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**THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS' ON HISTORY IN NON-  
EDUCATIONAL TV SERIES**

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**Abstract**

Television watching rates are increasing day by day in Turkey and television series are occupying a large part of everyday life in rush. Obviously this brings many problems as undermining reading habits of elementary school students. However, children will continue to be exposed to television series without certain precautions and therefore it is possible to think utilization of the existing television programs in the framework of education. In this connection, in the present study, the most popular historical TV series of recent years in Turkey, “Muhteşem Yüzyıl” (The Magnificent Century), was selected as the sample for the data collection in order to explore the perception of history of elementary school students'. The data collected was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings discussed in relation to the possible educative effects of historical non-educational TV series and movies on students' perceptions related to history. Thus, this can be a sample step to turn positive many of the negative effects of television.

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**Keywords:** Education, History, TV series.

## 1. Introduction

The debates on how the history should be taught and even what "history" really is has continued for more than a decade. Apart from the issue of what the history is, it is clear that the purpose of the history education should be not only to teach the past incidents but also to provide understanding of the present time and to offer insights into the future through revealing the phases of human progress (Sungu, 2002). In this regard, in today's world where rapidly growing technology progresses in various different fields, not only the history of education, but also all areas of education is clearly reshaped through the changing technology. In this regard, after Lumiere Brothers held their first screening in 22 December

1895 (Özgüç, 1988) films were started to be produced rapidly and then to be used in education in the first quarter of the 20th century.

The cinema has created a rich, functional and popular language by combining music, literature, theater, painting, dancing, acting, and even architecture (İnce Yakar, 2013). Therefore, the cinema has educational features when even considering just its core structure. Ata (2000) has defined the history education with the following statement: “History education should include all aspects of social life such law, morality, language, literature, painting, music, religion, education, etc.” Considering definitions of the cinema and the history education, it is noteworthy that how much these two definitions made in different regions at different times fit together and overlap.

Nowadays, in information age, schools and formal education have become indistinguishable from cultural environment which is heavily influenced by growing technology (Weinstein, 2001). Therefore, how the history should be taught to students who are raising with advanced audiovisual opportunities has emerged as a major issue for history educators (Çencen & Demir, 2013).

At this point, in order to concretize the process between past and present and to facilitate to express abstract concept of the history lessons, historically themed films and television series could be essential materials for teachers (Çencen & Demir, 2013). Films has also been started to be used for educational purposes in Turkey since 1990s (Demircioğlu, 2007; Öztaş, 2008). In this regard, various studies on this issue have indicated that films and television series have strong positive and negative (Bar-On, Broughton, Buttross, Corrigan, Gedissman, González De Rivas & Hogan, 2001) effects on students’ history perception. Moreover, in order to prevent negative effects of films and series, it is essential to teach critical thinking skills to students (Stoddard & Marcus, 2010). Because throughout history, political powers, social groups and media has tried to influence the relationship between the history and historiography. These influences have led existence of multiple and diverse historiography. Nowadays, this situation is under the control of the media, especially through television programs such as news, documentary and discussions. However, it is clear that films and series reach larger numbers of people than these types of television programs claiming that they address history more objectively (Bilis, 2013). However, it should be noted that films and series are the fictional products. Because these fictional products are interpreted through the perceptions of today’s world and the values of popular culture. Therefore, historical films and series should not take precedence over historical facts and materials. Instead, they should be used to draw a certain extent of attention to the history in a positive manner. In today's world, it is impossible to avoid or stay away from such biased programs; therefore, they should be used for education in an optimum way. On the other hand, how these non-educational films and series should be used in education should be addressed in different studies.

### **1.1. Purpose of the study**

The aim of the present study is to investigate effects of non-educational television series on primary school students’ perceptions of the history through The Magnificent Century, the television series which resounded and caused a lot of debates between 2011 and 2014 in Turkey. Meanwhile, another aim is to determine the role of non-educational films in education through the case of The Magnificent Century.

## 2. Methods

In the present study, a questionnaire developed by researchers was administered in order to determine effects of series on students' perceptions of the history. Participants of this study consisted of primary school students enrolled in fourth grade (n: 150). Data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS using Chi-Square.

## 3. Findings

**Table 1.** Chi-square results: Association between the answers of “Did you ask questions related to the series or did you discuss accuracy of the information derived from it?” and gender

Groups	Gender		Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p
	Girl	Boy				
Yes	15	15	30			
Discussion in the class	Within the groups %	50.0%	50.0%	100,0%		
No	53	29	82	1.972	1	.106
	Within the groups %	64.6%	35.4%	100,0%		
Total	68	44	112			
	Total %	60.7%	39.3%	100,0%		

The results showed that there is no significant association between answers of the question and gender ( $\chi^2(1) = 1.972, p > .05$ ). This finding also revealed that boy and girls are equally interested in the series.

**Table 2.** Chi-square results: Association between whether or not students watch the series and having more curiosity to learn other padishah's life after watching it

Groups	Increment in curiosity		Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p
	Yes	No				
“Yes”	49	14	63			
Watching	Within the groups %	77.8%	22.2%	100,0%		
“No”	53	4	57	10.434	2	.005
	Within the groups %	92.9%	7,1%	100,0%		
“Sometimes”	9	6	15			
	Within the groups %	60.0%	40.0%	100,0%		
Total	111	24	135			
	Total %	82.2%	17.8%	100,0%		

Examining answers of the question “Did you have stronger curiosity and desire to learn other padishahs’ life after the series came out?” revealed that the number of students who indicated that they not only watched the series but also have stronger interest in other padishahs’ life is 49 while the number of students who claimed that they watched it but they did not have more desire to learn other padishahs’ life is 14 ( $X^2=10.434$ ;  $p<.05$ ). On the other hand, some of students who claimed that they did not watch the series asserted that their interest in other padishahs’ life has increased after they watched the series. The essential reason of ambiguousness of this statement resulted from the series’ popularity in Turkey; therefore, almost all people would have opinions about it even if they did not watch. Because the series was featured on the media from news to magazine programs and newspaper almost every day. Therefore, students at the age of 10, who did not watch the series regularly, responded the question as “no” or “sometimes”. These students also responded “the increment in curiosity” question since they had opinions about the series although they indicated that they did not watch it. Therefore, after the series came out, 24 students out of 135 did not have increment in their interest in other padishahs’ life.

**Table 3.** Chi-square results: Association between the answers of “Did you ask questions related to the series or did you discuss accuracy of the information derived from it?” and increment of interest in history lesson after this type of series

Groups	Discussion in the class		Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p
	Yes	No				
“Yes”	26	61	87			
Within the groups %	29.9%	70.1%	100,0%			
“No”	1	35	36			
Increment of interest				13.320	2	,001
Within the groups %	2.8%	97.2%	100,0%			
“A little”	3	24	27			
Within the groups %	11.1%	88.9%	100,0%			
Total	30	120	150			
Total %	36,4%	63,6%	100,0%			

There was an association between students asking questions related to the series or discussing accuracy of the information derived from it in the class and increment of their interest in history lesson ( $X^2=13.320$ ;  $p<.05$ ). However, findings indicated that many students did not ask questions about this topic to their teachers and create discussions about it in the class. Moreover, only 24% of the participants’ interest in history lesson did not increase after the series came out. Results also showed that students knew more about Suleiman the Magnificent (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Percentage: Answer of “Which padishah do you think that you are informed more?”

Abdulhamid	7.5%
Suleiman the Magnificent	90.5%
Murat IV	1.9%

#### 4. Conclusions

The studies about learning suggests that students would learn 10 % of what they read, 20 % of what they hear, 30 % of what they see, 50 % of what they both see and hear, and 90 % of what they both see, hear, touch and tell (Demirel, 2002; Aktaş, 2015; Özmen, Er & Ünal, 2014). In this regard, the present study confirms these data that regardless of the gender, all students' rate of knowing famous people in the history increases through the characters in the series. Having no gender difference makes the use of non-educational films and series more functional (Öztaş, Anıl & Kılıç, 2013; Öztaş, 2008).

Findings show that only 24% of 135 participants' interest in history lesson do not increase after the series has come out. In parallel to this percentage, analyzing and interpreting the content of history themed films and series and even including students as one of the largest audience group to these processes and assisting lessons with films and series could be considered as an effective method to internalize historical knowledge.

However, present study reveals that after primary school students watch the series, although their interest in historical issues has increased, they do not bring these issues into classroom to create discussions and judge the accuracy of what they watch in the films/series. This is one of the major handicaps in child-media relations. On the other hand, considering the fact that the series increases interest in the history, it can be claimed that teachers have great responsibilities on this issue. Teachers should benefit from these positive attitudes and canalize them to the education. Moreover, they should bring the topic into classroom by using popularity of the series, draw students' attention to make them more knowledgeable and challenge them with questions to get students think critically.

Undoubtedly, regardless of age and gender, spending a lot of their time in front of television without adult control affect students' academic achievement negatively (Schmidt, & Vandewatert, 2008). Also it is known the other negative side effects of television (Feshbach, & Singer, 1971). However, students could choose wisely what they watch if their critical thinking skills and media literacy are promoted, and they are not exposed harmful effect if they gain self-control (Tesar, & Doppen, 2006). In this way, non-educational television film and series could be integrated into education (Derelioğlu, & Şar, 2010; Çoban, 2012). Because our findings in parallel to many studies show that films and series, even if they are produced without educational purposes, have positive educational effects on students. In particular, students' higher-order thinking skills which are required in today's world such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation can be promoted by such films. Moreover, students can learn about society by analyzing multifaceted and complex relationships in it (Chansel, 2003).

Films have advantages such as drawing students' attention, making topics interesting, presenting concept visually, and making the history interesting and accessible (Kaya & Çengelci, 2011; Savaş, & Arslan, 2014). Therefore, teachers can correct biased and misleading aspects of films by using these features of them to support the lessons. In order to eliminate aforementioned problems, teachers could get students watch two films having different perspectives on the same topic instead of only one film. Moreover, teachers could get students watch appropriate parts of films instead of the entire movie. Lastly, as mentioned earlier, promoting students' critical thinking skills and media literacy is one of the essential components of using non-educational films/series in education (Walsh, 2009).

If these essential qualifications are assured, use of films will contribute to effective learning and to achievement of students not only in history lessons but also in many other lessons.

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