

The Educator's Path to Autonomy: An Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Program in Early Childhood Education

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Introduction

Despite Freud's assertion in 1917 that "none of us is the master of our self", there is a consensus that autonomy is a fundamental human need in modern societies (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Indeed, research indicates that individuals, including children, tend to desire a sense of personal responsibility for their actions and experiences (e.g., Cheon et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Teachers may utilize autonomy-supportive teaching (AST) practices to foster autonomy in their students (Reeve & Cheon, 2021) AST is defined as the instructional effort to identify and nurture students' interests and preferences with the goal of supporting their voluntary involvement in classroom learning activities (Aelterman et al., 2019). While AST practices enhance teachers' levels of job satisfaction, motivation, and need satisfaction (Aelterman et al., 2014; Cheon et al., 2014; Cheon et al., 2018; Cheon et al., 2021), they also elevate students' levels of autonomous motivation, engagement, positive self-concept, prosocial behavior, and need satisfaction (Cheon et al., 2018; Meng & Wang, 2016). As the benefits of AST became increasingly apparent, researchers began designing intervention programs to assist educators in developing their capacity to adopt a more autonomy-supportive practice (Reeve & Cheon, 2016)

Autonomy-Supportive Intervention Programs (ASIP) enhance student support by fostering teachers' belief in the feasibility and ease of implementation of AST (Reeve & Cheon, 2016). Furthermore, by equipping teachers with skills to become more autonomy-supportive, ASIPs provide invaluable educational opportunities for students, teachers, and classes (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of ASIP for teachers at all levels of education (e.g., Aelterman et al., 2014; Cheon et al., 2014; Cheon et al., 2018; Cheon et al., 2021). However, despite the critical period for supporting the autonomy of children being the age of three (Erikson, 1959; Vygotsky, 1998), research on the AST of teachers of three-year-old children is relatively limited. From this point of view, in this study, it is aimed to prepare an autonomy-supported curriculum for teachers of three-year-old children and to evaluate the outputs of this program on teachers and their children. In line with this aim, answers to the following questions will be sought

1. What is the impact of the Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Program for Early Childhood Teachers (ASTECT) on teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and perception of competence at different stages of the program?
2. What are the opinions and experience of early childhood teachers participating in ASTECT regarding autonomy-supportive teaching across different stages of the program?
3. What is the impact of the Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Program for Early Childhood Teachers (ASTECT) on children's autonomy skills and motivation at different stages of the program?

Methodology

In this study, the multi-stage mixed design, which is called one of the advanced mixing methods, will be used. The multi-stage mixed design is commonly used in intervention programs and evaluation research. For the quantitative dimension of the study, the pretest-posttest control group design; It is aimed to use a multi-case study for the qualitative dimension. The sample of the study is planned to be determined by clustering sampling method

Data collection process

After the completion of the pre-test process with teachers and children, it is planned to hold three training workshops with teachers participating in the intervention program. After the workshops, a 40-second short informative video will be shared with the teachers at the beginning of each week during a training period. At the end of the semester, post-test data will be collected from teachers and students. Six months after the end of the intervention, it is planned to collect data from teachers and students as a follow-up study

Related Work:

- Abula et al., (2020): The autonomy support teaching intervention for teachers designed by a randomized control trial lasted 16 weeks. As a result of the program, in which 10 Chinese teachers, physical education teachers and their 258 students participated, the students' autonomous motivation increased
- Reeve et al., (2018): The autonomy support teaching intervention for teachers designed by the randomized control trial lasted 4 weeks. As a result of the study conducted with Korean teachers and their 663 middle school students, it was found that control behavior decreased, and autonomy support increased in teachers.
- Reeve et al., (2018): The autonomy support teaching intervention for teachers designed by the randomized control trial lasted 4 weeks. As a result of the study conducted with Korean teachers and their 663 middle school students, it was found that control behavior decreased, and autonomy support increased in teachers.

Open Questions:

1. What methodologies might be employed to facilitate the collection of data from three-year-olds?
2. I intend to develop the videos that I will use in the intervention program myself through a program that I have previously trained. However, I am concerned that this approach may result in a significant investment of time, potentially detracting from my thesis research. How should I proceed in this regard?
3. What methodology should be employed to evaluate the efficacy of the weekly videos submitted during the intervention period?
4. May I contribute to the dissemination of the work by creating a social media account and sharing the cartoon videos I prepared as part of the study? Moreover, what strategies might be employed to ensure that a greater number of teachers are able to benefit from the work?
5. Despite my best efforts, I was unable to locate a Turkish scale that assesses autonomy in children aged three. In light of this, I am questioning whether it would be more beneficial to collect qualitative data on children's autonomy skills.
6. In my country, there is a dearth of academic expertise on the subject of autonomy in the preschool period. It would be beneficial for me to collaborate with an academic who has conducted research on autonomy in another country for a year before embarking on my thesis. How should I proceed in this regard?

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