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**Abstract**

The aim of the study was to determine the effectiveness of the implemented peer mediation in-service teacher training program. Qualitative method was used to collect data about teacher opinions regarding the effectiveness of the applied 40 hours peer mediation in-service training program. The participants of the study consisted of randomly selected 40 elementary school teachers serving in 10 different elementary schools from five different regions of North Cyprus. The results reveal that teacher peer mediation beliefs together with social and professional developments have positively developed after the implemented peer mediation in-service training program.

**Resumen**

El objetivo del estudio fue determinar la efectividad del programa implementado de mediación entre compañeros en la capacitación de maestros en servicio. Se utilizó el método cualitativo para recopilar datos sobre las opiniones de los docentes sobre la efectividad del programa de capacitación en servicio de mediación entre pares de 40 horas. Los participantes del estudio consistieron en 40 maestros de escuelas primarias seleccionados al azar que prestan servicios en 10 escuelas primarias diferentes de cinco regiones diferentes del norte de Chipre. Los resultados revelan que las creencias de mediación entre pares entre profesores y los desarrollos sociales y profesionales se han desarrollado positivamente después del programa implementado de capacitación en servicio en mediación entre pares.

**Keywords**

In-service training program; Teacher training; Peer mediation

**Palabras clave**

Programa de formación en servicio; Formación docente; Mediación entre iguales.

## 1. Introduction

The rapid changes of social issues in the latest century strikes the need to develop new generations in accordance with the world's latest paradigms. Since the teachers are looked upon as the inventors of the future generations then the burden lies on teachers. Aristotle's words "*roots of education is bitter but the fruit is sweet*" (Castelli, 2018) can clearly define the hard work of teachers in order to accomplish success in educating their students. Teacher development to fulfil and facilitate the requirements of their students can be obtained through in-service trainings. Considering that world has moved from the mind set of industrial world to post-industrial world which has caused a need for patterns of thinking and acting to change as well. Regarding the change present curriculum developed with knowledge and skills are thought to be for the good of the government, society and individuals too. However, instrumentalism has had a great effect on the content of the curriculum like key learning areas. Therefore, in-service training for teachers can be one of the options for increasing their performance and developing contemporary knowledge as well as renewing the existing (Garuba, 2004). Some studies reveal that (Acheampong, 2003; Harris & Sass, 2008; Caena, 2011; Shriki & Lavy, 2012) promoting prospective teachers is a key element in improving primary and secondary education.

Thus, pre-service and in-service trainings are a way to change and develop the needed skills of the teachers regarding the development in their profession to be able to transfer academic knowledge and enhance students' social skills (García Laborda, 2018). Students lack of social skills are seen to end up with classroom disruptions which generally hinder teaching and learning processes in classrooms (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller, & Landry, 2000). Each person has a set of beliefs driven from building meanings. However, meaning making is not only individual it is also collective and the classroom is set up of students with individual and collective set of beliefs. Moving from this fact, schools are places where students can be developed in a constructive way in order to contribute positively to their own society. The need for connectedness instead of separation to co-exist is the main issue for the world we live in today. Students' lack of social and affective skills paves the way to classroom disputes where teachers' generally try to handle these issues with re-active methods like punishments. This kind of discipline method is a big discussion in education settings. There is a wording going around in many settings saying that "*nothing has a right to continue if it is not functional*" which really fits in with the re-active methods for school disputes. However, pro-active methods and skills generally have longer and are seen to be more constructive. Peer mediation programs are a method to accomplish pro-active attitudes, skills and beliefs towards student disputes. The need for school-based preventive programs (Da Silva, Ventura, & Garcia, 2016; Smith, Daunic, Miller, & Robinson, 2002) can be fulfilled by peer mediation programs. These programs not only help students to improve their competencies and attitudes in school; they also empower students to resolve disputes constructively in their future lives (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Selfridge, 2004).

Therefore, mediation skill development not solely enhances students' mediation skills (Shamir & Tzuriel, 2004; Tzuriel & Caspi, 2017) it also facilitates the transfer of mediation strategies. In order to adopt and develop such skills and strategies students' needs to be influenced by their role models. Teachers not only develop their students' knowledge and skills with the academic instruction and practice they also act as role models for them. Students' lack of such role models are likely to make them unable to challenge with the disputes they face and such cases might also affect their future lives in a negative way. In designing new schools and teacher trainings we are in need to consider these issues for the sake of the new generation. Peer mediation is a way to move from the past and walk to future, meaning that students dwell into their disputes solve in a positive way and open a new page for future relationships. Changing is not an easy job, especially in the government schools in implementing a new curriculum or a new subject. Change or re-developed curriculum takes a long time to be accepted and acknowledged by the authorities. Beliefs are fundamental assumptions that govern our set of actions, in other words they interpret how we see the world.

More clearly, beliefs determine the priorities we build in our way of living which turns into our choices. Teacher beliefs are also very strong, rigid and hard to change and something new on

the stage will light the fire. In other words, implementation of peer mediation into schools depends on teachers accepting and believing that it will be beneficial for them as well as for the students. Students' wisdom relies on teachers' way of conveying and explaining how and why they believe in what they believe and clearly explain to the students regarding the role of their beliefs in their daily routines. The importance of education depends mostly on developing beliefs, building values and performing constructive attitudes. Mission statements of the schools interpret their way of beliefs, values and visions for future generations' education. Therefore, success of the implemented peer mediation program is in need of commitment which really depends on teachers, administrators and the other school staff (Bickmore, 2002). Furthermore, teachers' philosophy in negotiating and mediating with skills in accordance with peer mediation within classroom and school are influential and effective (Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008).

Teachers' are the main role models of their students' in the meaning that they inspire, and influence their student to build new skills and reach to their utmost potential (Azer, 2005). In order to expect students to resolve their disputes in a peaceful and constructive way there is a need to change teachers' way of solving misbehaviour and classroom disturbances. Moving from this point, the peer mediation teacher in-service training program was implemented to enhance and empower teachers' knowledge, beliefs and skills towards peer mediation. Empowering students, school administrators and school teachers with peer mediation will develop effective communication and build peaceful educational settings which will lead to community and nationwide change in a positive way (Adiguzel, 2015). The aim of the present study is to determine the effectiveness of the implemented peer mediation in-service teacher training program. More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the changes in teachers' beliefs towards peer mediation after the peer mediation in-service training program?
- 2- What are the teachers' opinions about positive and negative sides of the peer mediation in-service training program?
- 3- What do the teachers think about the effects of scenario and activity based peer mediation training program regarding their profession?

## **2. Methodology**

The present study was undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the implemented peer mediation teacher training program. Qualitative method was used to collect data about teacher opinions regarding the effectiveness of the applied 40 hours peer mediation in-service training program. The participants of the study consisted of randomly selected 40 elementary school teachers serving in 10 different elementary schools from five different regions of North Cyprus. The data was collected by semi structured interview questions and content analysis method was used to analyse the data.

## **3. Procedure**

Peer mediation in-service training program was developed by the researchers. The developed program was based on social constructivism and the activities of the teaching-learning procedure were planned with scenarios for problem solving, cooperative learning and role playing. The 10 module program was applied twice a week which in total ended up with 40 hours training. The data was collected from 40 elementary school teachers after the implementation of 40 hour in-service training via recordings of the responds to semi structured interview questions. Seven questions was prepared for the interviews, however, during the interview session the interviewer forwarded extra questions either to clarify the respond or to enrich the data. The responds were transcribed and coded in relation with the aim of the research by two researchers in isolation.

#### 4. Findings

The findings of the collected data of elementary school teachers after attending 40 hours peer mediation in-service training program are presented under three headlines in-parallel with the sub-aims of the study.

##### 4.1. Changes in teacher beliefs regarding peer mediation

Teacher opinions about the changes in their beliefs towards peer mediation were accepted as an important indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of the implemented peer mediation in-service training program. The findings of the teacher opinions regarding their peer mediation beliefs show teachers' positive development. Teachers are seen to emphasize on becoming aware of injustice, dominant and advisory methods applied by them regarding students' dispute cases. They stressed that they used these methods due to their lack of knowledge about peer mediation. Teachers' way of handling disputes with classic discipline methods are seen to change by giving priority to individual emotions and feelings of their students. Moreover, teachers are seen to reflect on their inner instinct of democracy and justice. Having the opportunity to attend the in-service peer mediation training program their beliefs in handling disputes in a peaceful way is seen to be empowered. Even though, teachers' beliefs were seen to be empowered by the in-service training program, teachers believed that still have a long journey ahead. Some of the related quotations are given below:

*".....I'm trying to change .....yes, yes I'm changing", ".....instead of questioning why/how did it happen? I ask the disputants to express their feelings to each other..... I forward questions like"what are your needs and priorities to solve this dispute?"..... (Recording: T13)*

*"....."I used to believe that students could only be disciplined by the discipline rules....." I became aware of the importance of feelings, needs and individual requests during the in-service training"....." to be honest it will take time to change our beliefs....." (Recording: T 20)*

*".....I believed that I was fair, neutral and democratic.....however, I became aware that I was putting forward my decisions, resolution options and advices during the dispute resolution procedures....."I believe that this is due to my lack of knowledge about peer mediation and the lack of such programs in our education system.....(Recording: T 8)*

##### 4.2. Negative and positive sides of the peer mediation in-service training program

The findings of the collected data about the opinions of teachers positive and negative sides of the implemented peer mediation in-service training program shows that the program was evaluated as positive. The positive and negative parts was looked upon as important due to evaluating the program and re-developing or implementing as a whole. Teachers' opinions revealed that the content of the program and the activities as well as scenarios of the modules was constructive and attracted their interest. Teachers also stressed that the program was beneficial for individual and professional knowledge. Teachers stated that implementing peer mediation into school would affect the school environment in a positive way. In addition, they also stressed that the materials used in the activities were rather cheap and easily obtained because they were the kinds of things found at home and used in daily life like toothpaste and tooth brush in one of the activities. Therefore, the training program would not put a burden on the school budget which seems rather an important issue for the countries with poor budgets. Some important and related positive quotations are presented below. Creativity of the teachers regarding the dispute solutions can be the most desired change of the teachers taking part in this study. Anger control is another positive and important change and positive impact of the in-service training which is an important issue for burnt-out teachers.

*"....."the content of the training, the instruction and the daily life scenarios enabled the sessions to be very interesting and effective"....."especially the design and plan of the opening sessions were very constructive"..... "we all had an opportunity*

*to have a word at every opening to share our experiences about the disputes we faced and relate to our training knowledge”.....” the discussions after each training sessions about the training content was very beneficial”..... (Recording: T 2)*

*.....”the training was not only beneficial for my professional life it was also highly beneficial for my individual development as well”.....”I think that if peer mediation program was implemented in my school it would have an important effect on the school environment”..... (Recording: T 15)*

*.....”according to me the training program was well designed and planned.....”the materials used for the activities were easily accessed and rather cheap things”.....”the effective communication activity materials like tooth paste and tooth brush used with A4 paper can be found in each and every house and students can obtain them very easily with no cost or with very little cost”..... (Recording: T 29)*

*.....”anger control, effective listening and problem solving materials were very basic and easily accessible as well as effective in a way it was related to specific dispute and its resolution”.....” Creativity and value was added on to our individual knowledge”..... (Recording: T 33).*

The negative opinions of the teachers were very important indicator like the positive opinions for the sake of the effectiveness of the in-service training program. The negative findings showed that the teachers wished that they had the opportunity to have peer mediation training at an early age, training program for some teachers serving in schools at distant regions, lack of peer mediation training in schools. This finding is looked upon as an important fact for future trainings in the meaning that teachers are seen to demand more opportunities in this context. A striking finding for the negative part of the training was put forward by participating teachers’, stating that some teachers are likely to have resistance regarding the implementation of the program. Some of the related quotations are as follows:

*.....” the only negative thing is that I wish I had a peer mediation training at an earlier age”..... (Recording: T19)*

*.....” my school is located at a long distance from here.....I had difficulties to come and go to my region”.....”I had to skip my lunch to be able to make it”..... (Recording: T5)*

*.....”I can’t find any negative part to comment on, however, when I think about implementing peer mediation program in my school I think there will be a resistance”.....”I think peer mediation program should be implemented in every school and the lack of such programs is a big lost for our future”.....*

#### **4.3. The effects of the peer mediation scenario and activity based in-service training program regarding teacher profession**

Opinions of the teachers regarding the implemented peer mediation in-service training program in terms of their professional development were important for the study. The opinions of the teachers towards this question aimed to determine the reflection and the degree of the contribution to their profession as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the implemented program on this issue. The analysis of the collected data revealed that teachers’ communication with the students was enhanced and their relation with colleagues was developed to a higher level. Furthermore, findings showed that teachers were in favour of the program to be implemented in their schools because they thought that it would improve teaching-learning processes at a long run resulting with higher academic achievements of the students.

The findings also reveal that teachers pointed to the globalization of the world and mobilization of the individuals referring to the future generation needs of developing peaceful resolution attitudes, beliefs and skills. Teachers also stressed on the effectiveness of the program regarding resolving student-student, student-teacher and teacher-parent disputes where teachers spend too much time on such issues instead of spending on teaching-learning procedures.

The analysis of the collected teacher opinions showed that the realized activities were defined as professional necessity and lifelong learning methods to be used. Teachers' are seen to have benefited from the scenario and activity based in-service training program in the means of communicating with their students and colleagues and were willing to write their own scenarios from the real life dispute cases. Participant teachers' also stated that they were willing and very enthusiastic to apply and practise these scenarios in their classes. Teachers thought that such practises are likely to empower social contribution and enhance social affective skills of their students. This finding is accepted as an important outcome of the training in teachers' perspective of real life situations regarding disputes are mostly valued and accepted as meaningful. Another important finding commenting about positive criticizing manner during the in-service training program was very striking because teachers' usually evaluated criticizing to be negative. Quotations regarding these findings are as follows.

....."if the in-service training was applied as theory by giving the standards and principles it would not have been as effective as being applied with scenarios and activities"....."the real life scenarios and activities related to our profession and concerning general problems we are facing each were highly valued"....."the applied activities and scenario themes concerning effective communication, anger control and effective listening skills gave an opportunity to evaluate our reactions"..... "it also helped us to have awareness on such issues"....."interestingly, I noticed the importance of positive criticism which gave me motivation"..... (Recording: T1)

....."I became aware of the importance of problem solving, looking at disputes from different perspective, being aware that there are different options not only one, self-owned emotions, concentrating on cases not on individuals"..... "in-service training was beneficial"..... (Recording: T33)

....."according to me activities will not only enhance and empower dispute resolutions the in-service generally will develop lifelong skills which can be beneficial for future in daily life"..... (Recording: T3)

....."we engage our students with activities in the teaching- learning processes from now on I will apply peer mediation activities into the content of my lessons at suitable parts"..... (Recording: T23)

....."this program should be implemented" ..... "highly beneficial"....."interesting"....."especially the role plays and the activities were effective"....."it was highly beneficial"..... (Recording: T6)

## 5. Conclusion and discussion

The analysed opinions regarding teacher beliefs are seen to change after the implemented in-service peer mediation training in a way that applying strict methods and discipline rules and regulations in dispute incidents are dropped and effective communication, tolerance and empathy are adopted in parallel with the result that teachers lack of training makes the teachers act with indifference to problematic cases in schools (Irrirate et al., 2010). This gives a message that beliefs are refined and changes according individual experiences. Teachers usually copy or go after their idols like their former teachers in their student life or their colleagues in their professional life. Therefore, it is important to develop beliefs towards team work and pass it on to other stake holders in such programs like peer mediation. Generally, teachers are not aware of the strategies and methods that can be applied to prevent disputes turning worse (Stacy, 1996). Thus, teachers starting to put the learnt knowledge into practice reflect the positive development and effectiveness of the program. Personal change and change of others are possible with teachers facilitation (Ibarrola-García & and Iriarte, 2014).

Teachers' change of giving priority to students' feelings, needs and encouraging them to express their own resolution options instead of giving punishment according to the degree of the disputes result indicates that there is a change. Therefore, training is necessary for belief formation in a sense that values and attitudes are developed in a positive way. Since students role for future is very looked upon as important then their set of beliefs and values need to be constructively built up. Moving from this statement, the entire fabric of education relies on the

teachers' professional development with enhancement of contemporary methods and innovative strategies. Student-teacher interactions play a big role on teacher beliefs (Koballa, Graber & Kemp, 2000). However, the result that changing beliefs is not easy can indicate that it will take some time, illustrating Prawat (1992), discusses that beliefs are strong and highly effective. Some studies also underline that teachers acceptance of peer mediation as a legitimate dispute resolution takes nearly 5 years (Cameron & Dupuis, 1991 ; Dowell, 1998) which is in parallel with the results of the present study that implementation of peer mediation program will be more beneficial and affective in the long run.

Teacher opinion about the negative and positive sides of the implemented peer mediation in-service training results show that the program was evaluated as positive which indicates the effectiveness of the developed in-service training program. Teachers evaluated the program as constructive, interesting and beneficial for individual and professional development. Baskan (2001), study results as teachers' in-service trainings enable their personal and professional development reflects the same result. Besides positive opinions rather minor negative opinions derived from the results which the distance of were the venue and questioning why this training was not implemented before which were not actually criticizing the program negatively but complaining about the opportunities. For understanding and fulfilling our potentials as social beings where these results indicate that teachers supported the implementation of the program.

Scenario and activity based peer mediation in-service training results show that the applying peer mediation program into the schools are likely to contribute to students social skills development and reflect to teachers profession which will also contribute to the development of the community in future. Being creative and interactive in trainings are seen to be evaluated as more interesting than solely theoretical knowledge, teachers involvement in scenario writing and taking part in the interactive activities were seen to attract their attention and involvement. The latest century is demanding for changes to accomplish the needs of new era. Students are expected weave their own meanings about their world which will be formed by what they see and hear from their environment. Scenarios about real life situations can be interpreted as allowing a formal setting for students for having personal stories to weave their fabric accordingly.

Therefore, Questioning, researching, problem solving and creative thinking skills of the individuals develops the community which also opens the way for national development, enhancement for new paradigms (Ozcan & Gunduz, 2015). Teachers' responsibility for developing professionally according to contemporary changes and innovative methods of the latest generations are mostly appreciated and rewarded by the society. In other word, the education authorities and parents associations give credit and support in-service trainings. Furthermore, the participant teachers in this study were seen to be willing to practice peer mediation in-service program in a way that they was a full commitment to the program. The peer mediation activities and practice in scenario writing as well as role playing is seen to empower their skills and beliefs in peer mediations in the means of developing their attitudes towards peer mediation.

George and Lubben (2002), argue that in-service trainings have positive changes in teachers' social and professional lives. Seferoglu (2001) also discusses that sharing in-service experiences provides opportunity for elementary school teachers to develop their knowledge and skills for teaching. Quality in education is not evaluated just by looking at the useful things that the students have learnt. It is a matter of providing great teaching, fostering the magic of learning and building on to the students' responsibilities. The world we live in today captures us into the web of meanings and the more international we become the more demanding the world becomes. Thus, there is an expectation that each student becomes and behaves like a good citizen, A good citizen is aware and are likely to know about options, take responsibility and fulfil their duties. Furthermore, great schools are aware of moral incarceration and plunges into educating their students about how they should become responsible citizens not only in their countries but in the whole universe. We can briefly state from the above facts about being a good citizen that peer mediation programs are highly valued for fulfilling these standards.

In-service training of peer mediation program is new in developing countries and is also in need to be acknowledged more by the education authorities. Even though the present study reveals positive development of teachers and promises development regarding peer mediation practice there is still a long way to go to fulfil the necessary standards.

Present study results of the implemented teachers' in-service peer mediation program are believed to have a voice for future trainings. The results are considered to have positive impact on the professional development of the prospective teachers.

The development of individuals starts informally at home and keeps developing with formal education in schools. Therefore, social and affective skills needed for students are mostly covered in the peer mediation programs. Furthermore, development of such beliefs, skills and attitudes should start at an early age, in a sense that parents and teachers should act as role models. Moving from this issue, teacher's knowledge and skills for dealing with disputes in line with the parents' knowledge and skills will develop students' way of resolving disputes. Teaching and learning procedures are generally hindered by students' unwanted behaviour and becomes hard to accomplish academic goals and objectives. Turnuklu, Kacmaz, Gurler, Turk, Kalender, Zengin and Sevkin (2010), study reveals that peer mediation trainings empower elementary school teachers' dispute resolution skills, spares more time for the teaching-learning procedure and paves the way for academic success.

The present study of the implemented in-service training is seen to have positive impact on teachers' method of resolving disputes in teaching and learning procedures. The overall results indicate the need for such programs in developing social and affective skills which in the long run will enhance academic success. The lack of not reaching the targeted learning outcomes can be explained by the lack of such skills. Classroom settings are full of students unwanted disruptions and teachers classic discipline methods. However, the results of such incidents are not helping in any way to improve students neither social skills nor academic success. This also affects parents and teachers in a negative way. It can be stated that peer mediation training and practice in schools will turn this upside down in a sense that it will bring up the development of students both social and academic success.

To summarize, teacher profession is not just transferring knowledge, it's rather about dwelling into the significant side of the curriculum. To make it clearer it is about going into the depths of our aspirations. By doing this students' are likely to form constructive and systematic set of beliefs and also develop social responsibilities. Therefore, we can say that in-service teacher training of peer mediation program will enhance teachers' knowledge and skills and act as an agent for their student's accomplishment on such issues. Moreover, students' future development relies on developing a perspective about their world, constructing their own beliefs, acquiring contemporary and innovative knowledge and developing social skills. These can only be accomplished with prospective teachers, and this is an important reason for providing teachers' with on-going trainings.

The results revealed that teachers are demanding more opportunities for peer mediation trainings. It can be recommended for the National Education Board to implement either in-service programs or develop a curriculum for schools. Teachers' regret of not attending such program at an early stage brings out another recommendation of implementing peer mediation programs as a fundamental course in the universities curriculum in the education faculties. This will be a good opportunity for future teacher candidates and future in depth studies will be able to indicate the advantages for the teaching-learning procedures in class room and school environments. It can also be recommended in future researches to have follow-up studies to evaluate the outcomes of the implemented program in the long run to determine the benefits for teachers' professional development.

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