

Opinions of Primary School Principals on Pre-School Education: An Example of the Zonguldak Province

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the views of primary school principals regarding pre-school education. The study was carried out with ten primary school principals in the city of Zonguldak during the 2021-2022 academic year. The case study method, one of the qualitative research types, was used in the research. Based on the purpose of the research, the semi-structured interview technique was used to collect the data. A personal information form and an interview form prepared by the researchers were used to collect data in the study. In the research, it used the content analysis technique for the data obtained as a result of the semi-structured interviews. When the findings are examined, it shows that the primary school principals involved had positive perceptions regarding pre-school education. The primary school principals stated that pre-school education supports a child's psychomotor, linguistic, and cognitive development, and facilitates the preparation of children for primary school and their adaptation to school. Having a qualified pre-school educational institution in suitable conditions for children with interior and exterior space, it was stated that physical conditions and equipment should be planned in such a way that children can move freely. Some say that pre-school teachers should love their profession, be tolerant, give importance to their professional development, establish good relations with children and be role models to make pre-school education qualified. It was stated that the school principals had budget problems in pre-school education. They said that they sought support from the school-parent union and collected dues to solve these problems. Preparing physically suitable environments to carry out pre-school education more effectively, they expressed their suggestions to have auxiliary personnel, not to provide uninterrupted training, and to allocate the budget.

Keywords: Pre-school education program, legislation, school principal, pre-school teacher.

Introduction

The first six years of a child's life are an important stage in the youngster's existence. During this period, children gain the skills that form the cornerstones of their physical, cognitive, and emotional lives. The 0-6 age period, called the 'pre-school period', is a period of rapid development. Unique aspects of development in the pre-school period are highly correlated with each other (Oktay, 2000, p.111). Since it is a period in which children's learning and

abilities develop rapidly, it affects the child's life positively or negatively. Therefore, it should not be left to chance (Özkaya, 2018, p.1).

The importance of pre-school education in providing preparation for primary education achievements has been revealed in the national education legislation and certain research related to the subject. Through the purposes and duties of pre-school education, by the general aims and basic principles of Turkish National Education, it is determined as ensuring the physical, mental and emotional development of children and the gaining of good habits, their preparation for primary education, a common growth environment for children from unfavourable environments and families, and the correct and good speaking of Turkish (MEB, 1973). Here, it can be seen that pre-school education aims to prepare youngsters for primary education. Looking at the literature, it is understood that the pre-school education children receive before they start primary school significantly affects their next education life. Gögebakan (2011, p. 165) determined that children should go to a pre-school education institution before they start primary school, and that the pre-school education that children receive affects their later education positively. Kırık&Kazu (2019, p. 72) determined in a study that pre-school education gains are noticeable in primary education and that teachers can observe the effects of these gains.

The functioning of the institutions serving the pre-school period in Turkey is regulated according to the Regulation on Primary Education and Pre-School Institutions of the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2014). These institutions are independent kindergartens, nursery classes within primary schools, and practice classes within vocational and technical high schools, all of which are under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Basic Education. The most common pre-school education institutions across the country are nursery classes operating within primary schools. For this reason, primary school principals play an important role in the quality of pre-school education. The main purpose of this research is to reveal the views and approaches of school principals working in primary schools with nursery classes towards pre-school education. In line with this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the aims and realization conditions of pre-school education according to the opinions of the primary school principals who have nursery classes?
2. According to the opinions of the school principals, what are the positive and negative aspects of pre-school education in primary school?

3. What are the opinions and suggestions of the primary school principals who have nursery classes to carry out pre-school education practices in primary schools more effectively and efficiently?

Method

Research Design and Working Group

The research is qualitative research and the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. The working group of the research comprises school principals working in primary schools in the central district of Zonguldak Province in the 2021-2022 academic year. The purposive sampling method was used while forming the study group. Purposeful sampling allows for an in-depth study of situations that are thought to provide rich information to the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018: 118). With the determination of the study group, an attempt was made to consider diversity in terms of variables, such as age, gender, and professional seniority of the participants. The real names of the school administrators who took part in the interview were not used; (P), who stated that the participants were principals were coded using the letters (M) and (W) expressing their gender and numbers expressing the order of the interview.

Data Collection and Data Collection Tool

The semi-structured interview technique, which is one data collection method used in qualitative research, was used to collect the research data. It used a semi-structured interview form developed as a data collection tool, and a personal information form containing the personal information of the interviewees. The technique took care to ensure that the questions in the interview form were free from technical language and were suitable for conversation and daily use. In the personal information form, there was information regarding the age, gender, length of service in the administration, the duration of duty at the school where they currently worked, the status of participating in in-service training related to pre-school education, and the level of the school that they graduated from. In the interview form, there were open-ended questions aimed at finding answers to the sub-objectives of the research.

Data Analysis

The content analysis technique was used in the analysis of the data in the research, and the comments of the researchers have been included, as well as the views of the participants. Content analysis is a research model aiming to present the problem systematically and

impartially (Koçak & Arun, 2006, p.22). In the content analysis process, the data obtained in each of the sub-problems were carefully examined and codes were created; these codes were collected under the relevant themes.

Findings

Opinions on the Objectives and Realization Conditions of Pre-school Education

The school principals were asked, “What do you think are the contributions of pre-school education to child development?” and “What difference does it make whether children receive pre-school education in their psycho-social and academic development?” The opinions of the school principals regarding these questions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The Contributions of Pre-School Education to Child Development and the Findings Regarding the Differences in Psycho-Social and Academic Developments

Theme	Code	n
Psycho-Social Contributions	Psychomotor Development	7
	Social-Emotional Development	6
	Language Development	5
	Learning to Collaborate and Share	4
	Cognitive Development	3
Academic Contributions	Primary School Readiness	9
	Rapport	8

The school principals stated that pre-school education provides social-emotional development for children. Apart from this, they also stated that it is important in terms of psychomotor development, language development, cognitive development, cooperation and learning to share. They reported their academic contributions as readiness and adaptation to primary school.

The explanation of a school principal regarding the contribution of pre-school education to child development, and regarding the differences in psycho-social and academic developments, is as follows: “It is the adaptation problems observed in children who do not go to kindergarten when they start primary school. Kindergartens ensure that he/she does not have problems adapting to school. It contributes to many developments in the development of

children’s motor skills. It facilitates the work of primary school teachers, making the child ready for primary school.” (PM1)

The school principals were asked, “What physical features and equipment should the institutions offering a qualified pre-school education have?”. The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

The Physical Characteristics of Qualified Education Institutions and Findings Regarding the Equipment They Should Have

Theme	Code	n
Interior	Correct Classroom Environment	6
	Kitchen	5
	Toys and Materials	5
	Security	4
	Sink and WC	4
	Playground	4
	Workshops	2
	Comfortable Mobility	2
	Hygiene	1
Exterior	Garden Building	5
	Toys and Materials	4
	Entrances - Outputs	3

The school principals stated that the interior of a qualified pre-school education institution should have the most suitable classroom environment, kitchen, toys, and materials. Within the outdoor theme, they expressed their opinions mostly on the garden's direction and the building. The explanation of a school principal about the physical features and equipment that a qualified pre-school education institution should have is as follows: “Classes should be sized according to the number of students, their sink, WC, kitchen storage area, and their own indoor and outdoor playgrounds.” (PM3)

The school principals were asked, “What qualities should teachers and school administrators have in institutions that offer a qualified pre-school education?” The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The Findings Regarding the Characteristics of Administrators and Teachers in Qualified Pre-School Education Institutions

Theme	Code	n
School Principal Characteristics	Leadership	8
	Having Knowledge About Pre-school Education	5
	Helping Teachers	2
Teacher Specifications	Do Not Love Your Profession	6
	Giving Importance to Professional Development	5
	Do Not Be Tolerant	4
	Effective Communication with the Child	3
	Role Model	2

Considering the research findings, the views that administrators should have leadership and knowledge regarding pre-school education come to the fore in qualified pre-school education institutions. They show it should have the characteristics of loving the profession of teaching and giving importance to teachers' professional development. The views of a number of the school principals on the subject are as follows:

“School administrators should have leadership qualities and work to increase the quality of education.” (PM1).

“First, they should be open to innovations and development; administrators should have information about pre-school education and help teachers in every way.” (PM3)

The school principals were asked, *“What features should educational legislation and the curriculum have for a qualified pre-school education?”*. The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

The Findings Regarding the Qualified Pre-School Education Legislation and the Characteristics of the Education Program

Theme	Code	n
Program and Regulatory Features	Adaptability to Child Development	6
	Do Not Be Child-Oriented	4
	Being Flexible	3

According to the research findings, the views that the education legislation and education programs are suitable for child development, being flexible and child-oriented for a qualified pre-school education come to the fore. One view expressed on the subject is as follows: *“It should have a program that reflects the characteristics of the age of the students. It should include features that include games, can be flexible when necessary, and can reveal some minor talents.”* (PM7)

The school principals were asked, *“What are the works you have done during your tenure at your school to provide a qualified pre-school education?”* and *“In the achievement of these aims, what are the positive situations or obstacles you face?”*. The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

The Findings Regarding Positive-Negative Situations and Barriers in Quality Pre-School Education

Theme	Code	n
Works carried out	Physical Arrangement	9
	Increasing Participation in Pre-school Education	6
Positive Feedbacks	Increase in the Number of Students	2
Obstacles	Financial Troubles	7
	The Problem of Transportation in Access to School	4

Considering the research findings, they state that the work of school principals during their tenure to provide a qualified pre-school education is work to increase participation in pre-school education and physical arrangements. The principals stated they had financial difficulties while carrying out these studies. One evaluation on the subject is as follows: *“I have ensured that the pre-school education areas are equipped originally. I tried to prepare an area away from negative external factors as much as possible. Under the interests, abilities, and readiness levels of our students, I tried to choose the best materials. The biggest problem we encountered while doing all these studies was the inadequacy of economic and physical areas.”* (PM6)

The school principals were asked: *“What do you consider in the classroom’s planning selection and physical space arrangement, and provision of the nursery classes in your school?”*, *“What are your powers in these plans?”*, and *“What are the methods you have developed to achieve the aims of pre-school education in matters beyond your authority?”*. The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The Findings Regarding Authorization and Savings in Pre-school Classroom Selection, Physical Space Arrangement and Equipment Supply

Theme	Code	n
Planning of the pre-school class	Do Not Be Bright and Breathable	5
	A Comfortable and Peaceful Environment	3
	It Must Be in the Appropriate Place of Access	2
	Do Not Be in a Convenient Place	1

According to the research findings, the nursery class should be bright and breathable, comfortable, peaceful, in an accessible place, and a suitable place came to the fore.

One evaluation on the subject is as follows: *“I create an environment where children feel comfortable and peaceful. I would like it to be in a comfortable, breathable, light environment, rather than being in a damp, secluded place in the school's basement.”* (PM2).

2. Opinions on Positive and Negative Aspects of Pre-school Education

The school principals were asked, *“What are your views on the participation of kindergarten teachers in meetings and activities in your school and their belonging to the school?”* and *“Could you give some information about the additional studies carried out in your school on this subject?”*. The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

The Findings Regarding the Belonging Status of Kindergarten Teachers

Theme	Code	n
Sense of Belonging	There Is No Sense of Belonging	6
	There Is a Sense of Belonging	4
Definition of Sense of Belonging	Ensuring Participation in Meetings and Events	10
	Having a Say	1

According to the research findings, the opinion that pre-school teachers do not have a sense of belonging came to the fore. School principals defined the sense of belonging as ensuring participation in meetings and activities. One evaluation on the subject is as follows: *“I can say that the sense of belonging to the school is lower than that of the teachers in the other primary school, since kindergarten teachers do not have time for break time and rest. Although we try to ensure the participation of kindergarten teachers in meetings and activities, we sometimes experience difficulties in the participation of kindergarten teachers. That kindergarten teachers’ participation in meetings and activities is limited to only expressing opinions is one of the negative factors that prevents the development of kindergarten teachers’ belonging to the school.”* (PW10)

The school principals were asked, *“Can you give information about your approach to budget management for kindergarten/nursery classes in your school?”*, *“What is your authority and disposition on the school fees budget?”* and *“What are the ways and methods you have developed to achieve the objectives of pre-school education regarding situations that exceed your authority?”*. The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

The Findings Regarding Budget Management of Nursery Classes

Theme	Code	n
Budget	Meeting Needs	9
	Dues collection	6
	Getting Support from the School-Parent Association	6

According to the research findings, it was seen that the methods of benefiting from the school-parent union and collecting dues were applied to meet the needs of the nursery class. One statement on the subject is as follows: *“We form our budget by taking the fees determined by the District National Education Directorate for the nursery class of our school. However, some parents have difficulties paying these dues. The fees collected within this budget are also spent for the needs of our students.”* (PW7)

The Findings About Suggestions Regarding the Effective Execution of Pre-school Education Practices

The school principals were asked, *“What are your opinions and suggestions for those who produce and implement education policies to make pre-school education carried out within*

primary schools more effective and qualified?” The answers given by the school principals are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

The Findings Regarding Education Policies Producers and Implementers

Theme	Code	n
Physical Facilities	Appropriate Environments Should Be Prepared	6
	It Must Be a Detached Building	3
	Elimination of hardware deficiencies	3
Personnel	There should be helpful staff	4
Training Hours	There should be no uninterrupted training	3
Material Opportunities	Allocation of budget	2

According to the findings of the research, suggestions for those who produce and implement the education policies in the more effective execution of pre-school education, and preparation of suitable physical environments come to the fore as auxiliary personnel, lack of uninterrupted training, and allocation of budget.

One of the related answers is as follows: *“To increase the quality of pre-school education carried out in primary schools, first, schools should be given service personnel for nursery classes. Many schools do not have ancillary staff in their nursery classes. Therefore, the teacher must take care of the cleanliness of the educational environment. The physical conditions of the schools need to be improved.”* (PM8)

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

Conclusion and Discussion

In the research, the views of primary school principals, who have a nursery class within their school, about pre-school education were examined. The first sub-problem of the research comprises the aims and realization conditions of pre-school education according to the views of the primary school principals who have a nursery class within their school. From the findings obtained from the research, according to the opinions of school principals, pre-school education supports children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor development areas and contributes to their readiness for primary school. The school principals especially emphasized their contribution to social-emotional development in their psychosocial

contributions. In the academic contributions, preparation for primary school came to the fore. A similar finding related to our study is also included in a study by Kırık & Kuzu (2019). Doğan (2012) found that pre-school education provides mental, psychomotor, and social-emotional contributions to the child and prepares the youngster for primary education.

According to the results of the research, kindergartens should have a suitable classroom environment, kitchen, toys, and materials. In a study conducted by Kurşunlu (2018), the researcher concludes that pre-school education in inappropriate environments affects the quality of pre-school education negatively. This situation is parallel to the research findings.

The principals taking part in this research stated that in qualified pre-school education institutions, the administrators should have leadership characteristics and have knowledge regarding pre-school education. However, according to the research findings, it is understood that the school principals working in primary schools firstly have sufficient knowledge about pre-school education, since they are primarily from classroom teaching backgrounds. The principals also mentioned the importance of loving their profession and giving importance to the professional development for pre-school teachers. In a study by Doğan (2012) it was also stated that pre-school level principals lack knowledge concerning the field of pre-school education and its content; therefore, they concluded they could not guide teachers. These findings are in parallel with the findings of our study.

According to the results of the research, educational programs and the legislation for a qualified pre-school education should be suitable for child development, flexible and child oriented. According to research by Köksal, Dağal, and Duman (2016), pre-school educational programs support children's skills in their developmental areas and maximize these skills; the programs should respond to the needs of children. According to Can & Kılıç (2019), a flexible and child-centred pre-school educational program is a positive aspect. These findings also confirm and support the research findings.

In the research, school principals stated they made physical arrangements for the realization of qualified pre-school education, and they worked to increase participation in pre-school education, but they experienced financial problems while carrying out these studies. They also stated that there are certain transportation problems in accessing students to the school. In a study conducted by Sildir & Akın (2017), the researchers state that school principals should do physical improvement to increase the quality of pre-school education. They stated

that the major problem of pre-school education is financial inadequacies (Sildir & Akın, 2017, p.156). The study by Can & Kılıç (2019, p.511) is parallel to these findings.

The second sub-problem of the research comprises determining the positive and negative aspects of pre-school education in primary schools according to the opinions of school principals. School principals stated that kindergarten teachers do not have a sense of belonging to the institution. The principals defined the sense of belonging as ensuring participation in meetings and activities. It was stated that kindergarten teachers were not willing to take part in meetings and activities, and that they could forget the meetings. In the Pre-School Education and Primary Education Institutions Regulation (MEB, 2014), the Ministry stated that education in pre-school education institutions lasted for six hours of uninterrupted fifty-minute activity a day. There is no break time in pre-school education with this regulation, and education is carried out without interruption. It can be thought that with uninterrupted education, kindergarten teachers spend time in their classrooms, so their relations with teachers in other branches may be weak, and they may be forgotten or excluded from meetings and activities from time to time. In a study by Doğan (2012, p.171) it was concluded that the lack of break time for pre-school teachers caused them to be unable to meet with other branch teachers, and that this situation caused a lack of cooperation between teachers. Similarly, Can & Kılıç (2019) found that nursery classes, especially within primary schools, remained in the background in their research. They determined that there is no cooperation with pre-school teachers except on important days. According to the research findings, it is understood that the school-parent union formed the budget and collected dues to meet needs. These fees and their use are determined by the relevant regulations.

According to the Ministry of National Education (2014), the monthly fee to be collected from parents in pre-school education institutions is determined by the school administration in a way that does not exceed the ceiling fee determined by the provincial/district fee determination commission. The expenditure items of these dues are determined as nutrition expenses, cleaning service expenses, educational material expenses, minor maintenance and repair expenses, accounting and security services expenses, social activity expenses, and other goods and services purchase expenses.

The third sub-problem of the research is to determine the opinions and suggestions of the primary school principals who have a nursery class, to carry out pre-school education practices in primary schools more effectively and efficiently. The school principals stated that suitable

physical environments should be prepared and that there should be auxiliary personnel besides the necessity of giving a budget by the Ministry to carry out pre-school education activities effectively and efficiently. They also stated that nursery classrooms should be detached buildings, equipment deficiencies should be eliminated, and no uninterrupted education should be provided. This situation shows that nursery classes in primary schools are not suitable for pre-school education in terms of physical facilities. A similar finding is also encountered in a study by Yalçın & Yalçın (2018). In the study, it is stated that pre-school education should be held in independent buildings as much as possible, and that nursery classes within primary schools are limited to one classroom under the same roof as primary schools, preventing children from playing comfortably and restricting their movements.

Recommendations

- The planning of nursery classes should be done considering the interests, wishes and development of children. While creating educational environments, importance should be given to enabling children to develop their sense of curiosity.
- It can be ensured that at least one of the school administrators is a pre-school teacher graduate in schools with nursery classes.
- In-service training can be organized so that primary school principals have more detailed information regarding pre-school education and, in this context, the Ministry of National Education can act in coordination.
- Since play is the most important method in the education of pre-school children, indoor and outdoor playgrounds can be built to meet the needs of children in pre-school educational institutions.
- Concerning the problem of financial impossibility, in which school administrators have a common point of view, carrying out pre-school education activities in a healthy way, can be solved by sending regular appropriations every month to all educational institutions within the body of the Ministry of National Education, considering the type, number, number of students and the size of the building campus.
- This study, which was carried out in the central district of Zonguldak, encouraging research on the importance of pre-school education in Turkey, can be carried out over the whole province, in different provinces or throughout Turkey. More comprehensive studies involving teachers could also be carried out. This study is not only limited to primary school principals, but could also be conducted with middle school, high school and vocational high school principals who

have nursery classes. To reach different findings and results, it could be conducted statistically, with more participants, using the quantitative research method.

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