

Developing Strategies to Prevent “Cyber-Bullying”

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to define secondary education directors and teachers awareness of preventing “cyber-bullying”. The participants are directors and teachers at Near East College in the second half of the 2016-2017 academic year. A qualitative research method was used in this study. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to obtain the participants’ views. The data obtained showed that the directors and teachers were aware of “cyber-bullying” and the students faced “cyber-bullying” from time to time. It was also found that the development in technology created the necessity of “cyber-bullying” awareness among directors and teachers.

Keywords: cyber-bullying, education technology, precautions for young people, school administrative units

INTRODUCTION

The developments in Information Technology (IT) have begun to occupy a big amount of time among adolescents today. The fast development has facilitated access to technology for the individual at every age and it has become a part of their lives. IT has several advantages for the individual. According to Yaman, Eroğlu and Peker (2011), the adolescents can make new friends and sustain this relationship using it. Besides any kind of information, IT provides a lot of new opportunities for the individual (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

Besides the advantages IT provides, the unlimited and uncontrolled use of it brings together several negative points. Valkenburg and Soeters (2001), give examples to such negative influences among the individuals using IT as the widespread pornography, facing materials reflecting violence, and revealing personal privacy. Frequent use of IT creates new problems in schools and the society. While misbehavior in school was assumed as violence in the past, this concept has turned into “cyber-bullying” in which IT is abused. Tokunaga (2010) and Varjas, Henrich and Meyers (2009) and also Wang et al. (2009) define this abuse as “cyber-bullying”, “electronic-bullying”, or “online-bullying”.

The aim of this study is to “make a needs-analysis to define the necessity for the development of new strategies to prevent cyber-bullying in secondary schools”, as well as to raise the awareness of different concepts of “cyber-bullying” among directors, teachers, students, and families. In this respect, the following questions are posed for better understanding of the issue:

1. At what level are the participants’ perceptions of “cyber-bullying”?
2. At what level are the participants’ perceptions of the reasons for “cyber-bullying”?
3. Do you think students face “cyber-bullying”? If “yes”, at what level?
4. At what level are their perceptions of fighting “cyber-bullying”?
5. At what level are their perceptions of the need for education against “cyber-bullying”?
6. What suggestions do you have related to preventing “cyber-bullying”?

Contribution of this paper to the literature

- This study contributes to increased teacher and administrator awareness of cyber-bullying behaviors.
- The study sheds light on coping with cyber-bullying.
- Important discussion is carried out to find ways of preventing cyber-bullying.

METHOD

Research Method

A qualitative research method was conducted in this study. Strauss and Corbin (1990), define qualitative research as “a process of reaching to more information to understand human life-styles, stories, behaviour, organizational structures, and societal changes”. A needs-analysis was carried out to specify the directors’ and teachers’ views about developing strategies to prevent “cyber-bullying” in secondary education. The participants were identified by a coding method (**Participant = “P”**). The participants were directors and teachers at Near East College in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Data Collection Tool

Data were collected through seven open-ended questions prepared by the researcher. While preparing the questions, real life experiences in the literature were referred to. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013), open-ended questions should be clear, prepared carefully, should not involve multi-dimensions, and there should be alternative questions. The questions were prepared with the views from two experts in the field, one expert in languages, and one expert in evaluation. The questions were finalized after getting feedback from the experts. Structured interview forms were used in this study with the aim to specify the needs to develop strategies to prevent “cyber-bullying” in secondary education. Only 121 of the 221 participants were reached and were involved in this study. The data were evaluated in the light of the answers from the participants.

FINDINGS

Participants Perception of “Cyber-bullying”

From the perceptions of the participants, it has been noted that many of them are well aware of “cyber-bullying”.

P.7 (Participant 7) explained the problem as “It’s a type of behavior to do technical or personal harm to an individual or a group”.

“Cyber-bullying is a deliberate, ongoing, aggressive behaviour towards a defenseless person by an individual or individuals through electronic tools at certain times” explained Participant 90. However, it was noted that some participants were unaware of “cyber-bullying”.

P.9 (Participant 9) explained “To be honest, I didn’t know the meaning of “cyber-bullying”. I asked my roommates. Now I know what it means. It is abusing technology”.

“I have never heard about “cyber-bullying, so I have no idea about it” said P.88 (Participant 88).

P.35 (Participant 35) explained cyber-bullying saying, “It’s a way of threatening, denigrating, shaming, molesting a person or persons through the internet using digital or mobile technologies”.

P.40 (Participant 40) explained cyber-bullying saying, “Cyber-bullying is rapidly spreading today due to the excess use of the social-media and the internet. Writing text messages to persons or loading photographs and videos without one’s consent is a kind of bullying”.

When the participants’ views about cyber-bullying are considered, it can be noted in this study that many of the participant directors and teachers are well aware of the problem. Today, we see that, parallel to the development of technology, cyber-bullying has taken the place of traditional violence through technological tools”.

Participant Perceptions of the Reasons for “Cyber-bullying”

When the participants’ views related to the reasons for “cyber-bullying” were examined,

P.13 (Participant 13) said it was because of the “unconscious use of technology”.

P.119 (Participant 119) explained the reason as *“It is a way people, particularly school children tend to solve their problems; they can't cope with in school, through the internet or the social-media”*.

P.90 (Participant 90) expressed his views in a different way saying, *“Its an easy vision because of easy access, low cost, imitating improper behavior, lack of parent-children interaction, and supervision on the use of the internet”*.

P.55 (Participant 55) pointed to similar reasons and said, *“Lack of control or supervision and parents' education level and behaviour leads the children to look for unnecessary entertainment”*.

P.11 (Participant 11) expressed views saying, *“Personal psychological problems, loneliness, low self-esteem, family problems, improper raising, negligence of the child, and youth, pressure, and misbehaviors”*

P. 25 (Participant 25) explained views saying, *“Cyber-bullying is increasing even more in this technological age. The unconscious use of the internet has become the main source of gambling, imaginary love affairs, and many other improper behaviors”*

When the views to do with the perception of the reasons for cyber-bullying are considered in this study, it can be noted that the rise in cyber-bullying is due to the uncontrolled use of the internet and lack of parental control over the child's using the technology to solve their problems in an imaginary milieu.

Do you think your Children Face “Cyber-bullying?” If “Yes” What do they do?

The participants admitted that their children experience “cyber-bullying”.

P.10 (Participant 10) explained, *“Yes, they do. At present, they are adolescents and look for something to prove themselves. They try this easily on the internet, but face different pictures”*.

P.66 (Participant 66) expressed worries as, *“Yes. Some students, at the beginning, form their groups on the internet and write text messages. In time, these messages may turn into swearing”*.

P.119 (Participant 119) stressed the view as, *“I think they do, because communication has become a part of our lives due to widespread social-media tools. I can say that, even during classes students face “cyber-bullying”*. Some participants, on the other hand said they had never faced “cyber-bullying”.

P.25 (Participant 25) said, *“I'm worried that our students particularly the final year students in high school may be trying such disapproved issues, but even though, there may be something that interests them”*.

“No, I don't think students face “cyber-bullying” said P12. (Participant 12)

In this study it was found that, the need for technological tools today have a negative effect on the youth. Their making imaginary friends, writing inappropriate text messages and similar behaviors create cyber-bullying.

Participant Views about Preventing “Cyber-bullying”

The data showed that the participants needed information and education in terms of preventing “cyber-bullying”.

P.18 (Participant 18) suggested that, *“In-service training can be given to inform individuals on how, why, and what to use the technology for. Seminars can be organized for the students on using the internet for good purposes, which can be a solution to this problem”*.

P.36 (Participant 36) expressed views and suggested, *“We need to have a safe web, inform everybody about the problem, and educate people on the use of the internet and computer”*.

P.48 (Participant 48) stressed the view saying, *“The most important way for self-protection is not to let familiar or unfamiliar people reach one and try to avoid disclosure”*.

P.87 (Participant 87) emphasized a point saying, *“Students, families and all the directors and teachers should be informed about cyber-bullying and should be made aware of how to fight the problem”*.

It has been found in this study that, in the views expressed about coping with cyber-bullying, the directors and teachers are aware of the issue, but the needed training is how to fight the problem.

Participants' Perceptions of and Suggestions about the Need for “Cyber-bullying” Education

It was commonly agreed by the participants that directors, teachers, and parents should be educated on the problem in question.

P.29 (Participant 29) expressed worries saying, *“Education has become a must and people should be informed at intervals about the developing technology”*.

P.82 (Participant 82) added support and said, "Definitely, there is a need for education. Particularly students need it because sometimes they share pictures with friends, but they are not aware that such sharings can be published. They can be more aware of this danger through education".

When the participant directors' and teachers' perceptions related to the need for training in cyber-bullying is considered, it is clear that many of them needed training in this issue.

Suggestions about Preventing "Cyber-bullying"

P.66 (Participant 66) raised a suggestion saying, "We can arrange places where our children can use the internet safely, and, instead of banning the use of the computer, we should specify the length of computer use with our children, and we should be well aware of who our children meet on the internet. We should share all these with our children, which helps improve parent-student interaction with trust".

P.82 (Participant 82) suggested, "Guiding teachers in schools by organizing seminars on this issue in class. We are experiencing a wide-spread social-media environment and we need to use it consciously".

P.103 (Participant 103) supported this view and added, "Seminars can be organized separately for families, students, and teachers".

When the participant directors' and teachers' views related to prevention of cyber-bullying is considered, it is clear that they needed ongoing training in this issue.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this research clearly show that "cyber-bullying" is spreading rapidly and directors and teachers should develop much more awareness of the concept of "cyber-bullying". It is harmful and students need to know how to cope with and handle it. When "cyber-bullying" conceptions are examined, it can be noted that many participants have a lot of information about it. These findings have similarities with the conception of "cyber-bullying" found out in a study by Ayas and Horzum (2011), on "specifying teacher conceptions of imaginary bullying".

The reasons for "cyber-bullying" as pointed out by the participants are "abuse of technology, easy access, low costs, and lack of supervision". In an IT research by TUIK (Turkish Statistical Foundation) in 2006, 90.2% of the individuals use the internet to benefit from on-line services, 78.2% for communication, and 30.7% for education.

The participants agreed that students face "cyber-bullying". The reason for this, as they stated, as adolescents, students are always in search of something new and the need to try to prove themselves. On the other hand, Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), students refer to "cyber-bullying" for revenge and entertainment. In another research carried out, it was stated that the lack of sound relationships between parents and adolescents result in a tendency among the adolescents to use the internet excessively and look for emotional support (Lei & Wu, 2007).

According to the findings of this research, students having problems exhibited more cyber-bullying behaviors. For Johnson (1999), adolescents who do not have good relations with their families, find themselves trying to solve their problems on the internet.

As for coping with "cyber-bullying", the participants pointed to the need for clear information and education in the subject matter.

Kavuk (2011) added that there was more to this suggestion and emphasized that, in order to fight "cyber-bullying", directors, teachers, students, and families should be well aware of the type of bullying emerging from IT as well as the methods to fight it. Research previously done to specify teacher awareness levels of coping with "cyber-bullying" showed that student awareness levels had increased significantly (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Baker & Kavşut, 2007).

This research carried out to define the needs for preventing "cyber-bullying", found that school directors, teachers, students, and families needed to be well-informed and educated in the subject through seminars and training.

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