

TEACHERS ' OPINIONS ABOUT VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION READINESS LEVELS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Encapsulating characteristics an individual possesses case of a new learning situation; readiness is an integral part of the education process. Readiness levels of students must be quite high in order to ensure effective and permanent education. In this study aiming to assess readiness levels of students at middle school age regarding visual arts education, we tried to once again emphasize on the fact that visual arts education during pre-school and primary school periods, which are the most important in terms of a child's development, should be given by teachers who are experts in their fields. In this study, our goal was to assess readiness levels of students at middle school age regarding visual arts education. Based on this goal, 16 visual arts permanent teachers from 15 different middle schools located in Niğde city center were contacted and given a form to fill out. We arrived at the results using the data gathered. The study is a situation assessment, a qualitative research method. For research data assessment, we used the descriptive analysis method in which data gathered are summarized and interpreted based on predetermined themes. The study concludes that psychological readiness level of students was high; however, their cognitive readiness levels were low. A significant contributor to this conclusion was the fact that teachers who teach visual arts classes at primary schools were from other disciplines and did not have proper training in terms of visual arts education. The study suggests that all but mainly primary school visual arts classes should be taught by educators from the visual arts discipline, also class hours of visual arts education at middle school should be increased, and high school preparation tests should include questions from this discipline.

Key Words: Readiness, Visual Arts Education, Middle School

INTRODUCTION

Readiness is an important element of the education process. Readiness involves all characteristics an individual already possesses in case of a new learning situation. Individual's age, development, maturity level, attitudes, motivation, and health condition are influencing factors in new learning environments. Readiness means an individual being ready to exhibit a certain attitude as a result of maturation and learning. An individual must have past experiences required by a subject in order to learn about that subject or experience at desired level. Readiness of a child at middle school age is affected by his/her attitude and motivation as much as his/her age and development. For example; a child learning about the diving activity should be at a maturity that allows him/her to learn details of diving and relevant tools, be ready to learn, and possess basic knowledge and skills required for diving. Trying to teach a child an experience which he/she is not ready to learn may cause negative attitudes which leave a permanent mark. In summary, readiness can be defined as possessing maturity and basic experiences necessary to learn teaching duties at a certain level (https://bilgiyelpazesi.com/egitim_ogretim).

Ertürk (1998:91) defines the concept of readiness as all characteristics an individual brings to the education market. One of the student qualities that are important in terms of determining learning levels of students is cognitive entry attitude, in other words their past experiences which are deemed to be necessary to learn a learning unit of units (Özçelik, 1998: 11). Readiness level of a student is a crucial input for learning-teaching system. In addition, the learning at school model Bloom (1979) also emphasizes on the role of a student's readiness on his/her learning.

According to Tuna and Kaçar (2005), being cognitively ready involves possessing skills required for that learning in addition to attitudes that are required for new learning. This input is more important in areas where learning is interconnected. Art is a powerful tool to develop an individual's creative skills and elevate their humanitarian qualities. (Kavcar, 1999: 2). Art training is helpful in uncovering an individual's talents and skills, it also makes it easier for him/her to understand abstract concepts, understand relationships between objects, and think in a fluid and original manner. It allows him/her to have new experiences while transferring his/her opinions into matter. According to Aşılığlu (2012), art develops his/her emotional side along with his/her mental capabilities. Having strong imagery, separating this imagery in order to think in terms of artistic values such as color, shape, pattern, form, and space and problem solving towards qualified results is a mental practice (Aypek Arslan, 2010: 1081).

Developing artistic conscience during childhood increases the importance and necessity of visual arts classes in primary school period. Individuals who find out about the newest forms of art at early ages develop tolerance to contemporary arts and have easier time arriving at correct aesthetic considerations (Sam, 1997 quot. Kurtuluş, 2000). Arts training is an area which must be handled systematically in order to increase awareness within cultural structure of the society, plays an important role in early discovery of talents, stipulates provision

of special opportunities when required, is able to respond to capabilities and needs, and requires development of various teaching methods based on perception speed (Avşar, Soğancı, 2011:349). Thus, it must be taught at the earliest age possible by teachers trained at such field.

Visual arts education, an arts education class, is not taught by educators from that discipline at middle schools but by class teachers during primary education, which is the most important part of education. Increasing visual arts class hours, which is one hour at middle school is still a matter of debate as a collective request of visual arts teachers and students. On the other hand, in primary schools in which these classes are 2 hours, classes are taught by class teachers rather than educators from the field, which brings forth another discussion.

As Elike (1991) stated; visual arts and painting classes during pre-school and primary school, which are the most important periods in a child's development, must be taught by teachers expert in this field. However, many studies show that arts education classes taught to class teachers in education faculties fail to bring them to a level of competency which would allow them to grasp the visual arts class program and teach this class as intended. Teachers lack practical application at universities, they also lack motivation. This is why in Turkey the general consensus is that quality of class teachers fail to reach a sufficient level, which has always been a matter of discussion. The best education program that can be implemented in an education institution would not be able to reach its intended goal, even with all necessary tools and all manners of opportunities are provided, unless all these characteristics are provided to a well-trained arts educator. Particularly, trying to determine readiness level of teachers taught art classes by teachers from other disciplines, more interestingly who have not even graduated from class teacher departments, who have not received arts training and even graduated from department virtually unrelated to this training due to a gap caused by government policies of that time and somehow became teachers is another reason why we have conducted this research and tried to give a scientific meaning to this subject.

Teachers play a big role in determining readiness levels of students at middle school age regarding arts education. Kırıçoğlu (1995) describes teachers as "individuals who have the greatest responsibility in terms of raising individuals that make up the society" and said that individual, social, and cultural aspects of this responsibility is more crucial when it comes to having an active role in artistic and cultural development of individuals who make up the society and this due to the fact that a teacher contributes to cultural life with his/her artistic personality and transfer his/her artistic knowledge and experience to others.

As research findings of Aşılıoğlu (2012) indicate, arts education in primary school is a subject worth investigating. According to Yetkin (1968:129), if we want to fully train our children who will be overtaking our tomorrow, it would be beneficial to balance development of objective reasoning with development of sensitivity, imagination, and personal life; as beneath science and arts lies creativity, ensuring that children and youth benefits from both forces would be beneficial. Ascension can only be possible by flapping both wings. In this context, we need to focus on arts education as well as science and social sciences.

METHOD

Goal and Importance of the Study

The goal of the study was to assess sufficiency of visual arts class readiness levels of students who receive visual arts education at middle school. Study data were comprised of data gathered from interview forms filled out by 16 visual arts permanent teachers teaching at a total of 15 different public middle schools in Niğde city center. In the study, we provided interview forms which include open ended questions such as “What do you think about readiness levels of your students receiving visual arts education at middle school and adequateness of visual arts classes they receive at primary school?” and study conclusions are based on data gathered from these interview forms.

The study is quite important in that it sheds light on deficiencies caused by the fact that visual arts classes at primary school are taught by class teachers rather than educators from that field.

The study's problem

The problem of the study is what are the teacher's views on the level of visual arts education course readiness of Secondary School students?

Study Model

The study is a situation assessment, a qualitative research method. Situation assessment is an empirical research method (1) which works within real life frame (contents) of a current fact, (2) in which lines between the fact and its context is not apparent, (3) which is used when multiple evidence or data source is present.

The descriptive analysis method was used in evaluation study data. According to this approach, data gathered are summarized and interpreted based on pre-determined themes. Data can be organized according to themes set forth by study questions or be presented by taking questions or dimensions used during interview and observation processes into consideration. In descriptive analysis, direct quotations are frequently used in order to reflect opinions of interviewed or observed individuals in a striking manner. The goal of such analyses is to provide results to readers in an organized and interpreted manner (Yıldırım, Şimşek, 2003, p.153).

Data Gathering Tools

Study data were gathered by interviewing 16 visual arts permanent teachers working at 15 different middle schools in Niğde city center by the end of the 2018-2019 academic year. We have contacted all middle schools in Niğde city center and submitted our interview form containing 2 questions and data gathered were evaluated by the researcher by using a qualitative research method called “Descriptive Analysis Technique.”

Study Group

Personal information of visual arts teachers were kept secret in the study; teachers opinions were listed from 1 to 16 as T1, T2, T3,..., T16 and results were listed based on this coding.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

Results obtained at the end of the study under question titles “Were readiness levels of your students receiving visual arts education at middle school adequate?” “Were visual arts classes taught at primary school by class teachers adequate?” are evaluated and presented below.

In the study, the most important result obtained based on observations of visual arts teachers was that students love visual arts classes and are quite enthusiastic, they are curious and willing to use painting tools, painting, and learning new information, particularly different techniques. On the other hand, they are quite behind in terms of technical and practical knowledge they have to learn at primary school.

The education program used in visual arts education contains many theoretical and practical knowledge which primary school students may like and should learn while these programs are limited only by class teachers’ knowledge of visual arts education. Some idealist and curious class teachers conduct their own research in order to provide better education, while the majority tries to make do using their own knowledge. What is worse is that most class teachers see visual arts class as an unnecessary class, the fact that they use these class hours as study hours in order to focus more on other classes prevent discovery of talented students particularly during initial years of education and result in graduation of students into middle school with lack of information. T2 remarks about the situation by saying “We sometimes see middle school students who have received zero visual arts education or who have painted similar pictures using similar paints, got tired or painting the same subjects, or have not learned any technique. Especially students who got tired of painting the same pictures are really curious about different materials and different techniques, other than that they do not like painting with ordinary paints. This attitude of class teacher causes them to lose interest in the class and the field during a time in which education is the most important and their talents can be discovered.”

The most important finding of the study was that the collective opinion of majority of visual arts teachers is that having class teachers attend to the class rather than teachers of that field and class teachers’ lack of competency in terms of visual arts education results in them failing to put necessary emphasis on visual arts classes which results in classes not being taught according to the education program and students arriving at middle school with lack of information and competency. Other findings were that primary school education fails to provide expected performance despite class hours at primary school is being twice as much as class hours at middle school, and class teachers use hours reserved for visual arts education for other classes they deem to be more important which results in the class failing to reach its goal.

Regarding this issue, T15 says “*Having branch teachers teach visual arts classes at primary schools has been a source of discussion for a while. In my opinion, it is important to start music education of a talented child between the ages 6-10, in addition having branch teachers teach visual arts classes at these ages are important in terms of basic training (colors, composition, creating a product) and discovering talented students earlier.*”

T12 says *“High volume of main classes at primary school has resulted in classes other than visual arts gain importance. My observation is that the majority of students coming from primary education have not gained the visual arts experience they had to gain during primary school.”*

On this issue, T10 says *“I think great emphasis should be put on our class at first level. We can see examples from Europe; if an apt student is directed at first level, he/she would be much interested and successful at second level.”*

T8 says *“I would not say that visual arts classes are taught at first level. I can see it in my own child; in primary school they teach mathematics and science during visual arts classes. His primary school teachers do not have the knowledge and training required for visual arts classes and they don’t give due consideration. Students attend to their first visual arts class at 5th grade.”* T9 says *“Almost all primary school students go to middle school without drawing a line.”* T7 says *“Primary schools don’t teach drawing. Therefore their readiness levels are quite low. Children come to us without touching paints.”* T5 does not agree with her colleagues, she says *“We can’t expect every student to be at the same level. They have varying readiness levels based on their interest, eagerness, and skills”* and puts emphasis in differences between readiness levels of students. T2 also does not agree with her colleagues, she says *“Students catch their breath after academic classes and uncover their talents, so interest on visual arts class is at sufficient level.”* T11 says *“In general, middle school students have the readiness level required for visual arts education. They have the skills required to understand and apply their education but they come from primary school without learning many basic knowledge such as basic skills, color knowledge, technical knowledge etc. Just like having an illiterate child write an essay, unfortunately we have to teach from scratch if they don’t have the foundation. We are having difficulties completing the curriculum in 1 class hour, which is regarded as insufficient, while having to deal with students without necessary training and this makes education harder.”*

T3 says *“We do not approve using rulers during painting class but expect students to at least know how to use a ruler, hold scissors, cut paper properly using scissors, and able to use pencils to draw any type of line easily. However, we see students coming to middle school without learning such basic skills during 2 class hours. Their teachers have this perception on visual arts classes as “as good as it gets.” Failure to teach students during primary school which is the most important period of a student’s education also causes students and parents to think that this class is unnecessary or unimportant.”*

Lack of any question related to visual arts education in high school entrance exams causes the administration and parents to not take this class seriously. Parents think that spending time on a class from which no questions are included in the exam as a waste of time, they can even complain that this class makes them waste time rather than studying other classes. Parents are not even aware of many benefits such as aesthetic perception which is a requirement for visual arts education. They only care about high level of success in high school entrance exams and lack of material requirements. In addition, they do not expect success from a class

on which they do not wish to spend any time. Certain parents are aware that this class requires talent which not all students possess, but also think that students should get high grades from this class if their other grades are high.

In a study on determining readiness levels of class teacher candidates in terms of arts classes, Yolcu (2009) found that readiness levels of class teachers is not adequate on this subject. Findings of this study support the conclusion stated above.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Findings of this study indicate that majority middle school students have quite high psychological readiness levels. Still, it is apparent that majority of students fail to learn the experiences that should be taught in primary school. An important reason why is that visual arts classes are taught by class teachers without proper training rather than branch teachers.

First years of education that coincide with pre-school and primary school periods are the most important. This period is also important in terms of discovering, directing, and training talented students. The data gathered show that visual arts classes taught two hours per week in primary education is not taken serious by most class teachers and they fail to reach the goals of visual arts education programs. Current programs are not run as they are intended, class teachers spend these classes as studying hours for classes they deem more important, this attitude create the perception in students' minds that visual arts education is not important. The result is lack of material supplies by parent that do not care about the class and unfinished application studies.

Another conclusion of the study is that lack of any question in high school preparation exams about this class causes readiness levels to drop significantly, particularly during 7th and 8th grades.

Having only one hour, crowded classes, and all except 3 schools not having a fully equipped application environment makes running visual arts education programs in middle schools very difficult. Running current programs in such environments and completing them on time becomes quite difficult, and makes the work of teachers who are trying to teach basic information very difficult while lowering their motivation. This prevents or delays running the education program in line with its purpose.

Our suggestions to results of this study on visual arts class readiness levels of middle school students are as below.

A significant reason for these results was the fact that visual arts classes are taught by class teachers with no proper training on this branch. Having teachers trained at visual arts classes teach students during primary school would raise readiness levels of students.

Including visual arts questions into high school preparation exams would increase students' readiness levels with regards to this class.

Visual arts classes, which are one hour per week during middle school, would increase students' readiness level with regards to this class.

Visual arts classes should be taught in fully equipped workshops rather than unsuitable classes with missing equipment, which would increase students' readiness level with regards to this class.

In addition, providing on-site training to increase motivation of teachers teaching visual arts classes would also be beneficial.

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