



ANALYSIS OF STUDIES MADE ON MONTESSORI APPROACH IN TURKEY

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Abstract

This research is planned for the observation of studies made in Turkey on the Montessori approach. The research was conducted on a total of 53 resources; subdivided into 17 dissertations, 30 articles and 6 conference papers, either with direct or indirect connection with the Montessori approach. As a result of the research conveyed by content analysis technique, all of studies on the improvement of academic skills such as mathematics and preparation for reading and writing have shown positive results for the Montessori approach. Similarly, different studies using same method state that Montessori approach has positive impact on children's physical, social and language development. While studies were mainly conducted in early childhood education, studies about the effectiveness of Montessori in special needs education were produced in limited numbers. The fact that there were no studies, except for a single edited work, made on the Montessori approach on primary school level calls for attention.

Key Words: Alternative education, Montessori approach, child development, early childhood education, special needs education.

INTRODUCTION

Having first been developed by Maria Montessori in 1907, the so-called Montessori approach has taken an important place in the field of alternative education, and has been in many centers throughout the world. The approach emerged in an attempt to improve the cognitive levels of underdeveloped children focusing on sensorial education and has ensured that children with special needs become more successful than normally developed children educated with other methods. Its subsequent implementation with normally developed children and positive advancements obtained therewith, constituted the basis for its further development in becoming widespread. In that respect the Montessori approach has been influential in practices of educators for more than a hundred years (Erben, 2005; Follari, 2007; Lopata, Wallace, & Finn, 2005; Toran, 2011).



There had been no study on investigation of educational practices based on the Montessori approach until 1964, when a group of parents decided that the success of the education in the classroom should have been proven and accordingly collaborated with Cincinnati University for a three-year work plan. As a result of the three-year study with 150 children, the Montessori approach scored highest or next to highest on the variables of curiosity and assertiveness, exploratory behavior, creativity, innovative behavior, motor impulse control, attention, persistence, reflectivity, field independence, and analytical perceptual processes. (Lillard, 2013). A study by Azuma (1992) found that there had been 67 studies conducted on the Montessori approach between 1979 and 1989 as regards comparison of the Montessori approach to other methodologies, practices intended for further development of the Montessori approach, the Montessori approach and children with special needs, and theoretical and philosophical research on the Montessori approach. Walsh and Petty (2007) suggested in their study that there were only a few studies on the Montessori approach among 492 papers as regards different methodologies during the early childhood period. A study in Turkey investigating studies on different approaches in preschool education found that 12 out of 25 studies were about the Montessori approach. It was suggested that studies on geometrical shapes and number notion constituted the majority in research activities as regards the Montessori approach (Sali, Aksoy, Baran, & Köksal Akyol, 2012).

Both interest in and studies on the Montessori approach, which has been in use throughout the world as an alternative educational methodology, gradually increase in Turkey. The recent interest in the Montessori approach in Turkey is attributable to the fact that the Montessori approach started to be applied in pilot kindergartens in universities, promoted to educators from different fields, included in the syllabus of undergraduate and graduate education programs, studied by scholars, spread via project activities and non-governmental organizations, and reached to masses via social media in the electronic media (Korkmaz, 2013). Despite gradual increase in the number of studies parallel to aforementioned interest, it can be concluded that the Montessori approach is still novel for Turkey, given that it was Oktay (1987), who performed the first study before 1990. In that respect it was suggested that further detailed studies needed to investigate both the benefits of education based on the Montessori approach, and the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. It was anticipated that the number of especially longitudinal and experimental studies together with detailed studies on the nature and effects of the Montessori approach would rise (Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2004).

Despite limited number of studies on the Montessori approach in Turkey attributable to the recent interest therein, each study is considered important for investigating the effects of the Montessori approach as an alternative education methodology. Therefore the present paper aimed to investigate the studies on the Montessori approach in Turkey. It was considered that studies on the philosophy, materials, educational projections, and application in educational levels of the Montessori approach, and its effect on development fields and academic skills of children would be instructive for practitioners and scholars in child development and in the education field. Accordingly relevant studies were investigated as regards the type of source (dissertation, article, and conference paper) and contents.

METHOD

The present research was designed as a descriptive study with survey methodology on the grounds that it aimed to investigate the studies in Turkey on the Montessori approach (Büyükoztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014).

Population of the study was composed of all accessible studies in the form of dissertations, articles, and conference papers produced between 1990 and 2014. The postgraduate theses population was composed on theses as archived by Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). Population of the articles and conference papers was composed of articles published in educational reviews, online conference papers, and conference papers published in congress books. The present study aimed to access all studies in the population rather than selecting a sample. In that respect the study was conducted on a total of 53 resources, including 17 dissertations, 30 articles, and 6 conference papers.

Data Collection and Assessment

Content analysis was used in the study as the method of data collection. Content analysis was described as a systematic and renewable method, which summarizes a text using smaller content categories with encodings based on specific rules (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). The first step of content analysis was comprised of literature review intended for accessing the resources in the scope of the study. The keywords used in literature review via database included “the Montessori approach”, “Montessori education,” and “Montessori practice.” Dissertations included in the scope of the study were obtained from YÖK National Thesis Center (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>) and missing full texts of articles/conference papers were obtained from authors via e-mail. The second step included classification and analysis of accordingly collected studies as per type of study (dissertation, article, and conference paper) and contents. The last step of data analysis included the process of findings of the present study and interpretation thereof.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the studies on the Montessori approach in Turkey. Relevant resources in the scope of the study were assessed in line with the aims of the study.

Table 1: Distribution of Studies on the Montessori Approach by Years

Year	n	%
1990	1	1,9
1994	1	1,9
2005	4	7,5
2006	4	7,5
2007	3	5,7
2008	6	11,3
2009	4	7,5
2010	5	9,4
2011	6	11,3
2012	12	22,6
2013	5	9,4
2014	2	3,8
Total	53	100

A review of the distribution of studies by years provided that the number of studies tended to increase after 2005, subsequent to the publication of the first dissertation in 1990, and that the highest number of studies were conducted especially in 2012 (22.6%).

Table 2: Distribution of Studies on the Montessori Approach by Type of Study

Type of Study	n	%	
Dissertation	Master's	14	26,4
	PhD	3	5,7
Article		30	56,6
Conference Paper		6	11,3
Total	53	100	

A review of the distribution by study types provided that the respective ratios of dissertations, articles, and conference papers (including three international ones) were 32.1%, 56.6%, and 11.3%. Accordingly it was concluded that articles constituted the highest proportion of the resources on the Montessori approach, where doctoral dissertations were the lowest. Five studies included in the article group were developed upon

dissertations (Akuysal Aydoğan & Şen, 2011; Kaya & Aytar, 2012; Kayılı & Arı, 2011; Temel & Toran, 2012; Toran & Temel, 2014).

Furthermore, it was found that dissertations on the Montessori approach were performed in a limited number of universities. The distribution of dissertations by universities provided that Gazi University and Selçuk University ranked the first with four studies each (23.5%), followed by Marmara University with three studies (17.6%), Adnan Menderes University with two studies (11.8%), and Çukurova University, Dumlupınar University, Istanbul Technical University, and Zonguldak Karaelmas University with one study each (5.9%).

Table 3: Distribution of Studies on the Montessori Approach by Study Designs

Study Design	n	%	
Research Study	Descriptive	5	9,4
	Quantitative	18	34,0
	Qualitative	6	11,3
	Mixed	3	5,7
Compilation	21	39,6	
Total	53	100	

A review of the distribution of studies by study designs provided that 60.4% were research studies, where 39.6% were compilation studies. Experimental studies on the Montessori approach constituted the majority of the study designs, where mixed designs were the least (Kanbur, 2012; Kaya, 2012; Kaya & Aytar, 2012).

An Overview of Studies on the Montessori Approach in Turkey

In the scope of the study, direct studies (n=41) as well as indirect studies (n=12) on the Montessori approach were taken into consideration. The indirect studies were on alternative educational approaches and the Montessori approach's philosophy, application, and reflections on education (Dündar, 2007; Kalıpçı, 2008; Kanbur, 2012; Kaya, 2012; Kaya & Aytar, 2012; Kurt, 2010; Özgen, 2012; Salı et al., 2012; Soydan, 2013b, 2013c; Temel, 2005; Uysal, 2006).

The studies on the Montessori approach in Turkey were classified into compilation and research groups based on the study design, and that compilation studies (n=21) were assessed as regards contents and researches (n=32) as regards their respective results. Indirect studies and studies derived from master's theses and doctoral theses with the same content were excluded from assessment.

An Overview of Compilation Studies on the Montessori Approach

Compilation studies focused on a general assessment of the Montessori approach and provided information as regards the establishment, history, purpose, management models, applied learning methods, educational program, perspective towards children, and financial structure of the schools, which operated in line with the educational philosophy of the approach (Altınışık, 2014; Arslan, 2008; Boynikoğlu, 2013; Bulduk & Toran, 2013; Danişman, 2012; Durakoğlu, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b; Korkmaz, 2006; Köksal Akyol & Oğuz, 2005; Oğuz & Köksal Akyol, 2006; Temel, 1994). Two studies focused on the effects of the Montessori approach on child development during early childhood education and its applications. These studies investigated the contribution of education and educational material in development and learning of children (Mutlu, Ergişi, Ayhan, & Aral, 2012; Tuğluk, Gündoğdu, & Kaya, 2006). Büyüктаşkapu (2012) provided information in her study as regards how science education should have been given during early childhood education. Another compilation study underscored the importance of the Montessori approach in children with Down syndrome and neuromotor and psychomotor underdevelopment (Yıldırım Doğru, 2009).



An Overview of Studies on the Montessori Approach

The studies on the Montessori approach can be classified under three general titles; i.e. child development, early childhood education, and special education.

Studies on the Effects of the Montessori Approach on Child Development: It was suggested that education based on the Montessori approach was influential in development of social adaptation and skills (Koçyiğit & Kayılı, 2008; Toran, 2011), fine motor skills such as use of objects, drawing, and painting (Beken, 2009; Toran, 2011), receptive language skills (Kayılı, Koçyiğit, & Erbay, 2009), and concept acquisition (Toran, 2011). Another study found that children that received education based on the Montessori approach took social rules more seriously and had higher perception for the necessity of following the rules even in the absence of an authority figure, such as parents or teachers (Tepeli & Yılmaz, 2012). A study by Yıldırım, Akman, and Alabay (2012) concluded that education based on the Montessori approach was influential on visual perception in children. It was suggested that thanks to the Montessori materials, children made mistakes at first hand, observed their mistakes, and found solutions, which helped with development of visual perception.

In addition to the studies as regards child development, there were also other studies, which suggested that the Montessori approach positively contributed in children receiving education based on the Montessori approach as regards readiness for primary education and was more effective than the preschool education program. Kayılı (2010) found that the Montessori approach was influential in reading maturity, numerical maturity, copying skills, focusing, social independence, interaction, and collaboration. Similarly, a study by Koçyiğit, Kayılı, and Erbay (2010) suggested favorable results as regards focusing for children receiving education based on the Montessori approach.

Studies on the Effects of the Montessori Approach on Early Childhood Education: A study by Korkmaz (2005) suggested that the preschool education institutions in Turkey that provided education in line with the Montessori approach failed to meet the Montessori standards as regards materials, application, method-technique, and assessment. A study with Montessori materials suggested that because the Montessori materials failed to meet specifications, i.e. due to the deficiencies in design quality, they decreased the anticipated level of efficiency of the education (Erişen & Güleş, 2007). Another study found that education based on the Montessori approach facilitated children's recognition of classroom materials, increased attention of children, and encouraged children in using polite words (Güleş & Öngören, 2008). A study on Montessori educators investigated the views of preschool teachers as regards the educational environment prepared in accordance with the Montessori approach and perspective towards children (Soydan, 2013a).

Studies on reflection of the Montessori approach on early childhood education programs found that education based on the Montessori approach had an important role in children's acquisition of true information as regards the world they lived in (Güleş & Erişen, 2009) and that there were significant differences in creativity, elaboration, flexibility levels, and originality compared to children receiving the program of Ministry of National Education (MEB) (Şahintürk, 2012). Furthermore, it was suggested that the Montessori approach was influential in acquisition of geometric shape concept (Akuysal Aydoğan, 2007; Asfuroğlu, 1990; Öngören, 2008) and number concept (Akuysal Aydoğan, 2007; Yiğit, 2008) by children receiving science education at early childhood level.

Studies on the Effects of the Montessori Approach on Special Education: It was suggested that tools developed and applied in line with Montessori materials improved the receptive language skills and visual perception levels of children having impaired hearing and mental disabilities (Erben, 2005). Eratay (2011) found in her study that attention deficiency, unrest, crying, getting offended, and aggression behaviors decreased in autistic and hyperactive children receiving education based on the Montessori approach.

CONCLUSION

The present study shows that there are only a limited number of studies on the Montessori approach in Turkey. The main factor limiting the number of studies is the limited amount of schools adopting the Montessori approach nationwide, resulting from the compulsory use of centrally regulated MEB programs. Nevertheless,



the experimental studies directly associated with the Montessori approach is an indication of the fact that application fields of the said approach are being established. Furthermore, it is seen that the compilation studies directly or indirectly related to the Montessori approach focus on introduction to the philosophy, characteristics, and application patterns of the approach, which has but limited field of application in Turkey. These compilation studies provide important contribution in understanding, application, and adoption of the Montessori approach.

An overview of studies in Turkey provide that educational activities in accordance with the Montessori approach provides positive contribution in adaptation skills and rule perception as regards social-emotional development of children, in fine motor skills as regards motor development, and visual perception skills, focusing, numerical and reading maturity, and receptive language skills as regards cognitive development. Similarly, it was suggested that the results were in favor of the Montessori approach in all activities such as preparation for reading – writing and mathematics aimed for creativity, originality, and academic skills. However, the study results showed also the fact that preschool education institutions failed to meet standards as regards materials, application, method-technique, and assessment, and especially the deficiencies in the design quality of Montessori material, resulted in derailing of educational activities towards the Montessori approach. Furthermore access to inexpensive Montessori materials prepared in line with the standards at applied kindergartens in the university and at private kindergartens may increase the number of studies on the Montessori approach.

It is seen that most studies focused on preschool education level and that there is a limited number of studies on efficiency of the Montessori approach in special education. It is noteworthy that there is no study on the Montessori approach covering the primary education level, except for a compilation study. Further studies on the Montessori approach at the primary school level in addition to the preschool level would render a more complete scope of research. In that context, alternative examples can be provided for the primary school level for better understanding and application of child-centered educational programs.

Furthermore, it is seen that study results were obtained in favor of the Montessori approach in studies comparing children receiving education based on the Montessori approach and children under preschool education as applied within the current educational system in Turkey. This may create the perception that the Montessori approach is “a better educational system” based on its positive effects on children. And accordingly this may divert the Montessori approach from the principle of “alternative educational system” in Turkey. Similar to the Montessori approach, the preschool education as applied within the current educational system in Turkey also aims to support development of children by providing rich learning experiences. Therefore it would be useful if further studies also make comparisons with institutions that comply with the characteristics of the program of Ministry of National Education, and by such different parameters as teacher, family and educational environment.

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