

## Children's Perspective on the Right of Self-determination

Pelin Pekince<sup>a,\*</sup>, Neslihan Avci<sup>b</sup>

Received: 26 October 2017

Revised: 21 February 2018

Accepted: 13 March 2018

ISSN: 1307-9298

Copyright © IEJEE

www.iejee.com

DOI: 10.26822/iejee.2018438133

### Abstract

The present study was conducted to determine the thoughts of children, whose lives are governed by decisions taken by adults, on the right to self-determination. The study was conducted as a generic qualitative research, a qualitative research design. The study group included 16 children. The data were collected with semi-structured interviews conducted with children. Before the data collection process, the solo test game was played with children as ice breaker. After the solo test game, the modified version of the Cinderella fairy tale was read by the children and they were asked questions about the fairy tale. The objective of the modified Cinderella tale was to make children imagine a world where the decisions are taken by children. After the fairy tales, the semi-structured interview was conducted. The interviews were conducted upon the approval of the children to record the conversations, and the replies provided by children who did not provide approval for voice recordings were noted by the first author. The findings were analyzed with descriptive analysis. Based on the analysis results, the collected data was grouped in five categories that were organized under two themes. In conclusion, students stated that they were able to decide on daily matters such as selecting clothes, what to eat, however, they were presented with no choices in matters that could affect their lives such as school selection. Children stated that adults do not believe that children can make decisions on issues relevant to children's lives.

**Keywords:** Self-determination right, right to participate

### Introduction

Concept of self-determination reflects the decisions made by individuals regarding processes related to themselves and their ability to execute these decisions (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Although studies and documents on self-identification processes usually focus on adulthood, the foundations of the processes related to adulthood are laid during the childhood (Grolnick, Gurland, Jacob, & Decourcey, 2002). However, examination of the self-determination processes in childhood demonstrated that children do not have a say on issues related to their lives although this is their basic right. This suggests that children are passive individuals who respond to adults' demands and expectations in their lives (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

The position of children in processes that related to their own lives is associated with the perspective of the society on childhood. Because the concept of childhood is a social construct created by the society (Archard, 2004; Elkind, 1999; Heywood, 2003; Onur, 2005; Postman, 1995; Sorin, 2005). This social construct determines whether the child would be the subject of her or his own life or a passive practitioner. According to Corsaro (1977), in social structures called the "constructivist model", the child plays an active role in his / her social world, however in the "deterministic model", the child has a passive role in his/her life.

The reason why the children are kept in a passive position is the perception of the adults that the children are not mature enough, do not know what is right for them, and cannot correctly perceive and assess the conditions (Edwards, 1996). Therefore, "strong" adults believe that "weak" children could not make sound decisions about their education and their future (Giroux, 2009). However, children's passive status about decisions about their own lives would also affect

their adulthood. It is not possible to expect that children who are passive practitioners of decisions made by adults during childhood would be independent adults in the future (Hart, 2016, p. 16). Thus, the fact that children should have a right to speak on all issues that affect their lives, which is called the right to participate, is included in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC, 1995). Due to the problems experienced in practice, the nature of the accession processes and the responsibilities and obligations of the party states on the issue are detailed in the General Comment No. 12 published in 2009. In particular, it was emphasized that children should be listened to and be active participants in all matters affecting their lives (UN CRC, 2009). Although the child's right to be listened to and self-determination is considered as a fundamental right in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, there are several problems in practice due to various factors that affect the enforcement of this right. For example, the right to self-determination can be influenced by factors such as the socio-economic structure or cultural characteristics that the child is exposed to. Thus, the participation processes determined by children's families and societies vary significantly by culture (Hart, 2016, p. 11). As a result, the environment in which the individuals live influences their competence in self-determination (Coleman, 2000).

The objective of the present study was to obtain the views of 10-13 age group children on the right to self-determination. At this stage of the study, the right to participate will be portrayed as the meanings that children ascribe to the concept of self-determination. The study is limited to children aged between 10 and 13 years during the 2016-2017 academic year. It was assumed that children provided sincere answers that reflected their thought to the questions.

<sup>a,\*</sup> Corresponding author: Pelin Pekince, Kırklareli University, Faculty of Medical, Department of Child Development, Kırklareli/ Turkey. E-mail: pelinpekince@gmail.com

<sup>b</sup> Neslihan Avci, Gazi University, Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education, Ankara/Turkey. E-mail: navcister@gmail.com

The following research questions were determined to investigate the views of children on self-determination:

1. What are their positions in decision making processes?
2. In which topic could they make their own decisions?
3. What are the views of children on their competence in decision making?

**Methodology**

*Study design*

This study was conducted as a generic qualitative research, a qualitative research design. In generic qualitative studies, the researcher attempts to understand the meaning of a phenomenon based on the perspective of the participants. Meanings are discovered by concentrating on how individuals build the truth in their interaction with their social environment (Merriam, 2015, p. 22). In the present study, it was attempted to find how the children interpreted the concept of self-determination based on their experiences and the transformation of their experiences into awareness.

*Participants*

Snowball sampling, a purposive sampling method, was used in the study. This method entails the inclusion of the participants who easily fit the study criteria. After accessing these participants, they are asked to access other participants to enlarge the snowball, thus creating new situations where information could be collected (Patton, 2014). The study participants included 16 children between the ages of 10 and 13.

**Table 1.** *Participants demographics*

Participant	Age	Gender
1. Dila	10	Female
2. Fatma	10	Female
3. Nazlı	10	Female
4. Buse	11	Female
5. Selen	11	Female
6. Dilek	12	Female
7. Kumsal	12	Female
8. Aleyna	13	Female
9. Bora	10	Male
10. Enes	10	Male
11. Kadir	11	Male
12. Altan	12	Male
13. Hakan	12	Male
14. Mehmet	12	Male
15. Metehan	13	Male
16. Murat	12	Male

*Ethical considerations*

Studies conducted in the past to understand childhood was in the form of research on children (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Darbyshire, 2000; Oakley, 1994). The experiences of the children, who were the objects of the studies, were attempted to be acquired via the adults in their environment. However, with the adoption of the idea that contemporary children are social actors shaping their own lives, this conventional perspective began to collapse

and studies started to consider children as participants (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Alderson, 2005; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

The recent studies on childhood emphasize that research techniques should be adapted to children or new methods specific to children should be used when conducting studies with children (Darbyshire, Schiller, & MacDougall, 2005; Punch, 2002). In studies that acknowledge that children are competent social actors, child-friendly methods should be preferred (Punch, 2002). Thus, child-specific manners and methods were attempted to be used in the present study. Based on the idea that all children love to play games, it was considered that an ice-breaking game should be played to increase the interaction with the children and to enforce the participation of the child. The solo test game was chosen among the games that could attract the interest of the study group. The solo test game is among the games where it is easy to share the rules and play the game in a short period of time when interaction with the children was possible. Also, the efforts to use child-specific ways and methods showed the way to select the data collection instrument and method. To initiate the chat, efforts were spent to find a story associated with the study topic. The modified version of the Cinderella tale found in the emphasizes gender equality. Based on this fairy tale, a new tale that emphasizes the concept of self-determination, which is the study topic, was written by the authors by writers and used in the study. The Cinderella tale was read to the children before the interview questions were asked.

During the interviews, information was provided to children that the interviews will be recorded on tape and if they did not want recordings, their responses could be written by the interviewer and their approval was received. The responses of the two participants, who did not want to be recorded during the interviews, were written by the interviewer. Informed verbal consent was obtained from the children who were recorded on tape and written informed consent was obtained from the participants whose responses were manually written. Based on the "informative" quality of participation, the objective of the study was explained to the children and the study was initiated with the children who volunteered to participate. Informed consent was obtained from children to include the characteristics of child participation (informative, volunteer, respectful, relevant, inclusive, safe and sensitive against risks). The names of children that participated in the study were changed and assigned nicknames were used. Interview records were analyzed by the first author and an independent field expert scholar separately and disagreements were resolved by consulting the second author and establishment of an agreement. The results of the evaluation were calculated using the Reliability= Agreement / Agreement + Disagreement formula (Miles & Huberman, 2015). The overall reliability of the study was determined as 89%.

*Data collection*

At the beginning of the study, the child was met, the solo test game was demonstrated, and the game was initiated after the consent of the child was obtained and the child volunteered. After the solo test game was played, it was explained to the child that a different version of the Cinderella fairy tale will be read and then, a chat would be conducted about the story. Interviewer asked the child; "Do you want to read the story or do you want me to read it to you?" The modified version of the Cinderella fairy tale emphasized the concept of self-determination, which was the subject of the present study. In this mod-

ified fairy tale, Cinderella is an adult and the original bad stepmother, Shila is a child. In this fairy tale, decisions are taken by children and adults have to adhere to those decisions. The fairy tale aimed the children to imagine a world where they could make the decisions and the adults need to obey these decisions through the substitution process in the tale. Thus, they were asked to observe their experiences from a different perspective. After reading the story, interview questions were asked. In the interview, seven questions were asked to the children on their views on decision-making, whether their opinions were asked when decisions concerning them were made, whether children could make decisions about themselves, what decisions they could make, which topics they should never make decisions on, and whether adults believed that children could make decisions about themselves.

The interviews were held between October and December 2016. Digital audio recorder was used during the interviews. The responses of the two children, who did not want their voices to be recorded, were written down by the interviewer. The talks lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and interviews were conducted by the first author. In the interview procedure, at first, the objective of the study was explained, the consents were obtained, the solo test game was played, then the Cinderella tale was read and interview questions were asked.

*Data analysis*

After the interviews were completed, the voice recordings are transcribed by the interviewer without any alterations and the interviews were enumerated in the order that the interviews were conducted. The transcript lines were enumerated starting from one. The transcriptions were examined, outlined and categorized under five topics.

The data obtained with the interviews were analyzed with "descriptive analysis" under two determined themes. In generic qualitative research, the meaning of a phenomenon "is created but not discovered". The primary objective of generic qualitative research is to expose and describe these meanings (Merriam, 2015, pp. 22-24). Descriptive and direct quotes that are the foundations of qualitative research provide a more facile interpretation and understanding of the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the involved individuals (Patton, 2014, p. 503). In the present study, direct citations of the views of the children were presented and the data were constructed based on these quotes.

Research have a concern for producing and presenting valid and reliable information by adhering to ethical principles. In qualitative research, different approaches were proposed to determine internal validity or credibility. In the triangulation technique, which is one of the recommended techniques, an attempt is made to maintain consistency between the findings of the study and presented data (Merriam, 2013, p. 212-213). For this purpose, the study themes and categories were determined by the two authors and the categories and the subcategories were checked by an independent scholar. Concurrently, the analysis process was conducted by the first author and the abovementioned scholar separately for all 16 children. Disagreements were resolved by consulting the second author and establishment of an agreement.

**Findings**

*Right to self-determination*

Themes, categories, subcategories and codes on right to self-determination are presented below;

**Table 2.** Themes

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Code
Beliefs about decision-making	Who makes / should make decisions	<i>Adults for the child</i>	<i>Children should ask adults (2), adults make decisions (2), children cannot do it (1), parents could make better decisions than us (1), I do what I am told (1),</i>
		<i>Children</i>	<i>Children could make decisions as well (1),</i>
		<i>Co-decision</i>	<i>Everyone should be asked (4),</i>
	Self-efficacy perception of children on decision-making	<i>Children could make decisions</i>	<i>Children should decide to reach their goals (1), about homework (1), rational children could decide (1), children 12 years old and older could decide (1)</i>
		<i>Children could decide on certain occasions</i>	<i>They could decide on topics directly related to them such as clothing (3)</i>
		<i>Children could not decide</i>	<i>Adults are better in thinking (1), children cannot think clearly (1), children could make wrong decisions (1)"</i>
	Views of children on decision-making beliefs of adults	<i>They do not believe that children could make decisions</i>	<i>Adults are more intelligent (3), they underestimate us (3), because they have more experience (2), because we can select the wrong school (1), because we may not buy adequate clothes (1), because we do not know anything (1), because they believe that they could guide us (1), because they underestimate our mind (1), they know better (1), they consider themselves superior to children (1), because children could not think clearly (1)</i>
		<i>They believe that children could make decisions</i>	<i>They believe that children could make decisions on topics related to children (1)</i>

Table 2. (Cont.) Themes

Decision Topics	The subjects they think they could make / could not make decisions and reasons	The subjects they think they could make decisions	clothing (9), homework (3), school items (3), sports (2), food (2), play (2), toys (2), issues related to children (2), fixing their room (2), places to go (2), doing the things they like (1), buying for themselves (1), in many topics associated with me (1)
		The subjects they think they could not make decisions	Topics related to my parents (4), nothing (2), whom I can or cannot meet (2), shopping (2), buying a house (2), school selection (2), places to go (2), health issues (2), buying a car (1), interior decoration (1), buying technological devices (1), course content (1), travel to other countries (1), going to the bathroom during class (1), to have my own room (1)
		Reasons for not making decisions	Because they are young (3), adults could make better school selection (2), because they cannot sign (1), one needs to be an adult to buy a home (1), because a child cannot distinguish individuals with bad intentions (1), adults know better (1), children could not make the calculations required for shopping (1), would not want to interfere with the teacher's business (1), a child cannot travel to another country and cannot get a passport (1)
	The topics about which their views were asked / not asked	The topics about which their views were asked	clothing (6), going out (2), school (2), haircuts (1), food (1), fixing their room (1)
		The topics about which their views were not asked	Clothing (2), places to go (2), courses (1), sports (1), health issues (1)

Beliefs about decision-making theme

"Who makes / should make decisions" category. The views of the children on decision-making are grouped under the sub-categories of "adult instead of the child (8), co-decision (4) and child (1)". Children who think that adults make decisions expressed their views as follows: "Children should ask adults (2), adults decide (2), children cannot (1), parents can make better decisions than we do (1), I do whatever they say." Aleyna (age 13) stated her views on decision making as follows:

*"I do not have many chances to make a decision. Sometimes I say that I will do my homework tomorrow, but my mom does not listen to me and makes me do all my homework that day."*

Buse (age 11) expressed her views on decision making as follows:

*"For example, children always have to ask grown-ups, unfortunately. Then, for example, you are in a family, you are in a community it should be asked to everyone when making decisions."*

Kumsal (age 12) stated that adults do not allow children to make decisions because they underestimate children and expressed her views as follows:

*"Of course our parents can make better decisions than we do, I do not oppose that, they are older than us, they grew up like us, they have walked the same path as we do now, but they ignore these issues as well, I mean, I could understand us a little, but no, they do not think like that. Because adults look down on us, they scorn."*

Metehan (age 13) stated that he thinks children cannot make decisions and said that "They cannot think clearly because they are not settled yet. That is, they cannot."

Mehmet (12 years old) stated that he always thought that decisions are taken by the adults, but that everyone

should be asked:

*"What is right should happen. Generally, the adults decide about it. I think everyone should have a say. What the majority of votes say, that is what should be."*

"Self-Efficacy of Children about Decision-Making Category".

The beliefs of children that they can make decisions about themselves included the subcategories of "children can decide (7), children can decide sometimes (3), children cannot decide (4)". The responses of children who thought that they can decide were as follows: "children should decide to reach their goals (1), children could decide about homework (1), reasonable children can decide (1), and 12 years old and older children can decide (1)." Children, who thought they can make decisions from time to time, stated that they could decide on matters that concern themselves such as clothing. Children, who thought that they could not make decisions, stated that "adults are better in thinking (1), children cannot think clearly (1), children can make wrong decisions (1)." For example, Bora (age 10) stated that he thinks children cannot make decisions about health:

*"I do not think they can. For example, I cannot tell the doctor that there is such a pain in my stomach. If we are not with adults, the doctor cannot decide as well."*

Selen (age 11) argued that children can make decisions as follows:

*"They can decide. For example, I just imagine, you want to buy this thing, and you have enough money, why should you ask someone? You want it. Why do you have to get permission from someone? But we have to ask the adults, unfortunately. Sometimes they approve, sometimes they do not."*

Kadir (age 11) stated that he thinks children cannot decide because they are not good in thinking like adults:

*"I do not think they can. Because adults are better at thinking. For example, which school I should go, you know those peo-*

*ple who work at the factory publish textbooks, if the children did it, the textbooks would no longer be text books."*

Metehan (age 13) thought that children cannot make their own decisions: *"No they cannot. They cannot think clearly, that is, it is a child's mind. They make the wrong decisions."*

Hakan (age 12), who was one of the seven children who thought that children can make decisions about themselves, expressed their thoughts as follows:

*"Of course, especially about the classes... One can always make decisions because one is always free about one's self, nobody can oppose him, everyone can make one's own decision; as long as man remains equal to man."*

*"Views of children on the adult beliefs about decision making" category.* The children answered the question "Do adults believe that children can make their own decisions about the issues that concern them?" with the following answers: "They do not believe that (15), They believe that (1)". They explained their reasons as "Adults are more intelligent (3), they underestimate us (3), they are more experienced (2), they think that we may select the wrong school (1), they think that we may select the inappropriate clothing (1) (1), because they believe we do not know anything (1), because they think they can guide us (1), because they know better (1), because they consider themselves superior to children (1), because they believe that children cannot think clearly (1)." For example, Buse stated that adults belittle children and this hurts children's feelings:

*"No. They think that we cannot make our own decisions because we are children, and they look down on us. We, as children, are so bored with it, they can hurt our feelings."*

Mahmut (age 12) stated that adults do not believe that children can decide on matters that concern them:

*"They do not believe that. Because they think they are more experienced in their own..."*

Nazlı (age 10) stated that adults believe that children are not smart enough and can only decide on matters such as what to wear at school:

*"They do not believe that. Because they think that children are not smart enough. I think we are. Adults grow up because their minds are more intelligent, because they are smarter. I think adults are more smart than children. They believe we can only decide on matters such as school clothing."*

Selen (age 11) expressed her opinions as follows:

*"No. Because we are younger, we do not know anything, they would guide us, we will take our first steps or something... I think this is not right. In fact, parents should do this; I think they should leave their children be first, then ask what did you decide, the child should respond, did you really liked it, they should really go and ask, but they should do it, only on matters that concern the children. It is different in real life, just the opposite."*

Kumsal (age 12) stated that adults think that children cannot make decisions because adults think they are not smart:

*"They do not believe that. They think they are so much older than us. They are in fact, but they belittle us, they think our minds are inapt, but I do not think so."*

Similar to the views of Kumsal, Altan (age 12) stated that he thinks adults belittle children:

*"They do not believe that. They do not give their children what*

*it is due, they try to decide themselves. I do not know why they do it, just because they are smarter? They probably underestimate their own children."*

Hakan commented as follows:

*"Most adults do not believe that... Because adults think they are superior to children. They think, you do not know it, but we do."*

However, besides the abovementioned answers, Metehan expressed his ideas that children take everything as a game and thus, the adults are right as follows:

*"They do not believe that. Children are not exactly clear, or most children are different. Their minds work differently. Children cannot think clearly, they perceive all as a game. Those at my age cannot make all decisions by themselves, that is, we are still young."*

#### Decision Topics Theme

*"The topic they think they could make / could not make decisions and reasons" category.* The responses given by the children in the subcategory of the topics that children think they can make decisions were as follows: "clothing (9), homework (3), school items (3), sports (2), food (2), play (2), toys (2), issues related to children (2), fixing their room (2), places to go (2), doing the things they like (1), buying for themselves (1), in many topics associated with me (1)." For example, Selen (age 11) stated that children think that they can decide on matters of interest to them:

*"In matters that are related to me. For example, I study piano and I should decide where and how. I mean, not so much, my mother makes the research and tells me what is available. And then I got to choose. That is how it happens."*

Aleyna (age 13) expressed her thoughts on the issues that children could make decisions as follows:

*"On topics such as playing, toys, children can make their own decisions. Then kids can make their own decisions about clothes. They can make their own decisions about doing things they like. Nothing else more or less."*

Buse (age 11) expressed her thoughts about the topics they can decide as follows: *"They can arrange their rooms as they please. They can choose their clothes. I think they can get what they want if their financial situation is good."*

There were also children who said that children should get their parents' permission in all matters, as well as children who thought that they can make their own decisions. Dila's (age 10) following response that *"For example, I ask my mother even if I want to jump rope, or I ask my mother when I want to watch TV,"* demonstrated the fact that certain children had to get their parents' permission for everything.

Dilek (age 12) stated that only children could make decisions about their own goals:

*"Children can make their own decisions about education, because it is the child's goal, they can make decisions on that, it is up to the child, not up to her family. She can do it, his family would only support his education, would pay for it. For example, if she needs a pen, they would buy the pen for her. But they cannot attain our goals. Because it is not up to them, because it is our goal."*

The responses of the children in the subcategory of the topics that children think they cannot make decisions were as follows: "topics related to my parents (4), nothing (2), whom I can or cannot meet (2), shopping (2), buying a house (2), school selection (2), places to go (2), health

issues (2), buying a car (1), interior decoration(1), buying technological devices (1), course content (1), getting a tattoo (1), traveling to other countries (1), going to the bathroom during class (1)." For example, Nazlı (age 10) expressed her thoughts on the issues that children cannot decide as follows:

*"For example, when my father and mother are discussing about an issue, I say in my opinion it should be like this, but they do not listen."*

Buse (age 11) stated that she thought she could not decide about the people she could meet:

*"Whom I should meet or I should not. For example, people who have bad intentions that approach me, others could observe, but I might not notice. As such."*

Aleyna (age 13) stated that she believed that she could not decide about the choice of school and the purchase of technological equipment:

*"School selection. Buying a big thing such as getting a phone, tablet, computer..."*

Kumsal (age 12) stated that she could not decide about whom to befriend since her mother does not allow her to meet the children she does not approve.

Hakan (age 12) stated that he thinks that he cannot decide what to do in the classroom:

*"For example, in class, I would not want to decide about it anyway. Whether the teacher would instruct, would check the homework, or something else, I think I cannot decide about these things. Because I would not want to interfere with the teacher's business."*

The answers of the children in the subcategory "why children cannot decide" were as follows: "because they are young (3), adults could make better school selection (2), because they cannot sign (1), one needs to be an adult to buy a home (1), because a child cannot distinguish individuals with bad intentions (1), adults know better (1), children could not make the calculations required for shopping (1), would not want to interfere with the teacher's business (1), a child cannot travel to another country and cannot get a passport (1)". Most of the reasons they considered were related to "being a child". For example, Bora (age 10) expressed the reason why he did not think he could decide as follows:

*"For example, you must be an adult to buy a house, an adult must sign for it, I cannot sign."*

Nazlı (age 10) stated the reasons why she thought she cannot decide as follows:

*"Because we are minors, adults are not, so they always make the decisions. Because they think they can do it. For example, they do not ask their children when they consider about something because they want to think by themselves, they never want to ask the children."*

Kumsal (age 12) stated that she thought adults could be right. Her thoughts were as follows:

*"They were like us, too, they traveled the same path, they might know better than we do. They must know something, so they tell us what to do."*

Hakan (age 12) stated that he thought he could not decide which topic the teacher would instruct in the class or whether a topic would be instructed or the homework would be checked.

Metehan (age 13) stated that he could not travel to foreign countries since he could not get a passport:

*"I cannot travel to another country due to my age. I am still a child. One cannot get a passport by one's self."*

"The topics that their opinions were asked / not asked" category. In the subcategory of the topics where children's ideas were asked, the following answers were recorded: "clothing (6), going out (2), school (2), haircuts (1), food (1), fixing their room (1)" and in the subcategory of the topics where children's ideas were not asked, the following answers were recorded: "clothing (2), places to go (2), courses (1), sports (1), health issues (1)." For example, when Murat (age 12) stated the following topics that his opinion was asked / not asked when decisions were made about him:

*"In some, they ask. For example, when I have a haircut, they ask my opinion, but when they decide about which course I would attend, or which sports I would be registered, they do not ask my opinion. I always want other things, but they always register me for swimming. They rarely ask me about the things that concern me. Sometimes they ask about personal things. Things like haircut, but for example, I do not end up getting any outfits that I show to my mom, how old she thinks I am?"*

Buse (age 11) stated that when big decisions are made about her, they ask her:

*"For example, my mother tells me that I will go to the school. But when I get up one morning, he tells me that you will not go to school. She makes my decisions. In such unimportant things. For example, they ask me about things like when they want to change my school."*

Kumsal (age 12) stated that there were times when her parents did not ask her opinion when deciding about matters that were related to her:

*"She asks me what to cook, what do I want to eat. But then, there are times she would not, for example, let us say she is going out for fun, she makes decisions for you. I do not want to go to my mom's friend, but she would tell her okay, we will visit you with Kumsal this afternoon. But I do not want to visit her, but no one asks me."*

As there were children whose opinions were not asked when making decisions, there were also children whose ideas were asked. Hakan (age 12), for example, expressed that his opinions were asked when decisions were made on issues that concerned him:

*"They ask about my decisions yes, but it is a little dependent on the environment. For example, in a good environment you can really reflect your decision to people and if there is no obstacle to prevent you to reflect it freely, you can reflect it. For example, if a person considers himself as superior but not equal, it would make you feel about making a decision about him."*

## Conclusions

There are several authors who considered childhood as a restricted period in life and indicated that fact in their works (Holt, 2000; Firestone, 1979; Pavese, 2012). One of the most important reasons behind this is the fact that in childhood, children are not active in decision-making processes associated with themselves and have to live a life based on the decisions made by adults. Thus, children who are forced to become the objects of their own lives experience a restricted lifestyle. However, for children to recognize themselves as an individual, they should make their own choices and to experience the consequences of these choices. However, when the children are not given the choice to make decisions about themselves, the

chance of the children getting to know themselves is also taken from them (Perry & Szalavitz, 2013, p. 93).

While the decision-making process of children about their own lives is examined, it was observed that certain children were active in this process and certain others were passive practitioners of the decisions that adults made for them. Children, who think they do not have a say in the decision-making process, often stated that their parents make the decisions. In a study by Akyol (2011), although an approach where the views of children are obtained during the decision-making processes concerning matters pertaining the children has developed, due to the prevalence of the conventional perspective, the decisions of children on topics related to their lives were still not allowed. However, as a result of the lack of opportunities for children to participate in their lives, children would not be able to recognize their autonomy and would continue their lives as passive individuals (SC, 2010).

During the decision-making processes, the children who are aware of the idea that "everybody is entitled to their views" stated that the current situation was exactly the opposite. In a study conducted by Oktay and Kumbaroğlu (2011), children stated that they had no right to speak about their decisions. They considered that this was due to the fact that they were 'underestimated' by adults. There were participants who stated that the adults should understand the children since they traveled the same path. Punch (2002) explained this phenomenon by stating that although all adults experience the childhood period, since they could not make sense of childhood with their present minds and adult perspective, it would not be possible for them to understand children.

There were children who considered that they should be active in the process of making decisions about themselves, there were other children who thought that adults should make the decisions for them. Children considered themselves as inadequate, and they expressed that they considered that adults could make better decisions. This could be due to the fact that children remained in a continuous passive position while decisions were made about them. It is expected that children who have no experience in the decision-making process would consider themselves inadequate in decision-making. It is not possible for individuals, who do not make choices and experience the consequences of these choices, to believe that they could make decisions about themselves (Perry & Szalavitz, 2013).

Self-efficacy perceptions of the participants on decision-making of the children reflect the perspective of the children on childhood. For example, statements such as 'children cannot think clearly, this is mind of a child' or 'adults are better at thinking' suggest that children considered children as inadequate. The view that adults were 'smarter' than children and that adults can make the right decision about the children was rather dangerous because it would negatively affect children's development, emotions and capacities (SC, 2010). However, participants who considered that 'children should make their own decisions to achieve their goals', though that children were entitled to make decisions. Whether the individuals considered the children are entitled to make their own decisions or not is directly related to their own experiences.

Although there were participants who considered children adequate for decision-making, it is regrettable that there were children who stated that they asked their mothers even when they wanted to jump rope and were not able to choose their friends or clothes. The participants who thought that children should make decisions only on "trivial

ial(!)" matters such as clothing, playing games and fixing their rooms were the majority. In similar studies, it was observed that families were involved in the selection of children's friends and had low level of beliefs about the decision making abilities of their children (Dönertaş & Aksel, 2011; SC, 2010; Spielhofer et al., 2010). In a study conducted by Madge (2006), children stated that they wanted to decide on trivial matters related to their lives such as "bedtime or bath time" and did not expect to have more say in others. It was regrettable that only one participant in our study thought that he can decide on several issues that concern him and lived such a life.

When they were asked whether they thought that adults believed children could make own decisions, almost all children stated that they thought adults did not believe it. They stated the reasons for the disbelief of adults as "they consider that children are not smart enough, they think that children should be guided, and they underestimate the children". Giroux (2009) explained this situation by stating that "strong and knowledgeable" adults do not believe that "weak and ignorant" children can make sound decisions about their education and their future. Children's statements in the present study supported the ideas of Giroux (2009).

When the topics that the children could/could not decide were examined, it was observed that they considered that they could decide on trivial matters such as "clothing, games, toys and food." It was a pity that there was only one child, who indicated that he can decide on almost any aspect of his life. However, Article 12 of the CRC states that children's ideas must be obtained when making decisions about children.

Participants stated the topics on which they would never decide as "the choice of school, who to meet and who not to meet with, shopping for the house, and the instruction content in the classroom". The participant, who thought that he could not decide what should be instructed in the class, said that "this business should be decided by someone with a college degree". The reason could be explained by the prevalent approach that includes a perception and distrust that entails the incompetency of children in the management of their own learning processes (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007). When asked "why do you think children cannot decide?" the children replied "because we are young and adults are grown up, thus they make all the decisions', 'there should be a reason why they always decide', 'because the children roam between dreams and reality', thus, it could be argued that the abovementioned distrust that encompasses several areas in life affects the children as well and results in negative judgments about themselves.

Although there were children who stated their ideas on issues that would "not affect their lives" such as buying clothes or what they would want to eat were asked, it was upsetting to find children who thought that their ideas were not asked even in the same issues. Unfortunately, the right to participate is not considered as the participation of the child in her or his life, in decisions that would affect her or his life (Kjorholt, 2008). The presence of participants who argued that whether their ideas were asked or not depended on people considering them as equals, suggested that children were aware of the current situation.

These negative thoughts on participation cause children to question their competence and to make negative judgments about this competence. However, for children to be able to manage their own lives as a free individual, it

is necessary to have these experiences starting from an early age. In support of these processes, children need to take an active role in domestic and educational processes that are related to their lives. Otherwise, individuals who could only implement the decisions made by adults and lack the ability to make their own decisions throughout life would be raised.

## References

- Alderson, P. (2005). Children as researchers: The effects of participation rights on research methodology. *Educação & Sociedade*, 26(91), 419-442.
- Akyol, S. (2011). Çocuk hakları'na dair sözleşme çerçevesinde çocuğun görüşlerine saygı ilkesi (Varlığının sahibi olan çocuk). 1. *Türkiye Çocuk Hakları Kongresi Yetişkin Bildirileri Kitabı* (pp. 183-188). İstanbul: Çocuk Vakfı Yayınları.
- Archard, D. (2004). *Children rights and childhood*. London: Routledge Press.
- Bäckman, E. & Trafford, B. (2007). Democratic governance of schools (Vol. 383). Council of Europe.
- Christensen, P. & Prout, A. (2002). Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood*, 9(4), 477-497.
- Coleman, P. (2000). Aging and the satisfaction psychological needs. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 291-294.
- Corsaro, W. A. (1997). *The Sociology of Childhood*. London: Sage Press.
- Darbyshire, P. (2000). Guest Editorial: From Research on Children to Research with Children. *Neonatal, Pediatric and Child Health Nursing*, 3(1), 2-3.
- Darbyshire, P., Schiller, W. & MacDougall, C. (2005). Extending new paradigm childhood research: meeting the challenges of including younger children. *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6), 467-472.
- Deci, E. L., Connell, J. P. & Ryan, R. M. (1989). Self-determination in a work organization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(4), 580-590.
- Deci, E. & Ryan, R. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Edwards, M. (1996). *Institutionalising Children's Participation in Development*, *Participatory Learning and Action Notes*, 25. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Elkind, D. (1999). *Çocuk ve toplum- gelişim ve eğitim üzerine denemeler*. (B. Onur & D. Öngen, Çev.). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi.
- Firestone, S. (1979). *Cinselliğin diyalektiği, kadın özgürlüğü davası* (Y. Salman, Çev.), İstanbul: Payel Yayınları.
- Giroux, H. (2009). *Youth in a suspect society: democracy or disposability?*. New York: Springer Press.
- Grolnick, W. S., Gurland, S. T., Jacob, K. F. & Decourcey, W. (2002). The development of self-determination in middle childhood and adolescence. In A. Wigfield & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Development of Achievement Motivation*, (pp. 147-171), San Diego: CA: Academic Press.
- Hart, A. R. (2016). *Çocukların katılımı*. (T. Ş. Kılıç, Çev.). Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.
- Heywood, C. (2003). *Baba bana top at!- Batı'da çocukluğun tarihi*. (E. Hoşsucu, Çev.). İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi.
- Holt, J. (2000). *Çocukluktan kaçış*. (S. Yılandı & C. Aksoy, Çev.). İstanbul: Beyaz Yayınevi.
- James, A., Jenks, C. & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing childhood*. Williston: Teachers College Press.
- Kjorholt, A. T. (2008). Children as new citizen" In A. Jameson & A. Jameson (Eds.), *European Childhoods*. (pp. 14 - 37). New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press.
- Lansdown, G. (2010). The realisation of children's participation rights. In B. Percy-Smith, & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation*, (pp. 11-23). London: Routledge Press.
- Madge, N. (2006). *Children these days*. Clifton: Policy Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (2013). *Nitel araştırma: Desen ve uygulama için bir rehber*. (S. Turan, Çev. Ed.). Ankara: Nobel Yayıncılık.
- Oakley, A. (1994). 'Women and children first and last: Parallels and differences between children's and women's studies', (13-32). In B. Mayall (Ed.), *Children's childhoods observed and experienced*, London: The Falmer Press.
- Oktaş, A. & Kumbaroğlu, N. (2011). Öğretmenlerin ve öğrencilerin çocuk haklarına bakışının değerlendirilmesi. 1. *Türkiye Çocuk Hakları Kongresi Yetişkin Bildirileri Kitabı* (pp. 365-379), İstanbul: Çocuk Vakfı Yayınları.
- Onur, B. (2005). *Türkiye'de çocukluğun tarihi*. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Nitel araştırma ve değerlendirme yöntemleri*. (S. B. Demir, Çev.). Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayınları.
- Pavese, C. (2012). *Yaşama uğraşı, günlükler (1935-1950)*. (C. Çapan, Çev.), İstanbul: Can Yayınları.
- Perry, B. D., & Szalavitz, M. (2013). *Köpek gibi büyütülmüş çocuk*. (Elif Söğüt, Çev.). İstanbul: Okuyan Us Yayıncılık.
- Postman, N. (1995). *Çocukluğun yok oluşu*. (K. İnal, Çev.). Ankara: İmge Kitabevi.
- Punch, S. (2002). Research with children. The same or different from research with adults?. *Childhood*, 9(3), 321-341.
- Save the Children (SC), (2010). Children's Right to be Heard an Effective Protection. Sweden.
- Sorin, R. (2005). Changing Images of Childhood-reconceptualising Early Childhood Practice. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 1, 12-21.
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). *Çocuk haklarına dair sözleşme genel yorum*

no.12 çocuđun dinlenilme hakkı [General Comment No. 12 The right of the child to be heard].

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (1995). Çocuk haklarına dair sözleşme [Convention on the Rights of the Child].

Woodhead, M. & Faulkner, D. (2000). Subjects, Objects or Participants., In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.). *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. (pp. 9-33). London: Falmer Press.