PREFERENCES WRITING TOPICS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

In this study, it is aimed to determine secondary school students' preference of writing topics. The survey model was used in the study. The participants of the study consisted of 100 secondary school students (56 girls, 44 boys) studying in the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade levels. Student Information Form and Student Preferences Evaluation Tool were used as data collection tools in the study. During the preparation of the evaluation instrument, a systematic process was followed in order to prepare written instructions (topics) to be offered to the students. For this purpose, literature was searched, general writing topics were determined, instructions were prepared, and expert opinions were taken. A total of 15 instructions/topics (five of them were related to persuasive writing, memoir text and informative text) were created. The instructions are prepared by taking into account the characteristics of the text types. The data were collected by the researchers after necessary legal and ethical permits were taken. The data was analyzed using SPSS software. The obtained data were analyzed by using arithmetic mean (average scores) and total scores. Thus, the most and the least preferred instructions of students were determined regarding the types of memoir, persuasive texts and informative texts. Also, in order to determine whether there is a significant difference between preference scores and grade levels and gender, the one-way ANOVA and Independent Samples t-Test were used. According to findings, similarities were found in terms of students' the most and the least preferred instructions considering the grade variable. There were differences in of students' the most and the least preferred instructions according to gender. However, as a result of the statistical analysis, no significant difference was found in terms of gender and grade levels.

Keywords: writing topics, written expression, preference, secondary school

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1. Introduction

Writing, as a communication tool, is one of the basic skills each student should learn. Learning to write helps students gain many academic skills (Özmen, 2017). Writing skills are widely used in exhibiting behaviors such as knowledge acquisition, self-expression and social interaction (Feldman, 2011; Graham & Harris, 2005). In the process of learning, students often apply writing skills to show what they know (Harris & Graham, 2013). In this aspect, writing skills, which is a basic skill in terms of both academic and general success (Özmen, 2017), have an important role in students' work environment and social life (Graham & Harris, 2005; Uyar, 2016).

Writing skills can be discussed in two dimensions. They can be indicated as the mechanical dimension (the realization of writing) and the content dimension (expression of ideas) (Harley, Truan & Sandford, 1997). The realization of writing is generally related to the formal appearance of the writing. It is an important element of the writing process, but it is the mechanical aspect of writing. Expression of ideas relates to the discovery of a written product and covers the content dimension of the writing process. Written expression can be exemplified in the form of a paragraph, essay, short text, suggestion or report writing (Irwan, Syafei & Marlina, 2018). In order to produce a good writing, it is necessary to perform some procedures such as planning, creating sentences (writing) and reviewing/revising (Hayes & Flower, 1986). In this respect, written expression is described as a highly complex and challenging skill (De La Paz, 2001; Reid & Lienemann, 2006) that requires the use of high-level cognitive skills and metacognitive processes (Englert & Mariage, 2003). In other words, written expression is defined as the realization of a written product by using a combination of some cognitive and metacognitive processes according to the characteristics of the text type (Harris, 1993).

Although the written expression is considered as a general skill, there are many types of text that can be used in writing (Panjaitan, 2013). For example, narrative, memoir, descriptive, argumentative, explanatory, persuasive text are some of them. The text types and the text structures may vary according to the message/subject or the content to be written. In this respect, each genre has a unique function/purpose and usually a different audience (Rex, Koenig, Wormsley & Baker, 1995). In literature, especially in research on writing or written expression, it is seen that different types of texts are used, such as persuasive (e.g. De La Paz, 2001; Ennis, Jolivette & Boden, 2013; Little et al., 2010), narrative (e.g. Alatlı & Servi, 2017; Arı, 2010; Coşkun, 2005; Graham, Harris & Mason, 2005; Sivrikaya & Eldeniz Çetin, 2018), memoir (e.g. Güler Bülbül, 2015), informative (e.g. Figueroa, Meneses & Chandia, 2018; Güzel-Özmen, 2006; Ülper, 2008), argumentative (e.g. Deatline-Buchman & Jitendra, 2006; Figueroa et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2005; Harris, Graham & Mason, 2006). In these studies, students were given specific content(s) and they were asked to create one or more texts. Although the contents given to students are generally expressed as topics, they can be also labeled as theme, instructions, tips, etc. Subjects are usually organized according to the

characteristics of the text type. Although there are no specific range of topics, they range from 5 to 15 subjects.

When the writing or written expression studies are investigated, it is seen that there are studies examining students' preferences about writing topics offered to them (e.g. Arıcı, 2009; Can, 2012; Coşkun, 2005; Çoban & Karadüz, 2015; Güler Bülbül, 2015; Kılıç, 2012; Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ, 2010; Özmen, Selimoğlu & Şimşek, 2015; Seban, 2016; Shippen, Houchins, Puckett & Ramsey, 2007; Tavsanli, 2018; Troia, Graham & Harris, 1999; Zorbaz, 2010). In the aforementioned studies, students are offered a specific number(s) (like 5-10) and their preferences about topics were questioned. For this purpose, the students are also asked to perform Likert Type evaluation and to choose one or more of the topics given. Researchers use the topics that students preferred most or the topics that they give the most points. However, these studies generally examine students' written expression skills in terms of different variables, such as cohesion (e.g. Coşkun, 2005; Çoban & Karadüz), coherence (e.g. De La Paz & Graham, 1997), total writing time (e.g. Guler Bülbül, 2015; Harris et al., 2006; Özmen et al., 2015), text length (e.g. Ennis et al., 2013; Troia et al. (1999) and quality (e.g. Harris et al., 2006; Özmen et al., 2015). In the researches, it was emphasized that the students' topic preferences were applied in order to enable the students to identify the relevant fields (Özmen et al., 2015) and to ensure that they fully reflect their writing skills (Can, 2012). In a writing, it is important to pay attention to students' topic preferences in order to achieve success (Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ, 2010). The topic preferences is also an important variable in improving student performance (Seban, 2016) and to help students like writing (Arıcı & Ungan, 2008).

In the literature, the number of studies examining students' writing preferences is limited (e.g. Arıcı, 2009; Fleming, 1995; Freedman, 1995; Keenan, Solsken & Willett, 1999; Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ, 2010; Peterson, 2000; Seban, 2016; Shippen et al., 2007; Tavşanlı, 2018; Tuck, Bayliss & Bell, 1985). In these studies, Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ (2010) examined the written expressions of primary school students in terms of their topic preferences. Arıcı (2009) evaluated university students' writing in terms of their topic preferences. Seban (2016) examined the writing topics preferred by primary school students with process-based writing education in different text types according to their grade levels and gender variables. Tavşanlı (2018) investigated the primary school students' preferences of text types and topics in writing. Shippen et al. (2007) scrutinized the writing preferences of secondary school students. When the related studies were examined, it was noted that the number of studies conducted in the secondary schools is limited (e.g. Shippen et al., 2007). The study group of this research is composed of middle school students. In this respect, it can be said that the study differs from other studies. The findings of this study will provide general information about secondary school students' preferences of writing topics. It will also provide case studies for researchers who conduct research on persuasive texts, memoirs, and informative texts. In addition, not only will it provide instruction for new writing instructions or topics but it will be a guiding source for teachers. It is expected that it will provide practical information about topic selection or preference in terms of

researchers working on writing and that it will contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in terms of academic research. The main aim of this study is to determine the preferences writing topics of secondary school students. Thus, for this aim, it was investigated for answer to these questions:

1) Is there any significant differences in secondary school students' preferred writing instructions (topics) with respect to gender?
2) Is there any significant differences in secondary school students' preferred writing instructions (topics) with respect to grade levels?

2. Method

2.1. Research Goal and Research Model
This study aims to determine the secondary school students' preferences of writing topics/instructions that were offered to them. In this aspect, survey research method was applied for study design. Survey research aims to collect data for the determination of specific characteristics of a group (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2012). In other words, it is a research approach that depicts a past or still existing situation as it exists (Karasar, 2007). In the survey researches, the characteristics of the participants such as opinions, interests, skills and attitudes are determined and it is carried out on larger sample groups when compared other studies (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012).

2.2. Participants
The participants of the study were secondary school students studying at a government school in Ankara in Turkey, in 2018-2019 academic year. A total of 100 students (25 of each grade levels) participated in the study. 56 (56%) of the participants were females whereas 44 (44%) of them were males (please see Table 1).

Table 1: Participants

	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Total
Female	19	17	11	9	56
Male	6	8	14	16	44
Total	25	25	25	25	100

2.3. Data Collection
Student Information Form and Student Preferences Evaluation Tool were used as data collection tools in the study.

A. Student Information Form
Student Information Form prepared by the researcher includes information on gender, grade levels and school variables.

B. Determining the Instructions

Before developing the data collection tool (Student Preferences Evaluation Tool), written instructions (writing topics) to be offered to the students were prepared. Thus, the below procedures were systematically followed:

1. The researchers firstly decided on the text types. They were persuasive, memoir, and informative texts. In order to determine the writing topics, they examined similar studies in the literature (e.g. Can, 2012; Coşkun, 2005; Çoban & Karadüz, 2015; Güler Bülbül, 2015; Kılıç, 2012; Sallabaş, 2007; Zorbaz, 2010). In addition, they prepared the "Teacher Interview Form" which consists of seven open-ended questions and it was applied to three Turkish teachers working in the Ministry of National Education. Finally, the researchers investigated objectives in Ministry of National Education (2018) Turkish Curriculum together with secondary school textbooks.

2. In determination of writing topics, a great attention was paid so that the students were able to reflect themselves in writing comfortably, that topics could be suitable for students' grade levels and life, and that there should be topics students may encounter in their daily lives. Additionally, as a result of teacher interviews, 48 writing topics/themes were determined by the researchers (please see Table 2).

Table 2: Writing Topics List

1. Family	17. About your work at home	33. War / peace
2. Shopping	18. About the places you saw / traveled	34. Respect / love / tolerance
3. Friendship	19. Commitment / responsibility	35. About things you like
4. Atatürk	20. About you do at weekend	36. Travel / journey
5. To accomplish/achieve	21. About lost items	37. Street animals
6. About an incident you are experiencing	22. About your clothes	38. Social behavior
7. Computer / internet / technology	23. Neighborhood	39. Social media
8. About plants / animals	24. About the activities in the library	40. School / student / teacher / grade
9. Republic / democracy	25. Occupations	41. Vehicles
10. Work / Strive	26. Seasons	42. About what you do on holiday
11. Environmental pollution / global warming	27. History / culture / tradition / tradition	43. Helping / sharing
12. Natural events / natural disasters	28. Games / toys	44. Province / place / region you live
13. Accuracy / honesty	29. Award / ceremony	45. Old age / illness
14. About your feelings	30. Special days	46. About what you have learned
15. Earth / planets / space	31. Competition / compete	47. Harmful habits
16. Having fun and joking	32. Formal days	48. Wealth / poverty

3. In line with the specified writing topics, the researchers have set up instructions taking into account the characteristics of the informative (1-5), memoir (6-10) and persuasive (11-15) text types. They wrote a total of 15 instructions with five instructions for each text type (please see Table 3).

Table 3: Instructions

Informative Text	**Instruction 1.**	Behaviors such as acknowledgments, apologies, sharing, collaborating, being interested in others' needs are social skills that people should perform. Choose one of these skills and explain why it is important in human life.
	Instruction 2.	Today, thanks to many technological products such as computers, smart phones, tablets, robots, electric tools and equipment, many things in our lives become easier. Choose a technological product and write by explaining how it ease human life.
	Instruction 3.	Today, there are some situations that negatively affect human life. Environmental pollution, global warming, climate change are some of them. Choose one of these situations and write by explaining how it affects human life
	Instruction 4.	There are many measures to be taken against natural disasters such as earthquake, flood, erosion, avalanche, fire, landslide. Write one of these natural disasters by explaining what needs to be done.
	Instruction 5.	The organs in our bodies (such as the heart, lung, digestive system) have important duties for human life. Choose one of them and write by explaining why it is important in human life
Memoir	**Instruction 6.**	Imagine a moment in your life where you feel so happy. This could be a day you spent with your family, or a day when you were doing something that you wanted to do for a long time. Write a memoir of one of those times when you're happy in your life.
	Instruction 7.	Remember a moment when you take responsibility in your life. It can be a pet feeding, making presidency etc. Write an interesting moment with its details in one of these times when you take responsibility.
	Instruction 8.	Remember an event you have on your summer holiday and makes you happy. This may be a fun event when you spend time with your friends or go to summer school, as well as what you feel when you read a book. Write a story about this fun event you've had during your summer vacation.
	Instruction 9.	Remember what you did last feast. This may be something you do when you visit family elders, or something fun with your friends. Write an interesting moment in the summer.
	Instruction 10.	Think of a moment that hurts you or that you're upset. This can be a moment when you get a note from a test or a break with a friend you love so much. Write a moment by thinking about one of these times.
Persuasive Text	**Instruction 11.**	The school board and the school management are holding meetings for students to make decisions about wearing casual dress instead of uniforms. You want a casual dress at school. Write a letter to the school community and the school administration to convince them about the adoption of casual dress procedure.
	Instruction 12.	Your family wants to help the street animals, but opposes the idea of feeding animals at home. You want to feed a pet like a cat or a dog at home. Write a letter to convince your family to feed a pet at home.
	Instruction 13.	At school, teachers and administrators are holding meetings about setting new rules for homework. They want to give more homework to students. Write a letter to them in order to convince the school administration to give less homework.
	Instruction 14.	Parent-teacher association and canteen management are holding meetings about prices in the canteen. You think the prices in the canteen are high and you want the prices to be lowered. Write a letter to the school family and canteen authorities to convince them about the prices.
	Instruction 15.	Teachers will choose the students who will work in a project related to the protection of endangered animals (such as panda, bald ibis). You want to take part in the project team. Write a letter to convince your teachers to let you join the project team.

4. The written instructions were presented to the experts from the fields of Turkish Education (n=8). The experts were asked to evaluate the instructions as "1: Never suitable, 2: Not suitable, 3: Partially suitable, 4: Suitable, 5: Very suitable." Necessary arrangements were made on the instructions in line with feedbacks of the experts. In addition, the scores given to the instruction by the experts were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Total Scores Given to the Instruction According to Expert Opinion

Text	Instructions	Total Score	Mean
Informative Text	Instruction 1.	31	3,8
	Instruction 2.	36	4,5
	Instruction 3.	33	4,1
	Instruction 4.	34	4,2
	Instruction 5.	33	4,1
Memoir	Instruction 6.	36	4,5
	Instruction 7.	40	5
	Instruction 8.	32	4
	Instruction 9.	33	4,1
	Instruction 10.	35	4,3
Persuasive Text	Instruction 11.	30	3,7
	Instruction 12.	36	4,5
	Instruction 13.	29	3,6
	Instruction 14.	28	3,5
	Instruction 15.	30	3,7

C. Student Preferences Evaluation Tool

The Student Preferences Evaluation Tool was prepared by the researcher in order to determine the students' instruction preferences. The instruments consisted of three parts including a total of 15 instructions related to memoir, persuasive and informative texts (each part contains five instructions). The scoring of the evaluation tool was graded as 5-point Likert: 1) I never want, 2) I don't want, 3) I partially want, 4) I want, 5) I'd want to. In this context, the lowest score that can be taken from each part is 5 and the highest score is 25. The lowest point that can be obtained from the whole instrument is 15 and the highest score is 75.

2.4. Data Collection

In order to collect the data, the researchers visited the schools in which they applied the evaluation tool to the students. In this context, a study was carried out each grade (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade levels). In those studies, the researchers gave information about the work to be carried out and the evaluation tool to be distributed. Then, the evaluation tool was distributed and student were asked to respond it according to their instruction preferences. After the volunteer students filled out the evaluation tools, they were collected. As a result, 100 forms were gathered. During the data collection process, necessary legal and ethical permits were obtained. The legal permission was obtained from the Ministry of National Education. The ethical approval was taken from the Gazi University Ethics Committee.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS software. In order to evaluate the responses given by the participants to the student preferences evaluation tool, average scores (arithmetic mean) and total scores were analyzed. For this purpose, regarding the obtained scores of the students (n=100) on the evaluation tools, the total preference scores of the texts were reached by calculating each text type separately. In addition, the scores of each instruction were determined according to the answers of the students. Also, in order to determine whether there is a significant difference between preference scores and grade levels and gender, the one-way ANOVA and Independent Samples t-Test were used. Before the analysis of the data, tests of normality of the data were examined. The one-group Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was first used to analyze the distribution of the data, and the coefficients of skewness were investigated. Then, t-test was used to determine whether the students' preference scores vary by gender. ANOVA was used to determine whether students' preference scores vary by grade levels.

3. Results

3.1. Findings Related to Grade Levels

In the study, the total scores of students' instructions preferences related to informative texts, persuasive texts and memoir in terms of the grade levels were presented in Table 5. When the total scores of persuasive text were investigated, Instruction 2 (374 points) and Instruction 3 (353 points) were the most preferred ones. Instruction 4 was the least preferred one, with a score of 313. Considering the scores of the students' preferences of instructions related to Memoire, students were noted to prefer Instruction 6 and Instruction 7 the most with a total score of 393 and 365 respectively. The least preferred one was Instruction 10 with a score of 247. Regarding persuasive text, student mostly preferred Instruction 12 (387 score) and then Instruction 15 (359 score). In total, Instruction 11, which received 306 points, was the least rated one.

Table 5: Total Scores of Students' Instruction Preferences According to Grade Levels

Instructions		Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Total Score
Informative Text	Instruction 1.	93	80	90	85	348
	Instruction 2.	93	91	96	94	374
	Instruction 3.	89	74	98	92	353
	Instruction 4.	76	75	91	71	313
	Instruction 5.	88	84	92	74	338
Memoir	Instruction 6.	101	98	98	96	393
	Instruction 7.	96	87	93	89	365
	Instruction 8.	96	94	89	84	363
	Instruction 9.	85	81	97	94	357
	Instruction 10.	69	70	55	53	247
Persuasive Text	Instruction 11.	84	73	70	79	306
	Instruction 12.	96	96	108	87	387
	Instruction 13.	80	90	87	87	344
	Instruction 14.	90	71	83	68	312
	Instruction 15.	87	79	96	97	359

One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether students' preference scores vary by grade levels. The related statistics were shown in Table 6. Table 6 have shown that no significant differences were found in the students' preference scores by grade levels (F=1,809; p=,151, F=,328; p=,805, F=,656; p=,581, p>.05). In other words, preference scores of the students in different grade levels were similar on all of the instructions categories (informative text, memoir, persuasive text).

Table 6: Results of the ANOVA of Whether the
Students' Preference Scores Vary by Grade Levels

Instructions	Grade Levels	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p.
Informative Text	Grade 5	25	17,56	5,323	Between Groups	92,520	3	30,840	1,809	,151
	Grade 6	25	16,16	4,170	Within Groups	1636,720	96	17,049		
	Grade 7	25	18,68	3,544	Total	1729,240	99			
	Grade 8	25	16,64	3,147						
Memoir	Grade 5	25	17,88	4,630	Between Groups	19,310	3	6,437	,328	,805
	Grade 6	25	17,20	4,133	Within Groups	1881,440	96	19,598		
	Grade 7	25	17,28	4,605	Total	1900,750	99			
	Grade 8	25	16,64	4,319						
Persuasive Text	Grade 5	25	17,48	4,042	Between Groups	31,760	3	10,587	,656	,581
	Grade 6	25	16,36	3,717	Within Groups	1549,600	96	16,142		
	Grade 7	25	17,76	3,722	Total	1581,360	99			
	Grade 8	25	16,72	4,532						

3.2. Findings Related to Gender

In the study, the scores of students' instruction preferences related to gender variable were presented in Table 6. When Table 6 was examined, differences were observed in the most and the least-preferred instructions related to informative texts, persuasive texts and memoir in terms of male and female students. Thus, the most preferred instruction by the male students were Instruction 2 for informative text, Instruction 7 for the memoir and Instruction 15 for persuasive text. The least preferred was Instruction 4 (informative), Instruction 10 (memoir) and Instruction 11 (persuasive). While the most preferred choice of female students were Instruction 1 (informative), Instruction 6 (memoir) and Instruction 12 (persuasive), the least preferred ones were Instruction 2 for informative text, Instruction 7 for memoir, and Instruction 15 for persuasive text.

Table 7: Total Scores of Students' Instruction Preferences According to Gender

Instructions		Male	Female	Total Score
	Instruction 1.	153	195	348
	Instruction 2.	202	172	374
Informative Text	Instruction 3.	161	192	353
	Instruction 4.	137	176	313
	Instruction 5.	149	189	338
	Instruction 6.	161	232	393
	Instruction 7.	221	144	365
Memoir	Instruction 8.	162	201	363
	Instruction 9.	166	191	357
	Instruction 10.	101	146	247
	Instruction 11.	122	184	306
	Instruction 12.	180	207	387
Persuasive Text	Instruction 13.	150	194	344
	Instruction 14.	134	178	312
	Instruction 15.	196	163	359

t-Test was conducted to determine whether students' preference scores vary by gender. The related statistics were shown in Table 8. Table 8 have shown that students' preference scores in the all of instructions did not vary significantly by gender (t(98)=,279; t(98)=,437; t(98)=,600; p>.05). In other words, the students of different gender had similar preference scores on all of the instructions categories (informative text, memoir, persuasive text).

Table 8: Results of the t-Test of Whether the the Students' Preference Scores Vary by Gender

Instructions	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	sd	t	p.
Informative Text	Female	56	16,85	4,261	98	-1,088	,279
	Male	44	17,77	4,062			
Memoir	Female	56	16,94	4,649	98	-,780	,437
	Male	44	17,63	4,035			
Persuasive Text	Female	56	16,89	3,691	98	-,526	,600
	Male	44	17,31	4,386			

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to determine the secondary school students' preferences of writing topics/instructions that were offered to them. In this context, preferences of writing topics of 100 students were taken. Students' preferences were evaluated in terms of three types of texts (memoir, informative text, persuasive text) according to their grade levels and gender. The results were discussed within the framework of the literature.

In the study, there seems to be a similarity in the students' most preferred instructions (preferences score) related to informative texts, persuasive texts and memoir according to the grade levels. Although there are some minor differences in total preferences scores, in all grade levels, the most preferred instruction for the informative text was Instruction 2; for the memoir was Instruction 6; for the persuasive text was Instruction 12. While the grade levels were similar in terms of the students'

scores of the least preferred Instruction 4 (informative texts) and Instruction 10 (memoir), there was no coherence between the grade levels in the persuasive text. So we can say that preference scores of the students in different grade levels were similar on all of the instructions categories (informative text, memoir, persuasive text). Also, the results of the statistical analysis show that the preferences scores of the students were not different according to the grade levels. This was similar to the results in the related literature (Arıcı & Ungan, 2008). On the contrary, in terms of the grade levels, it was found that the writing topics preferences of the students differ (e.g. Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ, 2010; Seban, 2016). In this study, written expressions of primary school graders from 1st to 8th as regard to their choice of topics/subjects have been examined. Researchers have emphasized that the preferrences topics/subjects were changed according to the grade levels (Kurudayıoğlu & Karadağ, 2010). The fact that research groups have different characteristics can be considered as a reason for this difference. In addition, the differences in the subjects/topics presented in the researches can be considered as another reason.

In the study, differences were observed in the most and the least-preferred instructions related to informative texts, persuasive texts and memoir in terms of male and female students. This difference was expressed by considering total scores. Considering informative texts, Instruction 1 was the most preferred instruction by female students. The most preferred instruction by the male students was the Instruction 2, which was preferred the least by the female students. Regarding memoir, female students preferred Instruction 3 the most whereas male students preferred Instruction 7 the most. In contrast to male students, Instruction 7 was the least preferred Instruction by female students. For the persuasive texts, female students preferred Instruction 12 the most while male students preferred Instruction 15 the most. While males preferred Instruction 11 the least, females preferred Instruction 15 the least. From this information, it can be mentioned that there were differences between the most preferred and least preferred instruction by female and male students. However, this interpretation was made only in the context of total preference scores of the students. Therefore, statistical analyzes were performed to examine whether there were any significant differences in the study. The results of the statistical analysis show that the preferences scores of the students were not different according to the gender. In other words, the students of different gender had similar preference scores on all of the instructions. These findings were not similar to the results in the related literature. When previous researches on writing preferences were analyzed, it was determined that there were significant differences between male and female students. In many studies, it has been determined that topic preferences of males and females differ from each other (e.g. Fleming, 1995; Freedman, 1995; Keenan et al., 1999; Peterson, 2000; Tavşanlı, 2018; Tuck et al., 1985). For example, in the study conducted by Seban (2016), the topics/subjects preferred by male and female students differentiated. In the study by Arıcı (2009), although some similarities were observed to be in the topics/subjects preferences of female and male students, topics/subjects preference differences emerged

in general. Similarly, Tavşanlı (2018) found that subject preferences differed between male and female students.

Peterson (2006) explains that the topic preference is often addressed in relation to gender. In other words, it is stated that topics/subjects preference are not independent of gender and topics/subjects are selected according to gender when writing (Kamler, 1993). In this study, it was seen that topics/subjects preferences differentiated between male and female students. In this context, when the contents of the students' preferred instruction was investigated, male students were noted to prefer the themes such as technology (e.g. computer, phone, tablet), responsibility and commitment (e.g. class president) while female students preferred social skills (e.g. thanking, apologizing), happiness (memory), and animals. The content of the subjects they selected differed from each other. This finding supports the literature. For example, Keenan et al. (1999) found that male students preferred computer games, car etc. whereas girls preferred toys and clothing. Similarly, according to Seban (2016), while the topics related to vehicles and games were preferred by male, females preferred animals. In general, male students prefer topics of interest or more active rather than romantic or emotional topics. Female students generally prefer social issues. As it is known, girls are more prone to social issues than men (Arıcı, 2009). As a source of such a difference, sociocultural values that are effective in the process of texting are considered. In conclusion, the results of the study have revealed that the gender variable is important in the students' topic preferences.

Finally, in this study aims to determine the secondary school students' preferences of writing topics/instructions that were offered to them. Many instructions have been written for it. In addition, these instructions have been presented to the students. Considering the expert opinions (Table 4), which were found in the method section of the study, a significant similarity could be mentioned between the evaluation scores of the experts and the preference scores of the students. This was considered as a evidence for the validity of the developed instructions. Thus, it can be said that the instructions are suitable for the students studying in the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade levels. In addition, it can be said that the instructions can be used in research related to writing or written expressions.

5. Recommendations

As highlighted in many studies (e.g. Seban, 2016; Tavşanlı, 2018), providing the topic preferences options in writing studies will help students to express themselves more comfortably. In this context, it is important to make plans by considering the gender variable in the studies to be carried out. Thus, students will be able to prefer topics that they are interested in and can write on. Considering gender differences, educators should take note that students are interested in social issues such as politics and history as well as issues about their everyday personal activities such as school lunches and entertainment. The choice of subject is very important in written expression studies. Therefore, the subjects/topics that will allow students to express their thoughts, feelings,

experiments, experiences and knowledge should be selected. It can be said that students should be free to choose the subject in writing.

In this study, it is aimed to determine secondary school students' preference of writing topics. Writing topic preference by gender and school level (e.g. elementary, middle, and high school) should be addressed in future research. There is a need for further research on the relationships between the topic preference and writing performance of students. Students' preferences can be evaluated by creating different instructions. Researchers can use different text genres for it.

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