



## The Effect of Peace Education Program on The Seven -Grade Student's Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills \*

Esmail Sadri Damirchi <sup>1</sup>, Filiz Bilge <sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effect of Peace Education Program (PEP) on the conflict resolution and communication skills of seventh grade students. Pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design has been used in this research and 70 students were randomly chosen and were placed in experimental and control groups. PEP, involving 12 session was implemented in one academic semester for experimental group. Before and after training, Scale of Determine the Conflict Resolution Behaviors and Scale of Communication Skills have been applied for two groups. Also, three month after the teaching of PEP, follow-up measurement was administered. Data analysis was achieved through Covariance statistical test and showed that PEP training had been effective on the conflict resolution and communication skills of students.

### Keywords

Peace  
Peace education program  
Conflict resolution  
Communication skills

### Article Info

Received: 12.04.2013  
Accepted: 10.24.2014  
Online Published: 11.10.2014

DOI: 10.15390/EB.2014.2983

### Introduction

In the modern world, advances and changes experienced in social, political, and economic domains have not been effective in diminishing the unwanted behaviors displayed by individuals in the society. Although primary education seems to be successful in a systematic sense, increasing violence in society and behaviors that students demonstrate both in and out of school such as temper tantrums, intolerance, violence trends, and attempts to resolve problems with violent methods and insults prove that individuals can not be sufficiently furnished with expected positive behaviors. This underpins the need for creating a peace culture based on education. Schools are undoubtedly the starting point for this and can help make this change through peace education (Demir, 2011).

Peace education was born out of peace studies with different subfields like "global security, human rights education and environmental education" (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009). UNICEF defines peace education as the promotion of "knowledge, skills, attitudes and values" to create behavioral change in children, young people, and grown-ups, in order to prevent overt as well as structural conflict and violence. Peace education allows individuals to peacefully solve conflict and to help create peaceful conditions at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or global levels" (Fountain, 1999; United Nations, 1998).

\* This paper was taken from doctoral thesis with same title.

<sup>1</sup> Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Department of Psychology, Iran, [araz.sadri@gmail.com](mailto:araz.sadri@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Hacettepe University, Department of Educational Sciences, Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Turkey, [fibilge@gmail.com](mailto:fibilge@gmail.com)

Peace education must address the prevention and resolution of all forms of conflict and violence, whether overt or structural, from the interpersonal level to the societal and global level (Fountain, 1999). Also, peace education is most effective when the skills of peace and conflict resolution are learned actively and are modeled by the school environment in which they are taught (Baldo & Furniss, 1998). It is suggested that since peace is so important, it is advisable to start introducing it to our children through the study of peace education in our schools. Peace education is a right of all children, not only those living in situations of armed conflict. It is a long-term process that can take place in any learning environment.

Over the years, different approaches to peace education have been adopted. Both discourses and practices conclude in divergent views over which contents and methods in peace education to prioritize (Haavelsrud & Stenberg, 2012). Some focus more on conflict resolution skills while other on non-violent skills, communication skills and promoting peaceful attitudes. Schools are social sites where violence is witnessed in different forms. However, it negatively affects the learning and teaching culture (Zulu et al., 2004). The aim of peace education is to remove negative feelings by creating a forum for people to come together and allow them to know, trust, and cooperate with each other, and thus coexist (Agarwal, 2011).

Peace education includes education on international relations, human rights, developmental psychology, the environment and conflict resolution. Non violence and peace building are so strong that they empower individuals and give them solidarity (Robertson, Dale & Novelli, 2007). Peace education consists of different components and skills. The most important of these components are conflict resolution and communication skills (Klemp, 2000), which play a complex role in people's lives and are experienced at the personal as well as social level. Sociologists state that conflicts are essential for social change to take place, and some social theorists, like Dahrendorf (as cited by Harris & Morrison, 2003), believe "that conflict resolution is a myth because social conflicts are inherent in the very nature of social organization and structure". However, peace educators focus on the value as well as risks of conflict and aim to increase the communication skills.

Conflict is also considered to be an opportunity for growth and problem-solving and its origins can be analyzed at individual and societal level (Morrison, Austad & Cota, 2011). Similarly, the ability to effectively communicate with other people is an important skill. People who communicate effectively know how to interact with others flexibly, skillfully, and responsibly, but without sacrificing their own needs and integrity (Richard, 2002). Abilities related to communication skills include listening and speaking behavior which makes it possible to effectively share facts and feelings, that is, listening to understand, speaking to be understood, and using neutral utterances instead of "emotionally charged statements" (Bodine & Crawford, 1999). In peace education, the ability to communicate with others and to resolve conflicts effectively are two of the most important life skills for individuals to develop because it allows them to become more equipped for success both in life and personal relationships. Effective conflict resolution and communication skills can be learned through education.

Several studies have addressed the effect of PEP on conflict resolution and communication skills. Danesh (2006) found that the implementation of a PEP was effective on the student's culture of peace, cultural optimism and Danesh and Clarke-Habibi (2008), state that enrolling students in a PEP helps them to solve their social problems and conflicts creatively. Shapiro et al. (2002), show that teaching a PEP decreased aggressive behavior of students and demonstrated that there was significant improvement in their conflict resolution skills. Maxwell et al. (2004), in a study of 'the development and evaluation of a South African peace education program at pre-school level' also obtained strong evidence that a PEP decreased aggressive behavior among the children of the target population. The results also indicated that the teacher development course for PEP was well received by the teachers and helped them develop in different areas. The study also showed that peace education can have a considerable positive impact in a country that is recovering from years of political and social violence.

Sertel et al. (2004) found that teaching a PEP had a significant effect on conflict resolution in interpersonal relations and communication skills. Sagkal (2011), too, shows that the teaching of PEP has an effect on the student's aggressive tendencies, empathy levels and views of peace. As well as most studies show that the implementation of a PEP can be effective on the communication and problem solving skills, anger management, decision-making and use of the constructive conflict resolution techniques of students (Harris, 2003; Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003; Martin et al. 2002; Mutluoglu & Serin, 2012; Palmer & Roessler, 2001; Stevahn, 2004; Tapan, 2006). It is also reported to promote positive feelings and thoughts about peace (Kadivar, 2007; Spears, 2004).

Since bullying and youth violence is a prevalent problem in many schools, including conflict resolution and peace education programs in the school curriculum may be a direct way to solve this issue. However, constructively resolving conflict is mostly not included in the early years of the public school's curriculum (Anyon, 1979; Apple, 1979; Ehman, 1980; Malott & Porfilio, 2011; McNeil, 1986; Ndura-Ouédraogo & Amster, 2009). Yet, evidence suggests that the problem of youth violence and bullying can be mitigated by offering conflict resolution and peace education programs. The focus of this study is to gain a holistic understanding of students' views on what they learned from participating and teaching in a peace education program. The study was based upon the principles of moral inclusion and also contributes to a substantial amount of especially quantitative data regarding the actual effects and impacts of PEP.

### *Purpose of The Study*

While conflicts are an inevitable part of social relations, the response to conflict can be either destructive or constructive (Deutsch, 1993). Conflict in schools in its destructive form of bullying and violence, fomented by prejudices among diverse groups, is a fact of life that students face daily. Bombarded with modern media everywhere they look, children see numerous acts of violence. The problem is that young people can see violence and bullying as a normative conflict resolution strategy. Therefore, there is an urgent need for alternative education programs such as peace education, and not only for students, but for all other strata of society as well. This study aims to generate knowledge and to add new information to the current research about peace education processes. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to examine the effects of a PEP on the conflict resolution and communication skills of secondary school seventh-grade students.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

A pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design was used in this study. The study group of this research was secondary school students in the seventh grade (2013-2014 academic year) of a public secondary school located on the Çankaya district in Ankara, Turkey from middle socio-economic class. Four seventh grade classes (n=70) were randomly selected. The students in the four classes that joined the study were divided into two groups. The experimental group (n=35) was subjected to treatment, that is, they received PEP; the control group (n=35) did not receive PEP. All students in the experimental group participated in the program, regardless of their initial attitudes toward participation. They all obtained school consent to participate in this program as part of their extracurricular school activities.

**Table 1.** Demographic Distribution of Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	Number of Students	Femal	Male
Experimental Group	35	20	15
Control Group	35	19	16
Total	70	39	31

### **Materials**

In this study, in order to gather the required data, the Scale to Determine Conflict Resolution Behaviors and the Scale of Communication Skills were administered to both groups to examine the effectiveness of the experimental treatment. These instruments were chosen as they are the most widely used scales and appropriate for this age group. They are reliable, prepared according to the culture of the target population and recommended by experts in the field.

*Scale to Determine the Conflict Resolution Behaviors:* This scale was developed by Koruklu (1998) and is a self-rating scale, the completion of which takes approximately 20 minutes. The scale is appropriate for use with children aged 10-15. The scale includes 24 five-point likert-type items. It consists of two sub-scales: Aggressive Behavior and Problem-Solving. In terms of conflict resolution, a high score on the aggressive sub-scale has a negative meaning. Conversely, a high score on the problem-solving sub-scale has a positive meanings. The scale includes separate questions for each sub-scale and the sub-scale scores are calculated independently. The reliability coefficient were calculated for each sub-scale: Aggression sub-scale .85 and conflict resolution sub-scale to be .83. Also, content validity was calculated by expert opinions and construct validity was calculated by factor analysis to be over .40.

*Scale of Communication Skills:* This scale was developed by Ersanlı and Balcı (1998) and revised by Karatekin et al. (2012) for 6th, 7th and 8th grade secondary school students. The scale has three dimensions (Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral) and measures the communication skills from cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects. It consists of 34 five-point likert-type items. The total scores are calculated for the communication skill a whole and for the separate dimensions. The reliability coefficient was calculated to be .88. The content validity was calculated by expert opinions.

### **Procedure and PEP Context**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a developed PEP on secondary school seventh-grade students' conflict resolution and communication skills. Therefore, a PEP was prepared, implemented and tested. The program was prepared by the researcher under the supervision of five professors in educational science especially in the field of conflict resolution and peace education. It was designed based on other programs used in Turkey and abroad, such as the WINPACE, the peace education program of the Bogazici University Peace Education Center, the UNICEF peace education programs, Harvard University Peace Education Program, and Peace Schools Peace Cerculia.

Then, the 12 session PEP (one-hour session per week) was implemented in one academic semester in the experimental group. In each session, first, previous assignments and homework were shared and questions discussed by volunteers. Then new information was given to the class about the new activity. After the activity, a new homework was given to the students and the session ended. No treatment was provided to the classes in the control group. Before and after the experimental treatment, the Scale to Determine Conflict Resolution Behaviors and Scale of Communication Skills were administered to the experimental and control groups as pre-test and post-test. The participants answered the research questionnaire one week before the first session (pre-test) and one week after the last session (post-test). In addition, three months after completion of the PEP, both scales were administered again to both groups as a follow up to examine the stability effect of the PEP. The participants' anonymity was ensured. In order to equate groups in pre-test, data analysis was achieved through Covariance statistical test (ANCOVA). For analysis of quantitative data, the SPSS was used.

PEP sessions were as follows: 1) Introduction, aim and content of the program, class regulations; 2) Information on peace, awareness of internal and external factors hindering and supporting peace; 3) Expressing feelings, its importance and use in daily life; 4) Awareness of different values and individual prejudices, empathy, understanding another; 5) Understanding and respecting individual differences; 6) Understanding stereotypes, empathizing with groups subject to stereotyping; 7) Information on conflict, its reasons, and levels; 8) Understanding negotiation, its methods and use; 9) Understanding communication and barriers to communication; 10) Understanding the concept of perception and its role in conflict; 11) Definition of effective listening, how to achieve it, "I language" versus "you language", and adopting I language and 12) Program evaluation and end.

## Results

The main aim of the present study was to examine the impact of a PEP on the student's conflict resolution and communication skills. To facilitate understanding of the results of this study, the research question of this study was divided under two hypotheses.

First hypothesis: Training in the peace education program will enhance conflict resolution skills in seventh-grade students. To test this hypothesis, comparison of group means and standard deviations on the pre-test and post-test were employed. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The Pre-test and Post-test Results in The Aggression and Problem Solving Sub-scales of Scale of Determine the Conflict Resolution Behaviors

Variables	Groups	Pre-test			Post-test		
		n	$\bar{X}$	ss	n	$\bar{X}$	ss
Aggression Sub-scale	Control	35	39.77	11.45	35	40.03	10.89
	Experiment	35	37.91	9.92	35	29.51	8.87
Problem Solving Sub-scale	Control	35	40.09	7.85	35	40.49	8.51
	Experiment	35	39.17	10.87	35	40.29	8.80

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between the experimental and control group in the two sub-scales of conflict resolution behaviors (aggression and problem-solving) in the pre-test. However, it shows that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the two sub-scales of conflict resolution behaviors (aggression and problem-solving) in the post-test ( $p < .005$ ). The mean difference is higher for the experimental group for the aggression sub-scale ( $\bar{X} = 29.51$ ) and problem solving sub-scale ( $\bar{X} = 49.29$ ). Thus, these results show that participation in the PEP enhances conflict resolution skills in the seventh-grade school students in the experimental group. In addition to this finding, three months after completion of the PEP, a follow-up measurement was administered. The results show that three months after the teaching of the PEP, there also was a significant difference between the experimental and control group, and the positive impact of the PEP on conflict resolution was stable (for the aggression sub-scale:  $\bar{X} = 30.55$  and for the problem-solving sub-scale:  $\bar{X} = 47.52$ ).

**Table 3.** Data Covariance Analysis for Aggression and Problem Solving Sub-scales of Scale of Determine the Conflict Resolution Behaviors

Sub-Scales	Source	Type III sum of Sm.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.	$\eta^2$
Aggression Sub-scale	Pre-test	780.66	1	780.66	8.82*	.004	.11
	Group	1711.23	1	1711.23	19.34*	.000	.22
	Error	5927.05	67	88.46			
Problem Solving Sub-scale	Pre-test	338.73	1	338.73	4.71*	.033	.06
	Group	1418.90	1	1418.90	19.75*	.000	.22
	Error	4813.15	67	71.83			

\*  $p < .05$

As shown in Table 3, after completion of the PEP, the average of the aggression levels of the experimental group in the post-test were significantly lower than that of the control group for this sub-scale ( $F_{1-67} = 19.34$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In addition, the average of the problem solving skill levels in the experimental group in the post-test was significantly higher than that of the control group for this sub-scale ( $F_{1-67} = 19.75$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This finding suggests that participation in the PEP enhanced conflict resolution skills in the experimental group. Participants learned to understand the make-up of conflicts that can both contribute to and have at their root miscommunication. Conflict is seen as an opportunity for growth and for problem-solving.

*The second hypothesis:* Participation in the peace education program will enhance communication skills in seventh-grade students. To test this hypothesis, a comparison of group means and standard deviations on the pre-test and post-test were used. The results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** The Pre-test and Post-test Results in The Communication Skills Scale and Three Sub-Dimensions

Variables	Groups	Pre-test			Post-test		
		n	$\bar{X}$	S	n	$\bar{X}$	S
Communication skills	Control	35	99.29	22.27	35	95.43	21.21
	Experiment	35	103.77	14.81	35	131.37	14.83
Cognitive sub-dimension	Control	35	33.71	8.89	35	33.74	8.28
	Experiment	35	35.34	6.86	35	46.91	6.44
Behavioral sub-dimension	Control	35	35.37	8.3	35	34.29	8.27
	Experiment	35	38.20	5.91	35	47.80	6.07
Emotional sub-dimension	Control	35	30.06	6.45	35	27.46	6.46
	Experiment	35	30.51	5.07	35	36.66	5.02

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups with respect to scores on the three sub-dimensions (cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions) of communication skills in the pre-test. However, it shows that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control group with respect to the three sub-dimensions levels in communication skills in the post-test ( $p < .005$ ). The mean difference of the scores is higher for the experimental group in communication skills ( $\bar{X} = 131.37$ ). These results show that participation in the PEP enhanced communication skills in the experimental group. The PEP activities reinforced communication skills as well as safety and community building. In addition, a follow-up measurement was administered. The results show that at this stage, too, there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group, and the positive impact of PEP on communication skills was stable ( $\bar{X} = 120.55, 44.29, 41.65, 34.61$ ).

**Table 5.** Data Covariance Analysis for Scale of Communication Skills and Three Sub-Dimensions

Scales	Source	Type III sum of Sm.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.	$\eta^2$
Communication skills	Pre-test	11938.54	1	11938.54	73.76*	.000	.52
	Group	18558.76	1	18558.76	114.66*	.000	.63
	Error	10844.19	67	161.85			
Cognitive sub-dimension	Pre-test	1114.63	1	1114.63	28.43*	.000	.29
	Group	2636.61	1	2636.61	67.25*	.000	.50
	Error	2626.79	67	39.20			
Behavioral sub-dimension	Pre-test	1596.71	1	1596.71	53.97*	.000	.44
	Group	2269.07	1	2269.07	76.70*	.000	.53
	Error	1982.03	67	29.58			
Emotional sub-dimension	Pre-test	689.08	1	689.08	29.11*	.000	.30
	Group	1399.25	1	1399.25	59.13*	.000	.46
	Error	1585.49	67	23.66		.000	

\*  $p < .05$

As shown in Table 5, after completion of the PEP, the experimental group communication skills levels average in the post-test was significantly higher than that of the control group in this scale ( $F_{1,67} = 114.664, p = .000$ ). Similar results were obtained for the cognitive sub-dimension ( $F_{1,67} = 67.25, p = .000$ ), behavioral sub-dimension ( $F_{1,67} = 76.70, p = .000$ ) and emotional sub-dimension ( $F_{1,67} = 59.13, p = .000$ ). This finding suggests that participation in the PEP enhanced communication skills in the seventh-grade students in the experimental group.

## Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

At present the search for peace is considered a prerequisite for development, improved living conditions, and the creation of better foundations for the future generations. In order to establish peace in our domain, this study discusses the effect of peace education and the need to integrate this education into school programs. In this manner, peace education can be provided vigorously, through practical procedures and encouraging pupils to form acceptable habits of tolerance. The main aim of this study was to examine the impact of a peace education program on the conflict resolution and communication skills of seventh grade students. Findings showed that the PEP was effective in enhancing the conflict resolution and communication skills in seventh-grade students.

This discussion is presented under the two main hypotheses: According to the first hypothesis, this study explores whether there is a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of the conflict resolution skills level after participation in the PEP. The results indicate that the first hypothesis is supported; there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group in conflict resolution skills levels after the implementation of the program. Thus, based on these findings, it can be concluded that following a PEP had a significant impact on conflict resolution in seventh-grade students, decreasing their aggression level and increasing their problem solving skills.

Secondly, this study aimed to explore whether there is a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups in the communication skills level after completion of the PEP. The results support the second hypothesis; there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group in communication skills after the implementation of the program. So, it can be concluded that training in the PEP had a significant impact on conflict resolution and communication skills in seventh-grade students. The above findings are consistent with the literature (Danesh, 2006; Danesh & Clarke-Habibi, 2008; Hariss, 2003; Lane et al, 2003; Martin et al. 2002; Maxwell et al, 2004; Mutluoglu & Serin, 2012; Palmer & Roessler, 2001; Sagkal, 2011; Sertel & Kurt, 2004; Stevhan, 2004; Tapan, 2006). The study also revealed the positive feelings and thoughts about peace. The above findings are consistent with the literature (Kadivar, 2007; Maxwell et al, 2004; Spear, 2004).

Finally, it was also found that three months after completion of the PEP, there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group in terms of conflict resolution and communication skills, and the positive impact of PEP on conflict resolution and communication skills was stable. Based on the findings, this study supports the notion that PEP is effective on changing destructive strategies into constructive ones. The above findings are consistent with the literature (Mutluoglu & Serin, 2012; Sagkal, 2011; Sertel & Kurt, 2004; Tapan, 2006). Consequently, this study yields empirical evidence that may support changes in curricula and teacher training such that they address students' conflict resolution and communication skills. It also provides valuable data and insights about peace education, as well as foundational research in the field, that serve as starting points for applying and fully implementing critical education programs for other students, particularly in secondary schools.

It is the responsibility of schools and teachers to be models of peaceful and non-violent behavior to students. Not only should the content of the peace education curriculum deal with global issues and peace-related content to provide learners with the opportunity to consider, understand and appreciate others and to become part of a global civil society, but it should also provide learners with the necessary skills to address problems that may arise. It is hoped that research can inform peace education curricula in order to create a classroom environment that contributes to empowering learners successfully with the necessary resources to create diverse pathways to sustainable peace. In order to achieve this, an obvious starting point is teacher training programs. It has been argued that teacher training programs should not only include content related to peace theory, conflict resolution and peace education, but should also equip teacher trainees with the necessary knowledge and skills to reflect critically on their own learning and that of their future learners. It is hoped that this will encourage teachers not to be

concerned not only with learners' gaining communicative competence, but rather with learners' gaining communicative peace.

The struggle to achieve peace takes place at both the individual and social levels. Primarily peace and conflict resolution programs enable schools to become safe places in which students relate to each other in constructive ways and can learn. Moreover, children, adolescents and young adults are socialized into the behaviors they will need to resolve conflicts constructively for their future lives (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). Developing peace culture has led to a growth in tolerance and acceptance of new practices and values: the words open, open-minded, understand and tolerant were used often to describe how students felt their outlook had changed. The development and implementation of cooperative active curricula might be useful for peace-building as well as creating a peace culture. Educational efforts may be combined with the efforts of researchers and teachers to improve their awareness about what is happening around them and in their own lives (Sadri-Damirchi et al. 2013). In order to better manage efforts and help facilitate more lasting peace, international and regional organisations need to clarify and improve their working principles and prevent disagreements and the lack of coordination that hinder peacemaking. Thus, there is need to introduce the teaching of peace education in schools by school counselor. This will enable adolescents to appreciate the relevance of peace to their lives.

The current study was one of the first attempts to understand the effects of peace education on the conflict resolution and communication skills of Turkish secondary (seventh-grade) students. Results demonstrate that peace education had significant effects on student's conflict resolution and communication skills. The study revealed that peace is a global problem and so important that it requires an integrated approach where counselors, teachers, parents and learners work together.

The concept of peace education, aims of peace education, suggested curriculum content of peace education, modes of inclusion of peace education in the school curriculum and suggested strategies for teaching peace education were discussed. Peace education is distinguished by the fact that it is not limited to activities that take place in schools. A number of PEP have developed after-school programmes and summer programmes with a peace education focus. Findings of this study are considered to be helpful in directing teachers' and others related authorities' attention to peace and conflict resolution education and in designing other studies with broader scopes.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations should be noted in order to provide PEP in schools:

It is recommended that schools educate learners, educators and parents about conflict resolution and effective communication skills. School counselors could conduct awareness seminars and workshops on the above-mentioned forms of PEP. Learners should be taught to tolerate others through teamwork during lessons.

Schools need to fulfill their role in promoting student's conflict resolution and communication skills through academic and training programs. It should be noted that the secondary school period is critical and plays a critical role in acquisition of such skills. Therefore, more research is recommended on the training of skills in secondary schools.

Peace education training program and classes at this age should be included in the regular education courses. Peace education training can be integrated into the academic curriculum or they can be taught separately. If they are given as stand-alone programs, they may lead to frustration and overload for teachers. The integration of such programs into academic courses should be started in our educational programs, as well.

The hope is shared that through education, people can develop certain thoughts and dispositions that will lead to peaceful behavior. Key aspects of this disposition include kindness, critical thinking, and cooperation. Developing such virtues is an important part of peace education.

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