

## **The Lions Quest Program in Turkey: Teachers' Views and Classroom Practices.**

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This is a pilot study to explore the classroom implementation of the Lions Quest Program in Turkey. Teachers of first through eighth grades at two elementary schools who applied the program were interviewed about the program and their classroom practices while they were also observed and their classrooms were also observed. Considerable program implementation differences were found within and between the schools. Three main issues were raised in the interviews, namely that the teachers were not clear about whether social emotional learning (SEL) skills should be taught to students as a separate lesson or not; they seemed to doubt whether school personnel should be responsible for SEL implementation; and although they had positive views of the implementation, they underlined that students' social and emotional wellbeing is dependent on family background and the developing maturity of the child. In conclusion, the teachers expressed positive views about the Lions Quest Program, yet lacked strong opinions about when, where, and by whom the program needed to be included in the curriculum. Limitations, implementation challenges, and implications for SEL in the Turkish context were also identified.

**Keywords:** Lions Quest Program, social emotional learning (SEL), teachers' views, classroom implementation

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Evidence-based research on the impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools has shown many positive outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2000). Programs available for teachers to develop SEL skills in children include *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)*, *Can Problem Solve (ICPS)*, *Lions Quest: Skills for Growing*, *The Incredible Years*, and many others.

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Although endeavors aimed towards opening a space for developing social and emotional skills in schools have increased in recent years (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005), some resistance to such initiatives is still both observed in schools and being reported by teachers (Baker et al., 2010; Domitrovich et al., 2008; Witt, 1986).

Witt (1986) pointed out that program effectiveness cannot be considered the only factor in teachers' decisions regarding the adoption of a specific program and its continuous implementation in their classrooms. Teachers also consider time and resources, the theoretical orientation of the intervention, and ecological intrusiveness. Bywater and Sharples (2012) also stated that selection of a well-evidenced program may not guarantee success; wide arrays of professional development support also need to be provided. Also significant are teacher hesitations, such as feeling inadequate to teach SEL, not seeing SEL as being within their job description, lack of time due to pressure of academic content, believing there is no payoff, and concerns about loss of classroom control (Domitrovich et al., 2008; Han & Weiss, 2005; Walker, 2004). In the *Missing Piece* report by CASEL (2013; 2015), 80% of the teachers indicated that they think SEL skills are important and 81% reported that they are interested in receiving additional SEL training. However, 81% also said that time is a big constraint to implementing SEL programs.

Reluctance of implementing SEL at schools is especially evident in Turkey. As a developing country, Turkey has a huge population of youngsters for whom educational opportunities are limited, depending on national examinations to get into schools. In the context of Turkish schools, one might expect that teaching SEL skills would become a necessity due to the high percentages of violence and incidents of aggression in schools (Bulut, 2008; Ozgur, Yorukoglu, & Baysan Arabaci, 2011). To date, momentum has been slow (Diken, Cavkaytar, Batu, Bozkurt, & Kurtyilmaz, 2011). Ocak and Arda (2014) reviewed three SEL programs implemented in Turkish schools and provided information on the content, aims, and implementation and evaluation processes, to help schools and teachers to select the program that best fit their needs. Teachers' theoretical knowledge and their comfort with and acceptability for programs are identified as part of a strong basis for quality implementation (Devaney, O'Brien, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006).

A very limited number of SEL programs are available for teachers in Turkey. One of these, the Lions Quest Program, has proven to be an effective program targeting areas of most concern in Turkish schools: reduction of problem behaviors, increasing prosocial behaviors (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005), empowering adolescents to resist peer pressure (Eisen, Zellman, & Murray, 2003; Eisen, Zellman, Massett, & Murray, 2002; Foxcroft & Tsertsvadze, 2012), helping students to develop relationships, improve grades, and reduce dropout rates (Laird & Black, 1999). As an initial step in more widespread SEL program dissemination in Turkey, a preliminary study is needed to understand teachers' views and classroom practices relating to the Lions Quest Program in elementary schools in Turkey. By investigating programs such as Lions Quest by observing classrooms and asking teachers' opinions about the program, important issues can be better understood before any attempt is made to formally evaluate the program and go to scale.

The Lions Quest Program was started in 1975 in the USA and first funded by Lions Clubs International in 1984 (Lions Clubs International 2013a; 2013b). The program has been implemented in 85 countries by teachers, specialists and trained social workers in a wide range of applications in both formal and non-formal settings. Implementation may be carried out only by practicing professionals completing specific

training. It consists of three sub-programs targeting different grade levels from kindergarten through high school: Skills for Growing, grades K-5; Skills for Adolescence, grades 6-8; and Skills for Action, grades 9-12

SEL programs' targeted components are defined by CASEL (2013; 2015) as self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Lions Quest has been developed on those components. The program encourages students to develop social and emotional skills, become active volunteers contributing to their community, learn to protect themselves and others from violence, and to avoid substance abuse. The most important characteristic of the Lions Quest Program is the teacher training which is aimed at providing the positive environment in which children may be effectively assisted to face the problems that they will encounter in life. The program is based on the values of taking responsibility, living healthily, making positive decisions, volunteering, and feeling grounded in family, school, and community (Lions Clubs International 2013a, 2013b; Pinar & Gol-Guven, 2010). In Table I, the Lions Quest Program for 5th grade is shown as an example of units and lessons.

**Table I. Units and lessons of 5<sup>th</sup> grade Lions Quest Program**

<b>Unit 1 – A Positive Learning Community</b>	<b>Unit 4 – Health and Prevention</b>
Lesson 1: Important People to Know	Lesson 1: The Problem with Drugs
Lesson 2: The Respect of Shared Agreements	Lesson 2: Coming to Terms with Decision Making
Lesson 3: A Finely Tuned Machine	Lesson 3: Taking Steps
<b>Unit 2 – Personal Development</b>	Lesson 4: What Are the Influences?
Lesson 1: There Are Values in All of Us	Lesson 5: Chemical Dependency:
Lesson 2: I Can Do It!	Lesson 6: Class Hearing on Drugs
Lesson 3: Feeling Confident	Lesson 7: The Power of Positive Peer Pressure
Lesson 4: I Am Right on Target	<b>Unit 5 – Leadership and Service</b>
Lesson 5: I Want to Hit the Bullseye!	Lesson 1: I Can Make a Positive Impact
Lesson 6: I'm Focusing on Feelings	Lesson 2: My Talents, Skills, and Interests
Lesson 7: Dealing with Difficult Emotions	Lesson 3: Identifying Important Needs
Lesson 8: Positive Thinking Achieves Goals	Lesson 4: Together We Can Make a Difference
<b>Unit 3 – Social Development</b>	Lesson 5: Can We Get There from Here?
Lesson 1: Lend an Ear	Lesson 6: Places, Everybody!
Lesson 2: Figuring Out Friendship	Lesson 7: We Did It! What Did We Do?
Lesson 3: Everybody Wins!	Lesson 8: Shout It from the Rooftops
Lesson 4: Group Workout	<b>Unit 6 – Reflection and Closure</b>
Lesson 5: Environment Check	Lesson 1: Publishing Our Successes
Lesson 6: Recognizing Bullying Behaviors	Lesson 2: The Time of Our Lives
Lesson 7: Responding to Bullying Behaviors	
Lesson 8: Dealing with Bullying Behavior	

Note. Facilitator's Resource Guide (5<sup>th</sup> grade) retrieved from: <https://www.lions-quest.org/>

The Lions Quest Program has passed through several phases before being introduced to schools in Turkey. The Turkish version of the program was based on the Swedish version, with some added features adapted from the longer, more comprehensive, and costly to implement American version. After the necessary translation, experts in the area of SEL worked on the program to make it culturally and institutionally appropriate for Turkish schools, teachers, and students from PreK-High School.

A certified trainer from Sweden carried out initial teacher training in Turkey during a pilot phase, while at the same time undertaking hands-on training of Turkish trainers in order to build a local trainer team. The training of trainers candidates were selected according to their years of experience as educational practitioners and their competence in English, since they would be receiving training in English and acquiring status as international Lions Quest Program trainer trainers. They first observed the trainer in action during several training sessions, and then received extensive individual coaching, skill building and mentoring over a period of 18 months. They received feedback from the trainer and their progress was charted and evaluated according to a rigorous criteria-based system, including the assessment of video-recordings of their sessions, which were, as a final step, sent to the Lions Quest Program trainer selection committee based in the USA. The committee chose three training of trainers candidates, over a period of 4.5 years, the first of whom began actively training teachers in 2008. The Lions Quest Program was initiated in Turkish schools from kindergarten to 12th grade in different cities in 2008. Three hundred and ten schools were participating and more than 1700 teachers had attended training seminars by the year of 2012.

## **Methodology**

This study describes teachers' ideas and views of the program, its perceived effectiveness, and details about the program's implementations in Turkey. Interviews with teachers asked about their opinions of the program, its effectiveness, their classroom practices, whether they saw any positive changes in students' behaviors after their implementation, and their suggestions to improve the content, method, and implementation in school. Observations were conducted, focusing on identifying the general atmosphere of classrooms and the specific program implementations attempted.

For this preliminary study, schools located in Istanbul that implemented the program were invited to participate. Out of five schools, two schools (one private and one public) volunteered to take part. The schools were similar to each other in terms of the number of students, classrooms, and teachers in each grade level. The principals of the two schools were informed about the aims of the study and the anticipated responsibilities of teachers. The school principals and teachers helped to schedule the observations and interviews.

Ten classrooms in the public school (School A) and 8 classrooms in the private school (School B) were randomly selected for a full day of observation. Hour-long semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 teachers whose classrooms were also observed. In School B, 7 of 8 teachers were interviewed; in School A, 6 of 10 teachers were interviewed. The rest of the teachers said that they did not have time for interviews. In School B, a focus group was conducted with a team of counselors, at their request. Data were collected in June 2012.

Observations and interviews were conducted by graduate student researchers studying elementary education and trained by the principal investigator. Training took place in four elementary schools similar to the schools participating in the study, through joint observations and working to achieve reliable consensus. In order to understand the general classroom atmosphere, *Indicators of Orderly Classroom* was used (Gol-Guven 2013, 2014, 2016; Golly & Snead, 2004). The tool helped to describe some components such as classroom layout and design, order in routines, students' behaviors and interactions, and student participation in decision making. To foster systematic observation of Lions Quest and related instruction, eight main program applications were identified; indicators of positive use are summarized in Table II. Grounded theory sorting and coding strategies were used to analyze the interview data (Glaser, 1992). Constant comparison selective coding was then used to generate codes, which were then grouped to create final themes.

**Table II. Observation rubric for Lions Quest Program – Positive Examples**

<p><b>The use of Q-Bear (program mascot)</b> Effective use by students by interacting with it. Teachers use it in their lessons. It is available most of the time. The usage is appropriate to its aim. Treated as a classroom member.</p> <p><b>Problem solving</b> Children have a chance to solve their own problems while teachers are available for any help. Teachers provide time and space for children to talk about their concerns or issues. Children are encouraged to be a part of the solution.</p> <p><b>Use of energizers (group games)</b> Energizers are used by teachers to develop group dynamics. Collaborative and cooperative games are used. Teachers use energizers to collect children's attention back again.</p> <p><b>Following the rules</b> Teachers provide space and time for children to establish and follow the rules. Teachers wait for students to remind the rules to each other if not followed.</p> <p><b>Positive decision making</b> Teachers help children make healthy and positive decisions by providing in class activities (e.g., healthy life style, protecting oneself from harmful situations). Children give positive feedback to teachers about these activities.</p> <p><b>Asking for help</b> Children ask for help from friends and teachers.</p> <p><b>Diversity of groups</b> Techniques are used by teachers to help children have chances to be in a variety of small groups.</p> <p><b>Understanding and expressing emotions</b> Children are free to express their emotions. Children indicate that they understand other's emotions. Teachers encourage children to express emotions in class.</p>
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## Results

*Teachers' views of program and implementation.* Interviews showed positive views of the teachers about the program content and educational practices of the program. Most teachers in School A felt that the most impressive part of the training was their role in the training seminars. Some participants referred to their years in teaching and indicated that they were involved in frequent in-service seminars, yet found the Lions Quest seminars to be a source of new skills they could apply in their classrooms. Teachers also recommended that continued mentoring following the training seminars, such as visits of program experts during the school year, would increase the likelihood of implementing the program in the classrooms. Concerns included having a separate lesson time for the program, and feeling threatened in their classroom authority, in that students should behave well because they were asked to do so by their teachers. When asked about implementation, teachers did not seem to grasp the developmental aspects of the curriculum and seemed more inclined to use activities to meet immediate needs; in the absence of those needs, or in terms of preventing problem behaviors like drug use, teachers preferred not to implement program components. For example, although the Quest Bear (Q-Bear) is expected to be used as a classroom prompt, it was used in a more behavioristic way, being given to students who behaved well or to withdraw in situations where the students behave negatively. In School B, the teachers said creating random groups helped students know each other better and broke up peer cliques and same-gender groups.

*Classroom Observations.* Physical space, layout, rules about posting materials, and organization of interest centers varied within and between schools, and affected elements of program implementation. Also important was the role of the teacher in conflictual situations. The supportive role of the teacher in problem solving is one of the main components of Lions Quest. Instead of paying attention to negative behaviors, the teachers' task is to help students start positive interactions and become responsive to their peers by showing genuine effort to build relationships. However, opposite behaviours were observed on multiple occasions. More generally, the program suggests a variety of strategies to create a positive atmosphere, but these were not seen frequently in the program classrooms. It became clear that pre-established norms would require more training and support to become dislodged and better aligned with Lions Quest Program values and pedagogy.

Table III presents a summary of the main findings from the interviews and classroom observations for each of the two schools.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Within the schools willing to participate in this study, there was variety in program implementation. In School A, teachers made individual decisions about when and how to carry out lessons, while School B's personnel decided to have a 40-minute lesson every week. Regardless of implementation, there was a lack of acceptance of the program. The teachers in both schools appeared to be assigning primary responsibility for developing SEL skills to the families and were most likely to attribute positive change in behaviors to children's becoming more mature. These findings suggest that even though the training was well received, it was not sufficient to be applied in the classrooms.

**Table III. Summary of findings from interviews and observations in School A and School B**

School A	School B
<b>Interviews</b>	
Suggestions for the training seminar	Suggestions for the program content, the areas needing improvement and integrating the program to the curriculum
Q-Bear was used in a system of praise and punishment.	Q-Bear was not made available for children during class day. It was used in the Lions Quest lessons.
No specific examples related to the program were provided.	Specific examples were provided and observed.
Developing SEL skills is related to family, maturity, and learning classroom routines	Developing SEL skills is related to maturity and learning classroom routines; supporting SEL teaching at school needs to be supported by families.
Random grouping was not used.	Random grouping was used.
Energizers were not used.	Do not need energizers, students are already active.
<b>Observations</b>	
Physical layout, organization, materials, visual signs such as rules and daily plans seemed to be inadequate.	Physical layout, organization, materials, visual signs such as rules and daily plans seemed to be adequate.
No systematic ways of program implementation	Program was implemented by using the available lesson plans, but ownership of the program was unclear.
Incidents of teachers' negative attitudes towards conflicts and problems are observed.	Evidence of some examples of providing models for conflict resolution and problem solving, but teachers seemed to be didactic.
	Decision making is not perceived as a process, students' knowing the right answer is pursued by teachers
	Positive feedback about students' effort is provided by the teachers to encourage participation and effort.

Zins and Elias (2007) stated that all personnel in a school need to agree on the 'value' of the program before undertaking implementation, and there must be organizational readiness for it. Similarly, Domitrovich et al. (2008) found that if teachers do not see the value of a skill or a lesson, they may skip even the core elements of the program.

An important lesson in the Turkish implementation context is that beyond training, teachers need specific guidance and ongoing support in how to fit an SEL program into their school day and routine. Otherwise, generalization is unlikely to occur (Berkowitz, 1999). Elias and Mocerri (2012) stated that if the context does not support it, skills taught in SEL curricula cannot be reflected in students' behaviors and therefore teachers will not perceive a benefit. This appears to be true in the pilot schools, and perhaps may be

even more true in the schools unwilling to participate in the study. Teachers underlined the need to receive external support from the program experts. More understanding of program rationale and content and ongoing support, as well as in-class demonstrations, are important to ensure the quality of program fidelity (Lane, Mahdavi, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003).

The main limitation of the study is that only two volunteer schools were observed. The findings of this study should be interpreted with great caution due to time and sampling limitations. The study was conducted in Istanbul, which also limits generalizability. Nevertheless, it is clear that systematic research into the nature and extent of SEL implementation in Turkish schools, whether through Lions Quest or other program, is an essential step for future progress in SEL development in school. For that research, more systematic ways of data collection and program evaluation are recommended. The findings from this pilot can be used to create more structured interview questions, to test hypotheses generated by this study. Program fidelity and integrity studies will need to have longer time frames, as well as ways of understanding the process by which a program is considered for adoption and actually comes to enter a particular school. SEL skills are still highly relevant to Turkish youth and the challenges they face, but it is clear that each school must approach implementation with appreciation and guidance for adaptation to specific school and cultural contexts, and that programs chosen for implementation must include provisions for ongoing implementation support beyond the training.

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