

The Effect of Assertiveness Psychoeducation Program on Increasing the Assertiveness of University Students

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Abstract. This study examined whether or not the psychoeducation program, which was revised by field experts for university students with low assertiveness level, increased participants' assertiveness. The study was designed using pretest, posttest and follow-up test. In order to compare the effect of the program, the study employed the experimental model in which a control group was formed. The study group consisted of a total of 16 students who were attending a university's vocational school in Central Anatolia during the academic year of 2017-2018. There were eight students in the experimental group, and eight in the control group. The participants were selected on a volunteer basis. Developed by Voltan-Acar and Öğretmen (2007) to measure the assertiveness levels of university students, Voltan-Acar Assertiveness Inventory was used to collect the study data. The difference between the assertiveness levels of the participants in the experimental and control group was examined. Mann-Whitney U-test was used for different groups to analyze the differences between groups. Wilcoxon signed ranks test was employed to analyze the change within the same group. At the end of the study, there was a significant increase in the assertiveness levels of the participants in the psychoeducation program. This training will contribute to theoretical and practical studies and to field experts in the field of assertiveness and social skills acquisition. It will also encourage future studies on assertiveness.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Psychoeducation, Social Skill.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In interpersonal communication, assertiveness refers to a communication in which each individual is equal. In addition, assertiveness includes mutual worthiness and respect. Hence, individuals can behave with a sense of mutual trust and sincerity (Güdek, 2014). Assertiveness is the quality of not looking down on other individuals, knowing that others also have rights and being personally equipped so that a person protects what he or she owns (Voltan-Acar, Arıcıoğlu, Gültekin, & Gençtanırım, 2008). This quality makes the individual feel safe in social environments. The existence of trust, one of the basic needs, provides psychological relief. Assertive behavior is about expressing and controlling needs, demands, and intellectual and emotional characteristics without covering them up. It is also the type of behavior where we express our awareness of the other person's perspective while we address our own needs and desires. Existence of individuals with assertive qualities is a solution for the problem of not being understood, one of the greatest barriers in communication. Doing away with these barriers minimizes social breaks and contributes to the elimination of negative consequences caused by conflicts (Hartley, 1999).

Assertiveness, as a skill, is a behavioral characteristic that improves the quality of social life because assertive people's communication skills are more advanced than people who are not assertive enough (Karahan, 2005). Effective communication is minimizing the problems faced. The most important part of being socially effective is to have traits such as being able to express himself or herself, being self-confident, being accepted by others and being approved by others in social domain (Özabacı, 2006). These traits can only be attained by being assertive. The individual needs to have assertive traits in order to exist in society. Assertiveness refers to the individual being useful to both himself or herself and to the people he or she is in contact with (Voltan-Acar et al., 2008) and the individual's awareness of his or her rights and the rights of other people and his or her ability to reflect this awareness to daily life (Ateş, 2013). Assertiveness is the common point between passiveness and aggressiveness (Voltan-Acar, 2004). Assertiveness involves being able to seek one's rights without being angry and without pulling back due to frustration. It is about knowing the truth and realizing these truths. Assertive behavior is a characteristics affecting both the satisfaction of the individual with his or her life and quality of his or her relationships with others (Pamuk, 2013). Assertiveness can be defined as the body of caring behaviors towards others in addition to caring about oneself. It can be described as having the ideal individual characteristics in terms of self-realization. It follows from this that assertiveness can contribute to the individual's enjoyment of life and to the individual developing good relationship with his or her environment (Tan, 2006). In addition, assertiveness is reported as a social skill that can be learned and developed. Therefore, social environment and support from the social environment is very important for individual development (Bishop, 2013). In this respect, it is necessary to give trainings and to be a good model. Assertiveness, defined as the personality characteristic of the ideal person, is also a part of being virtuous. Since this trait can be defined as a value, social structure is very important. While we maintain

our social relationships in the social environment we live in, we may encounter situations that do not always work well during our communication with others. Many people might have difficulty talking to someone they just met. Even if they want to, they might not keep the social balance to the extent that they want to. While expressing themselves and while trying to establish a successful communication with their social environments, they might feel internal and external frustration, and this feeling of frustration might have negative effects on their lives. As social skills, these are disadvantaged situations. If we respect the opinions and rights of other individuals, and express our own rights and opinions without violating their rights, this is an indication of our social skills (Kılınç, 2011). According to the group data from trainings provided by researchers such as Rathus (1973), Huey and Rank (1984), Mays (1996), Arı (1989), Deniz (1997), Yatağan (2005), Uğürol (2010), Keser (2013), Seçer, Akbaba and Ay (2014), the education provided by these researchers were effective in developing assertive behaviors in individuals.

Assertiveness enables individuals to follow a more active way to develop better social relationships and to solve problems. Furthermore, individuals who solve their problems more effectively need less psychological help (Akeren, 2017). Individuals with good psychological health are the basis of social productivity and dynamism because being mentally healthy means being adaptable. An adaptable individual is optimistic towards the future, has plans and hopes for the future (Geçtan, 1978). He or she has a positive relationship with the people around him or her in a mutually satisfying way. This individual fulfills its social duties by getting on with others and by adapting (Adasal, 1977). It follows from this that being socially skillful (adaptive to the society) means being assertive at the same time. For this reason, social skill acquisition is important to have an assertive personality.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to test the effect of the psychoeducation program on university students' assertiveness. In the study, the accuracy of the following hypotheses was tested.

1. Psychoeducation program is effective in increasing the assertiveness of students in the experimental group.
2. There will be no significant change in the assertiveness levels of the students in the control group.
3. There is no significant difference between the post-test and follow-up-test scores of the experimental group.

2. METHOD

Study Design

The study employed experimental design. Pretest, posttest and follow-up test were administered, and a control group was used to compare with the group who got the

psychoeducation training program. This design is a combination of random design and remeasurement design (Karasar, 1998). The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of psychoeducation program on the assertiveness levels of vocational school students. In the study, the psychoeducation program was the independent variable, and the students' scores from the Assertiveness Inventory was the dependent variable.

Study Group

16 students out of 118 students studying at a university in Central Anatolia during the academic year of 2017-2018 participated in the study. There were eight students in the experimental group, and eight in the control group. Volunteerism was taken as the basis for the selection of the students. The participants were selected on a volunteer basis.

Procedure

Prior to the implementation of the psychoeducation program, 118 students who were first- and second-year students at the Vocational School were administered the Assertiveness Inventory and informed about the content of the study. The students who wanted to participate in the psychoeducation program were written down. Amongst these names, an experimental and a control group was formed by random sampling. Planned for one hour a week, the psychoeducation program was executed regularly by the researcher to the experimental group for 10 weeks. Those in the control group were not subjected to any training. At the end of the psychoeducation program, participants in both the experimental and control group were administered the Assertiveness Inventory as post-test. The same inventory was administered to both groups as a follow-up test 75 days after the psychoeducation program was completed. The data analysis started after the follow-up test

Data Collection Tools

Voltan-Acar Assertiveness Inventory: Developed by Voltan-Acar and Öğretmen (2007), Voltan-Acar Assertiveness inventory measures the assertiveness of university students. In the inventory, there are 17 items for passiveness, and 11 for assertiveness. The inventory consists of 28 items. It is a six-point Likert type measurement tool. The score obtained from this measurement tool ranges between 28 and 168. The high score obtained from the inventory indicates high assertiveness level. The internal consistency coefficient of the inventory was 0.83 for the passiveness dimension, 0.78 for the assertiveness dimension, and 0.87 for the total inventory. Conducting the study with a sample of 35 people for the test-retest technique while developing this measurement tool was reported as one of the inventory's limitations. For this reason, reexamining the reliability of the test-retest technique by administering the inventory to a larger sample was recommended. Therefore, at a later date, reliability of the inventory was reexamined by using the test-retest technique with a new sample consisting of 113 people. According to the results of this analysis, test-retest reliability was 0.78, a value close to the previous results. This measurement tool showed that aggressiveness and assertiveness were two different concepts. Developed to determine assertiveness levels of individuals, this inventory was found to be a valid and reliable measurement tool

(Voltan-Acar & Öğretmen, 2007). In the present study, the internal consistency coefficient of the inventory was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha method and found to be 0.83.

Program Development

Behavioral-cognitive techniques were predominantly included in the psychoeducation program. The concept of assertiveness was explained, and the participants were made active by assigning them homework after sessions. The related literature revealed that psychoeducation programs were functional in increasing individuals' assertiveness levels. The content of the social skills training program, which was prepared by Parmaksız (2017) to overcome shyness, was examined by three field experts. This program was revised in light of the program contents used by researchers who conducted studies on the positive effects of social skills education programs on assertiveness levels (Deniz, 1997; Karahan, 2005; Yatağan, 2005; Uğürol, 2010; Uz-Baş, 2010; Özbulak, et al., 2011; Keser, 2013; Seçer, Akbaba, & Ay, 2014). Active participation in the sessions was aimed. Techniques requiring active participation were preferred for the sessions to be more lively. The session contents were formed by approaches such as knowing oneself, comprehending the feeling of expressing oneself, making sense of sociality, recognizing automatic thoughts and focusing on now and here. Participation activities were carried out to make the effect of the objectives permanent and to ensure practicality. These were reinforced with homework.

Data Analysis

In order to determine the effect of the psychoeducation program on the participants' assertiveness levels, two equal groups were determined by comparing the Assertiveness Inventory pretest data obtained from the experimental and control group. Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test were used to test the main hypotheses of the study ($N < 30$). All of the data analyzes were done with SPSS statistics software (version 22.0).

3. FINDINGS

The findings obtained from the analyzes revealed that the study hypotheses were proven correct. Indeed, the psychoeducation program was effective in increasing the assertiveness of the students in the experimental group and there was no significant change in the assertiveness levels of the students in the control group. In addition, there was no significant difference between the post- and follow-up tests of the group that was given the training. The findings are presented in the following tables.

Table 1

Assertiveness Inventory Pretest, Posttest and Follow-up Test Results of the Experimental and Control Group

Rank Number	Experimental Group			Control Group		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Follow-up Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Follow-up Test
1	65	137	150	62	68	66
2	81	135	119	79	79	79
3	74	117	114	63	65	67
4	60	109	135	79	75	70
5	104	129	105	90	66	69
6	75	124	113	74	57	73
7	58	135	115	87	68	65
8	77	121	120	70	73	67

The table presents the change in Assertiveness Inventory scores of all the participants from the experimental and control group in terms of pretest, posttest and follow-up test.

Table 2

Mann-Whitney U Test Results of the Assertiveness Inventory Pretest Scores of the Experimental and Control Group

Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of	u	Z	p
Experimental	8	7,94	63,50	27,50	-,473	,645
Control Group	8	9,06	72,50			

z: -,473 p >.05

Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference between the groups at the .05 level in terms of pretest, posttest and follow-up test results of the experimental and control group. According to these data, there was no significant difference between the experimental and control group.

Table 3

Assertiveness Inventory Pretest and Posttest Mean and Standard Deviation Values of the Experimental and Control Group

Groups	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Follow-up Test	
		X	Sd	X	Sd	X	Sd
Experimental Group	8	74,25	14,59	125,87	9,93	121,37	14,37
Control Group	8	75,50	10,26	68,87	6,79	69,50	4,59

The assertiveness mean score of the experimental group was 74.25 before the program. After the psychoeducation program, it rose up to 125.87 and became 121.37 with the follow-up test. On the other hand, control group's assertiveness pretest mean score was

75,50, the post-test mean score was 68,87 and the follow-up test score was 69,50. The assertiveness mean score increased due to the training given to the experimental group, whereas the mean score of the control group, which was not subject to any training by the researcher, did not change significantly.

Table 4

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the Assertiveness Inventory Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group

Pre-Test Post-Test	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	p
Negative Ranks	0	,00	,00		
Positive Ranks	8	4,50	36,00	-2,524 ^b	,012
Ties	0				
Total	8				

$z: -2,524^b p < .05$

As shown in the table, it was determined that there was a significant difference at the .05 level between Assertiveness Inventory pretest and posttest results of the experimental group. The program given to the experimental group led to a significant change in assertiveness scores. Therefore, the program can be considered having a functional structure on the participants' assertiveness.

Table 5

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the Assertiveness Inventory Follow-up and Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group

Post-Test Follow-up Test	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	p
Negative Ranks	6	4,00	24,00		
Positive Ranks	2	6,00	12,00	-,840 ^b	,401
Ties	0				
Total	8				

$z: -,840^b p > .05$

As shown in the Table 5, no significant difference was found at 0.5 level between Assertiveness Inventory posttest and follow-up test results. When the results of monitoring test are evaluated, it is seen that the effect of the program given to the experimental group still continued. Therefore, psychoeducation programs can be considered having a lasting or long-term effect on the participants' assertiveness.

Table 6

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the Assertiveness Inventory Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control Group

Pre-Test Post-Test	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	p
Negative Ranks	4	5,25	21,00		
Positive Ranks	3	2,33	7,00	-1,183 ^b	,237
Ties	1				
Total	8				

z: -1,183^b p > .05

The results provided in the table revealed that there was no significant difference at the .05 level between Assertiveness Inventory posttest and follow-up test results of the group that was not given the psychoeducation training. The lack of difference in score means can be associated with the fact that the control group was not given any training.

Table 7

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the Assertiveness Inventory Posttest and Follow-Up Test Scores of the Control Group

Post-Test Follow-Up	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	p
Negative Ranks	4	4,00	16,00		
Positive Ranks	3	4,00	12,00	-,339 ^b	,734
Ties	1				
Total	8				

z: -,339^b p > .05

The results provided in the table revealed that there was no significant difference at the .05 level between Assertiveness Inventory posttest and follow-up test results of the group that was not given the psychoeducation training. The lack of difference in score means can be associated with the fact that the control group was not given any training.

Table 8

Mann-Whitney U Test Results of the Assertiveness Inventory Posttest Scores of the Experimental and Control Group

Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	u	Z	p
Experimental Group	8	12,50	100,00			
Control Group	8	4,50	36,00	,0	-3,366	,001

z: -3,366 p < .05

Table 8 shows the Assertiveness Inventory posttest results of the experimental and control group. The results revealed that there was a significant difference in posttest scores at .05 level between the group that was given the training and the group that was not subject to any training. The source of this difference was the education provided to the experimental group. The literature on assertiveness argues that assertiveness is a skill that can be learned and developed. Table 8 is in parallel with this argument.

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of the assertiveness psychoeducation program on the assertiveness of university students. Whether psychoeducation program had led to a significant difference between assertiveness levels of the participants in the experimental and control group. There should be no significant difference between experimental and control group characteristics in order to examine the effect of experimental application. If there is no significant difference between these groups before the application, it can be said that the difference between the two groups' post-test results is because of the effect of the application. In this study, first, whether there was a significant difference in pretest results between the experimental and control group. After the comparison, no significant difference was found in the pretest results of both groups. This data indicates that both groups were equal to each other according to the Assertiveness Inventory scores. The equivalence of the groups before the implementation was ensured in this way. After the training, statistical analysis of the data obtained from the application was done. As a result of the statistical data analysis, assertiveness levels of the students attending the training differed significantly and positively compared to the results of the control group. The Assertiveness Inventory was administered again 75 days after the psychoeducation in order to monitor the increase in the experimental group's assertiveness level. The posttest and follow-up test results of the experimental group were compared, and no significant difference between the results was found. The result can be interpreted as the continuation of the program's effect on the group that that the effect of education is still continuing in the group receiving education.

The study data showed that the psychoeducation program was effective in increasing the assertiveness level of the students in the experimental group. This result is in parallel with the previous studies that were conducted to increase assertiveness (Rathus, 1973; Morgan, & Leung, 1980; Voltan, 1980; Topukçu, 1982; Arı, 1989; Deniz, 1997; Karahan, 2005; Yatağan, 2005; Uğürol, 2010; Uz-Baş, 2010; Özbülak et al., 2011; Keser, 2013; Seçer, Akbaba, & Ay, 2014). These studies put forth that psychoeducation was effective in increasing assertiveness. It was also determined that the trainings aimed at increasing assertiveness were effective on people from different age groups (Uz-Baş, 2017).

Showing parallelism with the present study, the aforementioned studies and other related literature argued that assertiveness is a skill that can be improved (Bishop,

2013). As a result, it can be said that psychoeducation program is an effective method to increase the assertiveness of the students who are given training. When the literature is examined, it is determined that in most of the experimental applications, the participants' assertiveness levels were positively affected, and their awareness increased. Considering the results of the present study as well as other applications and survey-type studies, it was determined that assertiveness was a learnable, teachable and improvable quality.

Based on the study findings, it was seen that psychoeducation programs were effective. The principle of preventiveness is considered the main method in modern guidance approach. Therefore, it is important to provide the necessary psychoeducation services to the students on the issues they need by the guidance counselors at education levels before university. The content of this training program can be changed as needed. Assertiveness is a personality trait that can be considered as a prerequisite for acquiring many different social skills. For this reason, in order to have assertive individuals, psychoeducation studies can be conducted to increase the awareness of the university students, employees and administrators. In addition, it may be an appropriate approach to extend the duration of psychoeducation according to the individual or group in need of education.

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