given case. The following sentences appeared at the top of the worksheet, "*You see your friend fall from a bicycle while you are riding your bicycles together. How do you feel and what do you do?*" The students were asked (verbally) to write for five minutes on the worksheet about their feelings and actions. The Holistic Writing Scale (HWS) developed by Miller (1995) was used to evaluate the writing. The scale consists of clearness, support, organized and mechanical dimensions; each dimension contained four levels, the first three of which describe the student's skills concerning producing text directly and the other level describes skills related to form. The HWS was assessed by examining the coherence between the grades given for each student by two researchers, independently. Coherence was tested using the Spearman correlation coefficient (r) because the measure points of the groups did not represent normalcy (Shapiro-Wilks tests in order Group 1 = 0,939 $df=42$, $p<0,05$ and Group 2 = 0,948, $df=42$, $p>0,05$) (Büyükoztürk, 2007). The grade for each student was determined by getting arithmetic average of two raters depending on that correlation coefficient between judge grades on writing skills were positive and high ($r=.84$). A "Writing Evaluation Form", developed by the researchers with the help of two researchers who are linguists, was used to examine the writing grammatically and textually. The numbers of sentences and words, and sentence types were determined grammatically. Homogeneity in word level and consistency between sentences were determined textually.

2.4. Analysis of data

The groups' writing grades were analyzed by Mann Whitney U-Test that is one of the non-parametric tests. The features of the students' writing were examined in a descriptive way according to two themes; grammatical and textual. Codes were obtained from examining the students' writing. The descriptive statistics of frequency and arithmetic average were used to compare students' writing in terms of grammar. Examining helping expressions contained in the students' writing formed another dimension of the study. In this context, content analysis was used to analyze the writings. Content analysis revealed the sub-themes of emotion, thought and behavior under the general helping theme. Theme and codes are described in the Findings section, below.

3. Findings

3.1. The differences between the children's writing skills in two age groups

Firstly, analysis results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis results of composition writing skill grades

Groups	N	Mean	SD
Older Group 1	22	10,96	3,33
Young Group 2	20	10,48	3,19

It may be seen in Table 2 that the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of two groups' composition writing skill grades are similar. It can be concluded that both groups' grades approximate each other. Even though the arithmetic average values are near to each other, in the previous stage, the Mann Whitney U- test was applied to assess the significance of the difference between the group grades. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The result of U-test analysis for the significant difference between the grades of writing skills

Groups	n	Mean rank	Sum of Mean	U	p
Older Group 1	22	22,25	489,50	203,500	-,417
Young Group 2	20	20,68	413,50		

In Table 3, it is seen that there is no statistical difference between the writing skill grades of the groups of students ($U = 203, 500, p > 0,05$). In fact, when the range averages are considered, it is observed that the values are near to one another even though the range average of the students in the older age group (22,25) is larger than the range average of the younger students. Accordingly, it can be said that there is no effect of age statistically between the groups in terms of students' writing skills.

The next stage of the study involved examining the students' writing products in terms of grammatical, textual and helping themes.

3.2. Examining the similarities and differences in writing products in terms of grammar and textual

Another aspect that was examined in students' writing is grammatical and textual features. The writing was scrutinized for sentences, words and sentence types under the grammatical theme, and for homogeneity in the level of words and the consistency of codes between sentences within the textual features theme. The results of the

analysis of the descriptive statistics related to the students' writing are represented in terms of the themes and codes in Table 4.

Table 4. The analysis of the students' writings in different age groups in terms of grammatical and textual features

	N		Sentence		Word		Sentence Types				Textual Features			
							Simple		Composite		Homogeneity (In terms of word)		Consistency	
Groups	F	f	\bar{X}	f	\bar{X}	f	\bar{X}	f	\bar{X}	f	\bar{X}	F	\bar{X}	
Group 1	22	71	3,22	249	11,31	49	2,22	22	1,00	12/22	0,45	2/22	0,91	
Group 2	20	56	2,80	190	10,00	29	1,45	17	0,85	15/20	0,25	3/20	0,77	

While the arithmetic average of the students' sentence numbers in Group 1 is 3,22, the arithmetic average of the students in Group 2 is 2,80. The arithmetic average of the words in Group 1 is 11,31 and 10,00 in Group 2. While the simple sentence average from sentence types is 2,22 per capita in Group 1, this average is 1,45 in Group 2. The average of compound sentences in Group 1 is 1 and the average in Group 2 is 0,85 (Table 4).

The average related to homogeneity in word level from textual features is 0,45 in Group 1 and 0,25 in Group 2. When it is examined in terms of consistency feature, it is 0,91 in Group 1 and 0,77 in Group 2 (Table 4). Even though the numerical findings represent an idea, further examination of the grammatical and textual features seen in the students' writing was needed. In this context, the examination was actualized as sentence types under grammatical themes and textual features.

Sentence types: It is seen that the older group students' average is higher than the younger students in terms of the numbers of simple and compound sentences used. Examples of simple sentences written by the older students are presented as follows:

"Annesine götürürüm. Onu kaldırırım(.) bisikletide kaldırırım./I would take him to his mother. I would make him stand up(.) I would remove bicycle, too" (Student 1).

"Üzüldüm (,) çok üzüldüm/ onun yanına giderdim./I felt sad (,) I felt too sad/I go to near him." (Student 2).

"His mother had no Bandaid" (Student 3).

"I make him stand up/ I help him/I feel sad." (Student 7).

"Then I would bandage his foot with a piece of cloth" (Student 8).

"I feel myself very sad." (Student 12).

From the younger group the following examples can be given:

"I feel sad" (Student 2).

"I feel very sad/ I help my friend." (Student 5).

"I made my friend stand up immediately." (Student 12).

"I felt sad and went near him." (Student 20).

Some examples of sentences are given below, written by students who appear to be able to write compound sentences. From the older group:

"If my friend fell from his bicycle, I would help him." (Student 4).

"I go near to my friend immediately I make him stand up and then sit somewhere and call his mother." (Student 6).

"I would say what happened, my friend." (Student 8).

"... come to the house, rest awhile." (Student 12).

"I would take him to his house to help him." (Student 16).

"When my friend went too fast I was scared very much when he fell." (Student 22).

From the younger group such examples can be given:

"I say ride carefully another time." (Student 3).

"I call wait for me my friend/ when my friend falls I ask are you ok, my friend?" (Student 9).

"When my friend falls from his bicycle I make him stand up. I think my friend is hurt. I ask my friend which part hurts." (Student 13)

"I say does your head hurt?" (Student 19),

Textual features: In this part, the homogeneity of students' writing is examined in terms of word base and consistency between words in sentences. As seen in Table 4, while 10 older students from 22 used the homogeneity feature on word level (12 students did not use this), only 5 students in the younger group used it (15 students did not use it). This can be seen in the following sentences:

"Ona yardım ederim. Annesine götürürüm(iyelik eki)/ I help him. I would take him to his mother/ (with possessive suffix)" (Student 1).

"Onun yanına giderdim(iyelik eki)/ I would go near him/ (possessive suffix)" (Student 2).

"Koşarak yardım ederim üzülürüm yardım ederim (ona-gizli zamir, yardım etmek-tekrar)/I run and help feel sad I help him/ (Him- secret pronoun, to help- repetition)" (Student 11).

"Bir şeyin var mı derim (zamir, iyelik eki)/ I say is there anything wrong." (Student 20).

It is observed that the students established homogeneity out of pronouns, possessive suffixes and the "to help" word group.

The younger students' sentences can be given as examples:

"...arkadaşım bir şeyin var mı. diye sorarım yardım ederim. Bisikletini kaldırırm.(zamir, iyelik ekleri, (-n ve -i)/ I ask my friend, is there anything wrong with you, I help. I make his bicycle stand up (pronoun, possessive suffix : my and his)" (Student 2).

"Evegilmesine nardım ederis (iyelik eki: s)"We help him to go home (possessive suffix: s)" (Student 3).

"Arkadaşımı tedavi ederim. Onu hastaneye götürürüm (ilişkili sözcükler: tedavi-hastane)/ I cure my friend. I take him to the hospital. (related words: cure and hospital)" (Student 7).

"Arkadaşımın acı çektiğini düşünürüm. Arkadaşım neresini acıdığını sorarım. (aynı sözcük kullanımı)/ I think my friend hurts. I ask my friend which part hurts. / usage of the same word: hurts and hurts)" (Student 13).

As seen in the sentences, it is understood that the students of younger group established homogeneity out of pronouns, possessive suffixes, related words and repetition of the words in a similar way to the students of older group.

When we analyzed the consistency between the sentences it was seen that, while almost the whole of the sentences of the older group (2/22) have consistency, most of the younger group like the older group (3/20) have used this feature. For example, it is obvious from the underlined sentences that there is no relationship between the sentences of only two students from the older group; it appears that they cannot establish that connection. For example, the ninth student wrote

"I feel sad I get help from the adults or my friend. When his mother comes telephone" (and he has not completed his sentence).

The thirteenth student wrote *"He can break his arm and leg. His head can be cracked. His chin can be broken our leg can be broken. Our hands can be broken. Our waist can be broken. I call his mother"* and tells the story himself instead of his friend.

From the young group, the first student tells the story of himself instead of his friend by writing

"I rode but I never fell. I always ride a bicycle."

The seventh student could not establish a relationship between the sentences in terms of time, writing *"I make my friend stand up I say ride carefully next time. I cure my friend. I take him to the hospital. I get sorry for my friend and make him stand up."*

The thirty eighth student left the last sentence uncompleted by writing *"I make my friend stand up immediately. Then if he hurt I took home."* It is seen that they cannot establish a relationship between sentences.

3.3. Outstanding helping expressions in students' writing

This part of the study attempted to identify what themes would emerge when the students wrote about how they would help their friend. When the students' thoughts about the given text were examined in terms of content, it was seen that the helping theme is reached and this theme divided into the sub-themes of emotion, thought and behavior. When the codes were examined in terms of the two different age groups, it was seen that both groups gave similar reactions in general similarly expressing features such as being sad, informing the parents, taking the friend home, making him stand up and asking how he is. The codes determined for the general helping themes are as follows: I take him to his house/mother (n=23), I ask how he is (did you hurt, are you ok, is there anything wrong with you?) (n=22), I get sad (n=20), I help (n=18), I make him stand up from the place he has fallen (n=17), I call his mother (n=8), I call my teacher (n=2), I make the bicycle stand up (n=4), I go near him (n=5), I comfort him (n=2), I give band-aid (n=1), I plaster band-aid (n=3), I bandage his foot (n=2), I cure him (n=2), I take him to the hospital (n=1), I call ambulance (n=1), I say ride carefully next time (n=1), I think he suffers (n=1), I tell him not to move (n=1), I get scared (n=1), I think of taking him to home (n=1). The codes determined when the emotion sub-theme is examined: I felt sad (n=20), I get scared (n=1), the codes determined for thought sub-theme: I think he suffers (n=1) I tell him to ride carefully next time (n=1), I tell him not to move (n=1), I think of taking him to home (n=1). The codes determined for behavior sub-theme: I help (n=18), I take him to his home/mother (n=23), I call his mother (n=8), I call his teacher (n=2), I make him stand up from the place he has fallen (n=17), I make the bicycle stand up (n=4), I go near him (n=5), (2), I give band-aid (n=1), I plaster band-aid (n=3), I clothe his foot (n=2), I cure him (n= 2), I take him to the hospital (n=1), I call ambulance (n=1), I ask how he is (Did you hurt, are you ok, is there anything wrong with you?) (n=22), I comfort him. When the themes are examined, it is seen that the codes the students repeat the most about helping are "I take him to his home/mother, I ask how he is (did you hurt, are you ok, is there anything wrong with you?), I get sad, I help, I make him stand up from the place he has fallen, I call his mother".

Sample expressions of the helping theme are represented above;

- I would take him to his house to help him. Or I would tell him to wait there. After that I would bring band-aid from the house and plaster it on the wounded part.* (16th of Older Gr, Girl, birthdate 2005)
- I ask whether anywhere hurts. Then I make my friend stand up. The emotion I feel would be a bad one.* (19th of Older Gr, Girl, birthdate 2005).
- I ask whether he has anything. I feel very sad. I call ambulance.* (20th of Older Gr, Boy, birthdate 2005)
- I would get sad, very sad. I would go near him. I would get sad too much. I would tell him not to cry anymore.* (1st of Younger Gr, Girl, birthdate 2005).
- I cry to my friend to wait for me. I ask whether my friend is ok when he falls. Then I take him to his house.* (9th of Younger Gr, Girl, birthdate 2006).
- I make my friend stand up. I tell him to ride more carefully next time. I cure my friend. I take him to the hospital. I get sad for my friend and I make him stand up.* (7th of Younger Gr, Boy, birthdate 2006)
- I get sad and I go near him. I help my friend. I make his bicycle stand up.* (20th of Younger Gr, Girl, birthdate 2006).
- I help him, get sad, call his mother.* (12th of Younger Gr, Girl, birthdate 2006).

4. Discussion

Following a change in the starting age of primary education, studies have focused on whether or not children of 66 months are ready to start first grade education. A literature review has been conducted of studies based on the thoughts of teachers and candidate teachers (Başar, 2013; Kartal, 2013; Öztürk & Uysal, 2013). The experiences of students who start the first grade early is an important subject. The purpose of this research is to compare the writing composition skills and the level of written helping expressions between younger children (between 67-78 months) and older children (between 81-89 months). This study has found no statistically significant difference between the

younger and older students in terms of composition writing grades. Arithmetic average values of the older students were seen to be higher than those of the younger students in terms of sentence, word, simple and compound sentences and textual features. It was noted that the older students' average was higher than the younger students in terms of usage of simple and compound sentences. Beside this, the older age group used more of the homogeneity feature on word level than the younger group. It is not possible to say that there was a meaningful difference between the two groups as a result of the analysis of composition, grammar and textual features. In this study we focused on whether or not the age variable affects the writing skills. Further study is required using different research designs that search effects of other developmental areas such as the cognitive and psycho- motor development areas on students writing skills. When the students' thoughts about the given text in terms of context were examined, it was seen that the 'helping' theme was present; this theme was divided into the sub-themes of emotion, thought and behavior. Helping expressions involving emotion, thought and behavior were used by both age groups; it was observed that only one student did not use any helping expression about the given text and wrote irrelevant material. There appeared to be no difference in the students' helping expressions between the age groups. This finding of no difference may be explained by the observation that the students lived within the same culture and in an environment where social learning was encouraged. A socialized individual is likely to present appropriate behaviors according to the norms and expectations of the society he lives in, and can create a balance between his own needs and wishes, and society's wishes and expectations. He can manage to help the people that he lives with, sharing and pulling together, and can express his feelings in a way appropriate to the culture he lives in. If, however, individuals cannot complete their social development or if they have insufficient social development, their future social behaviors may be negatively affected. At least, the probability of these individuals encountering social and emotional problems in the future is increased (Çubukçu, & Gültekin, 2006).

Several suggestions can be made based on the results of the helping behavior aspect of the study. The helping expressions of the two age groups in the study were similar, it may be researched for understanding the reasons of this similarity. The students used words expressing emotion and behavior in helping expressions focusing on only one emotion (sadness); this observation may be useful to make studies of understanding different emotions.

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