Providing access to basic literacy education with educational TV

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According to UNESCO statistics, there are approximately 800,000,000 people around the world who are not literate, and two thirds of them are women. These individuals have been denied education, an important basic human right (Unterhalter, 2005), because of various barriers such as economic (poverty), socio-cultural (not allowing girls to go to school) or political (war and immigration). These individuals are falling further behind as the rapid technological advances require more sophisticated literacy proficiencies. In addition to being a basic human right, the access to education has implications for the growth and development of a society, as shown by its link to development indicators such as infant mortality and gross national product (Greaney, 1996; Kağıtçıbaşı, Gülgöz & Gökşen, 2004.)

Currently, there is a renewed interest in using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education (Wagner & Kozma, 2003.) ICT tools can range from closed circuit TV to Internet, with many alternatives in-between. The possibility of reaching a large number of learners using technology is an exciting endeavour that is becoming increasingly more common. In this age of Internet and computers, one overlooked distance education tool is educational TV. Of course, using TV as an educational tool is not new, especially when it comes to children's programming. However, using TV as an educational tool for adults has been more limited. In fact, media researchers are only now beginning to systematically evaluate and discuss the characteristics and impact of the Entertainment-Education (E-E) model (Singhal & Rogers, 2004).

The E-E model uses the telenovela or soap opera form in TV and radio broadcasts and creates characters and situations that are emotionally appealing to the target audience. The characters experience many events in their lives and respond to these issues in different ways, leading to positive or negative outcomes. For example, a program on prevention of domestic violence may tell the story of a woman across many episodes, including instances of violence in her home and how she responds to this situation. Each program includes positive and negative role models as well as models who are in transition, depicted as in the process of changing their behaviour. This form was first utilized by Sabido in 1970s to encourage adults in Mexico to attend literacy classes (Sabido, 2004) and its success has since led to the use of the E-E format in many communities across the world for purposes such as family planning, or prevention of domestic violence, AIDS, smoking (Jason, Tait, Goodman & Buckenberger, 1988; Poindexter, 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 2004). In the E-E methodology, the story format captures the audience's attention and makes it easier to convey the messages that are interwoven through the drama. The goal is to change behaviours through an emotional connection to characters and events, rather than direct, didactic educational messages. Hence the drama theory is used as a guide for effective techniques to set the emotional tone of the program (Sabido, 2004; Sood, Menard, & Witte, 2004). Throughout the episodes, the audience receives continuous exposure to the message as well as information about the relevant resources in their community.

One of the dominant theoretical underpinnings of the E-E model is Bandura's social cognitive theory which states that we learn not only by direct experience, but also through social modelling. Social modelling can serve many different functions. What Bandura (2004) calls the "instructive function" of modelling is observers learning about new styles of behaviours, values and coping strategies as well as about emotional responses and a sense of efficacy through their observations of others, including those on TV or radio. The "motivation function" operates by depicting benefits and detriments of modelled behaviours so that the observers will be motivated to adopt or reject the behaviours as a function of expected outcomes.

Recently with the support and guidance of MOCEF (Mother Child Education Foundation) we have developed an adult literacy TV program in Turkey that uses the basic framework of the E-E model, but also goes beyond it. Our program was unique because we aimed not only to change the attitudes and behaviours of the viewers towards literacy, but also tried to explicitly teach literacy skills. As far as we know, ours is the first E-E adult literacy program attempting to both develop literacy skills as well as to change behaviours and attitude regarding literacy. Previous work on adult literacy as described above, had the goal of encouraging adults to attend literacy classes. Here we actually provided some literacy instruction in addition to encouraging viewers to attend regular literacy classes.

When it comes to using TV for literacy instruction, there are limited implementations and research. Hence, there is a serious gap in our knowledge base about how this very powerful tool can be used to develop the literacy skills of adults with no or minimal schooling. This is ironic because around the world, even the poorest homes have TV sets, but not computers. Even more important, TV is found precisely in the homes of the individuals that are the target of many national literacy campaigns. For example, while developing an E-E program in Turkey on family planning, Yaser (2004) reported that their initial studies conducted in late 1980s indicated that nearly all (93%) of women watched their own or someone else's TV for an average of more than 3 hours daily. The TV viewing habits are likely to be even higher today, twenty years later.

Many individuals around the world, especially women, find it hard to leave their homes to go to literacy classes or to computer centers because of economic and cultural reasons, for example, not being able to travel outside of home easily or not being able to attend classes because of young children or conservative family rules. Interestingly, the ability to attend classes is a serious problem even for adults in more developed cultures. For example, Porter, Cuban, Comings and Chase (2005) found that in one literacy program in the USA, two-thirds of the participants dropped out within six months of enrolling. In sum, leaving home to attend classes is a hurdle for many participants in adult education programs and it is important to explore ways to bring the educational programs to the participants, thus making it more accessible.

The high dropout rate in adult literacy classes can also be explained by motivational and dispositional factors (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 2000; Durgunoğlu, 2003; Ziegler, Bain, Bell, McCallum & Brian, 2006). Adults with limited literacy skills may have never attended school or may have experienced failure and dropped out. Hence, they have low confidence in their abilities to succeed academically in literacy classes. The belief in one's effectiveness to accomplish a task is termed "self efficacy". As Bandura eloquently summarized "unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. ....Human well being and attainments require an optimistic and resilient sense of efficacy because usual daily realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of frustrations, conflicts, impediments, inequities, adversaries, failures and setbacks" (2004,p. 79). In short, sense of self-efficacy affects whether or not individuals will even attempt a task and if they do, how much effort and persistence they will show. This is a self-perpetuating cycle, because as individuals attempt and succeed at a task, their self-efficacy as well as efforts increase, but the opposite happens when there is no attempt or the performance is low due to poor effort and persistence.

In addition to such direct personal experiences, Bandura (2004) proposed that other types of experiences can also influence self-efficacy, namely, social modelling, social persuasion, and

modulation of the physical and emotional states. Social modelling works by providing examples of people similar to oneself persevere and succeed. Social persuasion involves structuring the learning context to provide opportunities to succeed and offering encouragement. Finally, the modulation of physical and emotional states works by reducing fatigue and anxiety and inducing a positive mood, as positive mood is linked with higher self-efficacy.

A literacy program delivered in E-E format on TV rather than in a classroom circumvents some of the serious obstacles faced by potential participants, such as transportation, childcare, inability to leave home. Such a program also provides an opportunity to build self-efficacy through social modelling, social persuasion and by generating a positive mood.

In addition to the basic E-E tenets discussed above, a second pillar of our program was the actual literacy education content. For this, we relied on our existing adult literacy curriculum. Since 1995, we have been working on improving adult literacy levels in Turkey, especially for women. In 1995, we developed a Functional Adult Literacy Program (FALP) which has been implemented all across Turkey through the efforts of MOCEF. We wrote the textbooks for its two levels and evaluated the program multiple times and revised the textbooks and curriculum three times according to the results of the evaluation studies (Durgunoğlu, Öney, Kuşcul & Dağıdır, Aslan, Cantürk & Yasa, 1995; 2000; 2003). Last year we were awarded the UNESCO literacy prize for this work. Although we have reached approximately 65,000 women in 17 provinces in Turkey in the last 11 years, this is still a drop in the bucket considering the needs of millions women who did not go to school for various social and economic reasons.

To introduce literacy concepts to wider audiences, we have adopted FALP to television and developed "Bizim Sınıf" (Our Classroom) in collaboration with a private broadcast company whose TV channel is viewed all across Turkey. E-E scholars stress that in order to understand the characteristics, needs and preferences of the target audience, it is important to do formative research during the planning stages. It is also necessary to conduct evaluative research at the end, to determine the program's effectiveness (Greenberg, Salmon, Patel, Beck, & Cole, 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 2004).

Our formative research was based on our 10-year experience with FALP. We knew our target audience very well based on our evaluation studies (Durgunoğlu, 2000; Durgunoğlu, Öney, & Kuşcul, 2003; Öney, & Durgunoğlu, 2006). In addition, we had information about the TV viewing habits of our target audience (Yaser, 2004). The pre-tests given before Bizim Sınıf aired, indicated that our target audience, on the average, watched 5 hours of TV. Entertainment programs, newscasts and telenovelas were the most popular with 91%, 94% and 96% reporting watching them, respectively. In contrast, only 18% reported watching sports programs.

Bizim Sınıf was developed as a 60-episode program and it was broadcast during the summer of 2005 for 1.5 hours daily on weekdays. It was in the format of an entertainment/women's talk show, with literacy instruction and skits about importance of literacy built into it. The TV program also provided phone numbers as a resource to help people learn more about adult literacy classes in their communities. As the program was airing, we conducted an in-depth evaluation of the program to test its effectiveness in developing both literacy skills as well as social consciousness in the viewers.

The goal of the paper is to (a) describe this TV program in detail, (b) report the evaluation data and (c) discuss the implications for this type of distance education for other regions around the world to increase access to education, a very basic human right.

Characteristics of Bizim Sınıf

The format was a live women's talk show co-hosted by a famous Turkish singer (Kibariye) and a young TV music host (Aysın Zeren). It was broadcast live from the studio with a live audience. The hosts introduced many celebrities, interviewed as well as sang and danced with them. Of the 1.5 hour-long program, about 40 minutes were devoted directly to literacy and math activities and these were distributed across each episode. However, instead of a didactic lesson format, different techniques were used in these educational segments.

Educational components

"The bell rang": This segment was aired from tape as it was filmed in an adult literacy class setting created in the studio. An experienced FALP teacher and 8 women who were actual graduates of a real FALP class enacted the classroom environment. Some of the basic literacy and math instruction (letters, numbers, combining syllables to make words, recognizing and spelling words) was delivered in this environment. How to read, critically evaluate and respond to newspaper articles was also modelled in this context. A newspaper (owned by the same group that owns the TV channel) provided worksheets accompanying the TV program.

This newspaper has one of the highest circulation rates in the country and with its lower price compared to other papers, it is the newspaper of choice for the poorer segment of the society, which was our target audience. These worksheets were distributed as inserts within the newspaper or made available for free for people who requested them. The worksheets were coordinated with the episodes on TV. Within this segment, the teacher encouraged the viewers to complete their worksheets and to read and write along with the "students" in the TV classroom. The teacher also assigned parts of the worksheets as assignments for the viewers to later complete on their own.

Animation: In synchronization with "The bell rang" segment and the worksheets, letters and sounds were also introduced using animation. In these segments, the sound of a letter as well as the steps to print it were highlighted.

Expert guest: During the live broadcast, in addition to celebrity guests, there were also guests who were experts on topics such as women's health, legal rights, education and they were interviewed by the two hosts.

Hasibe & Hafize: Hasibe and Hafize were the names of two sisters-in-law created by writers Muharrem Buhara and Meriç Özen and their colleagues, and portrayed by professional actors. In each episode, which lasted about 10 minutes, the two women got into tragi-comic situations caused by their inability to read and write but their unwillingness to admit this to their families or to each other. The women would pretend to read, but guess at what is written on buses, signs, legal papers and get into trouble for their misunderstandings. Finally in the later episodes, the two women have had enough of the tribulations they have experienced and set out to find an adult literacy class. The goal of these skits were to illustrate the difficulties faced by low levels of literacy and model ways to address the problem, some leading to better outcomes than others.

<h1 style="text-align:center">E-E applications</h1>

Implications of drama theory: One of the factors that made the program attractive to wide audiences was our very skilled scriptwriters. Buhara, Özen and their colleagues have developed several popular TV series (e.g., "Time for Rain") and had a keen sense of drama and character development. They knew the characteristics of the target audience and ways to emotionally engage the audience. They also had experience in educational programs as they had previously collaborated with MOCEF to develop a preschool program ("Will You Play With Me?"). They wrote the Hasibe & Hafize skits and provided valuable input on the integration of the segments. They used lively characters that the audience could readily identify with, two- sisters-in-law and their overbearing mother-in-law, and a healthy dose of humour. The coordinator of the production was Canan Meray, an experienced TV producer who oversaw the taping and live broadcasts to create a seamless whole.

The host and co-host were celebrities that audiences could identify with and aspire to be like (Sood et al., 2004). In fact, the host, Kibariye, was well known across the country for her efforts to develop her literacy skills following serious losses of income. As a famous singer managed by her ex-husband, she had lost a great deal of money when she signed contracts without knowing what they included and was swindled. Her tribulations and later efforts to overcome these problems provided a very real, concrete example to her fans. On the broadcasts, she also explicitly described her experience and encouraged viewers to try hard. The co-host was a well-educated TV personality and provided a model of a modern young woman. In addition, the classroom teacher as well as the students in "The bell rang" were real people who had gone through similar experiences. The live broadcast and the studio audience brought a high level of energy to the program. There was music, dancing, and celebrity interviews. To summarize, in line with social modelling principles the characters (real or created) had many similarities to the viewers so that the viewers could identify with and emulate them. In addition, there was explicit persuasion to develop literacy skills and plenty of opportunities to practice and succeed using the worksheets. Finally, the lively, upbeat atmosphere as well as the humour set a very positive emotional tone.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Empowerment component</h2>

In addition to the basic literacy and numeracy concepts, the program also had an empowerment component, discussing topics such as preventive healthcare, civics and participation in society, human relationships, and the importance of literacy. This component included interviews with experts in that topic. The literacy, numeracy and empowerment components were based on our existing adult literacy curriculum.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Literacy content</h2>

Because of the limited amount of time was available, we introduced some very basic literacy skills. In order to read and write efficiently, individuals need to have two basic building blocks in place (Hoover & Gough, 1990): They need to understand the spoken language of their community (listening comprehension) and also know how this spoken language is represented in written form (decoding). The importance of these two building blocks can be illustrated by the following two examples: Most of the people with very limited literacy skills can understand their home language perfectly well (listening comprehension) but cannot read it. Likewise one can decode words in a foreign language if given some basic spelling-sound rules, and sound native-like and yet not understand a single word that one decoded. For our particular target audience, decoding and some basic math was the more urgent need and we focused on that most. Turkish

has a transparent orthography with very consistent spelling-sound correspondences. In addition, syllable is a well-defined and salient unit (Durgunoğlu, 2006; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 1999; Öney & Durgunoğlu,1997). We have exploited these linguistic characteristics of oral and written Turkish and included the following sub skills in the program:

- Letters and their sounds

- Hearing the sounds in words (phonological awareness)

- Creating syllables from sounds and joining syllables

- Decoding words, sentences

- Spelling words

- Reading some common signs in the environment (on buses, stores, hospitals...)

- Recognizing numerals

- Reading and writing numbers with several digits

- Telling time, reading calendar entries (day/month/year)

- Recognizing bills and coins

- Reading a paper and recognizing its subsections

Evaluation of Bizim Sınıf

Methods

Participants:

Before the program started broadcasting we sampled 237 women in Istanbul with no or less than 2 years of education. There were equivalent numbers of women in age groups of 15-30; 31-45; and 45+. These women received the pre-test assessing their literacy and numeracy knowledge and attitudes towards some empowerment topics such as sending girls to school. There was also an initial interview to get information on the education and family backgrounds of the participants as well as their literacy and numeracy needs. Throughout the summer, the women were interviewed 3 times by phone to determine their viewing patterns and to encourage them to watch the program if they have not been doing so consistently. After 3 months, at post-test, the participants were given the same literacy, numeracy and empowerment tests and a new survey. This new survey asked their views and suggestions regarding the program.

Complete pre and post-tests were available from 111 of these women. Therefore the results for this group are reported here.

Measures

Pre and post-tests were identical and included the following tasks:

1. naming the 12 upper and lower-case letters (maximum score:12)

2. writing the 6 letters named by the researcher (maximum score:6)

3. reading 12 words (maximum score:12)

4. spelling the 6 words read by the researcher (scored by giving credit to each correct letter and correctly placed letter. (Maximum score: 54)

5. naming 12 numbers (ranging from 1-6 digits) (maximum score:12)

6. writing 6 numerals (ranging from 1-5 digits) (scored by giving credit to correct placement of digits and correct numerals maximum score: 39)

7. reading 6 sentences and orally answering a comprehension question given by the researcher about each sentence (maximum score: 6)

8. empowerment, listening to 8 scenarios (for example, a parent not sending her daughter to school) and rating from 1-5 (very likely) how similar their own behaviour would be to that of the individual in the scenario. The data were coded so that the maximum score of 40 indicated fully identifying with a positive behaviour.

Results

Basic demographics:

   The majority of the participants (87%) was married, with an average of 3.3 children. 95% did not work outside the home. 67% reported not going to school at all and 25% reported going less than 2 years. 51% reported not knowing how to read and write and 49% reported knowing just a little. Out of the 60 episodes of the program, 53% watched at least 30 episodes. As E-E theorists have discussed, the affective response of the viewers plays an important role in the success of a program. When we asked the reviewers how much they liked the program, an overwhelming majority (99%) reported that they would have continued watching the program if there were more episodes. As summarized in Table 1, 95% reported liking or very much liking it. The most watched segments were The Bell Rang, Hasibe & Hafize and Animation with 99%, 96% and 89% of the viewers watching those segments, respectively. However, the participants clearly stated that they would have preferred less music and celebrity interviews and more of the educational segments The Bell Rang, Hasibe & Hafize and Animation.

Table 1. Program ratings as reported by the participants

How much did you like the TV program?

	frequency	percent
liked very much	74	**67**
liked	31	**28**
neutral	2	2
disliked	4	4
disliked very much	0	0

Percent of participants reported watching a specific segment of the TV program

segment	watched	Did not watch
The bell rang	99	1
Hafize/Hasibe	96	4
Songs and music	88	12
Expert guest	83	17
Celebrity interview	82	18
Animation	89	11

Percentage of participants who preferred that the program contained more (or less) of a segment

segment	more	less
The bell rang	**99**	1
Hafize/Hasibe	**92**	8
Songs and music	26	**74**

Expert guest	**76**	24
Celebrity interview	25	**75**
Animation	**87**	13

Self reported changes, future goals

Another survey question asked "From now on, what are you planning to do to read and write better? This also was an open-ended question. Table 2 presents the frequency of responses (Some individuals listed more than one skill so the total is more than 111). Except for 9 people, every participant reported some sort of activity that they are planning to do to develop their literacy skills further. These activities included attending adult literacy classes, studying on their own and asking the children for help.

Table 2. Frequency of responses to the question "From now on, what are you planning to do to read and write better?"

	frequency
Attend a literacy class	37
Work at home and read books and newspapers	35
Learn from my children	15
Watch the TV programs	16
Go to school and get a diploma	1
Nothing	9
Other	2
Total number of responses	115

On the survey, the participants were asked to list what they learned as a result of watching Bizim Sınıf. This was an open-ended question and the responses were categorized and tallied. Table 3 presents the frequency of responses. (Most individuals listed more than one skill so the total is more than 111). The variety of responses indicate that the viewers learned some basic literacy proficiencies, thus signalling that the targeted content was delivered successfully.

Table 3. Frequency of skills reported as being learned after watching the program.

		frequency
Decoding	Letters	52
	Syllables, blending sounds	24
	Reading words	7
	Reading sentences	4
Reading/writing	Learned to read and write	4
	Improved my reading and writing	5
	Improved my writing	8
Functional	Signature, reading invoices	3
	Reading addresses	1
	Writing own name	12
Math	Numbers	37
	Simple arithmetic	5
	Shopping, telephone numbers, dates	5
empowerment	Detriments of illiteracy	4
	Learning new knowledge	2
nothing		13
Total number of responses		186

However, we did not only rely on self reports of growth. We also gave actual literacy tasks to document growth empirically. Table 4 presents the pre and post-test comparisons on identical tasks. Because of multiple comparisons, the Bonferroni correction was used and a more conservative p<.006 level was used to determine statistical significance.

Table 4. Means (and standard deviations in parentheses) of pre- and post-tests

test	maximum	Pre-test mean (sd)	Post-test mean (sd)	t-value
Letter recognition	12	7.17 (4.7)	9.19 (3.8)	6.64[*]
Letter writing	6	3.26 (2.6)	4.14 (2.4)	5.41[*]
Word recognition	12	4.23 (4.7)	6.07 (5.2)	6.49[*]
Word spelling	54	20.06 (21.6)	25.09 (2.3)	5.54[*]
Number recognition	12	4.33 (5.3)	5.32 (3.4)	1.89[*]
Number writing	39	15.35 (16.3)	20.42 (16.3)	5.84[*]
Sentence reading	6	1.31 (1.9)	2.59 (2.6)	6.69[*]
Empowerment	40	30.94 (3.8)	29.84 (3.4)	2.37 ns

[*]$p < .006$ (with Bonferroni corrections for multiple comparisons)

Except for recognizing numbers, there was significant growth on all literacy measures. These results are even more remarkable given that the education component was only a 40- minute part of a daily entertainment program during the 3-month broadcast period. However, such a short education component was not very effective for the empowerment purposes as indicated by lack of change in attitudes. There was no significant change in attitudes assessed by the empowerment scenarios.

Conclusions

These results indicate that our pilot adult literacy program broadcast on national TV was quite successful in developing basic literacy and numeracy skills. These results are even more remarkable given that the literacy component was only a 40-minute part of an entertainment program. However, the TV program was adopted from an already-established and well-evaluated program of literacy delivered in the classrooms. This existing knowledge base was very useful in creating an effective TV program. However, such a short literacy component was not very effective for the empowerment purposes as indicated by lack of change in attitudes. The empowerment component should have been integrated better into the entertainment sections (for example, when guest artists are interviewed�) and lengthened. Also it might have been better to focus on one or two topics (e.g., AIDS or legal rights) and integrate only those topics consistently across the episodes, with multiple repetitions in different contexts.

The educational components were created with the E-E model in mind, creating a warm, emotionally engaging program rather than didactic lessons. The evaluation data indicated that the participants both thoroughly enjoyed and, more importantly learned from these segments. In hindsight, we realized that the pure entertainment sections (songs, dances, celebrity gossip) could have been considerably reduced without the program losing its emotional impact and interest value. Educators and media professionals have very different perspectives and when they work on a project such as this, a certain level of discomfort and compromise is to be expected. As Singhal and Rogers stated "Time-tested media formulae generate audience ratings and profits. Commercial broadcasters fear that advertisers and audiences will be turned off if a radio or television program is perceived as playing an educational role." (2004, p.13.)

This pilot program, with its promising results, is a good starting point to discuss how the powerful medium of TV can be used to deliver adult literacy programs to reach more of the 800,000,000 individuals (mostly women) around the world. The future studies and discussions need to address issues such as the curriculum, which type of viewer tends to benefit the most from this medium of instruction, how to make the viewers active participants, finding common ground with different stakeholders, especially broadcast companies who may have different goals and a stronger interest in the ratings of the program compared to educators. Despite the unknowns and possible sources of tension among stakeholders, educational TV incorporating a solid educational content within the framework of a E-E model has proven to be a valuable and effective resource to provide access to basic education, a fundamental human right.

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