

## **Examination of Parents' Opinions on Early Childhood Learning**

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### **Abstract**

Qualified and continuous learning experiences provided in early childhood have an important place in the development of the child. This should not be considered a situation that only concerns schools, but parents, who are the first teachers of the children, should be included in the process. For this reason, this study aimed to determine parents' views and practices on learning. The research was designed using basic qualitative research. The Snowball sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to select the sample. In this study, demographic information forms and semi-structured interview questions developed by the researcher were used as data collection tools. The data were collected by interview method. Descriptive analysis was used in the analysis of the data. As a result of the study, it was determined that parents perceive learning as a behavioral change and developmental process, that parents think that they learn by playing, exploring, and doing, and living, that their children should be able to express themselves and learn universal values, and they generally teach these as models. According to the results of the research, it has been determined that parents are knowledgeable about different instructional strategies used in early childhood, but they need to be supported.

**Keywords:** Children, Early childhood, Learning, Parent, Teaching.

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## Introduction

Childhood years are the years when development and learning are the fastest, and the experiences gained in this period form the basis for the following years. In this respect, waiting for the child to start primary school to support the developmental areas, most of which are completed in the first years of life, will be too late today and may cause irreparable delays in the later years of life (Kartal, 2007). It is extremely important for the brain development of children that parents give quality stimuli to their children from the moment they are born. It is extremely important for the holistic development of children that they create quality learning environments at home at later ages. For this reason, parents as well as early childhood educators have important duties. As it is known, parents are defined as the first teachers of their children. Below is an example given by Cordry and Wilson (2004; pp.56).

*“On August 11, 2003, Johnny X. is born. By the time Johnny X. turns one, his parents will have 8,750 hours to provide supervision and care for Johnny. When Johnny is ready to start school at the age of five, his parents will have accumulated 43,800 hours of time for his development and growth. Each new school year Johnny will spend 1,260 hours with a teacher and 7,490 hours spent with his parents. By the time Johnny graduates in 2021, he will spend 16,380 hours with teachers and 97,370 hours (52,416 after accounting for a student sleep average of 8 hours per day) with his parents: the parent-to-teacher ratio of time with Johnny is 76% to 24 % waking hours.”*

As can be seen, even under normal conditions, parents spend more time with their children than teachers. Research has shown that home environments that will support the child's development include the child's mental development, language development, and early literacy skills (Bergen et al. 2017; Espy, Molfese, DiLalla, 2001; Roberts, Burchinal, Durham, 1999; Niklas & Schneider, 2017; Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, & Siraj, 2015). For this reason, it is extremely important for parents to create effective learning environments at home (Berk, 2012). Bradley (1994) and Bradley et al. (2001) stated that quality home conditions for early childhood children include: Adaptation of cognitive development with toys, games and reading materials, language stimuli, regulation of physical conditions, emotional support, academic behavior stimuli, modeling, and promoting social maturity, opportunities for a variety of daily stimuli, and escape from corporal punishment. Studies show that the home environment offered to the child has long-term effects (Orth, 2018).

Early childhood period is defined as the period from birth to eight years of age and all the policies and programs that should be done for the development of children in this process (UNICEF, 2001). High-quality early childhood education programs enrich the learning and nursing environments of disadvantaged children. An accumulating body

of evidence shows the beneficial effects of these programs (The White House, 2014). In recent years, studies examining the effects of early childhood have begun to attract the attention of not only educators but also economists. Longitudinal studies, especially by Nobel laureate Professor James J. Heckman (2016), have shown that one dollar invested in disadvantaged groups if qualified in early childhood, returns 13 dollars to the country's economy. The first important development with early childhood education in Turkey was the inclusion of "child protection" in five-year development plans in the 1960s. With the "Regulation for Kindergartens and Kindergartens" on June 16, 1962, public and private institutions were opened, and their numbers increased. With the 1973 "National Education Basic Law", the purpose, scope, and duties of early childhood education are clearly stated. In the 2000s, the pilot application for compulsory early childhood education was started in 32 provinces in the 2009-2010 academic year and it was announced that the schooling rate increased from 33 percent to 39 percent. In the 2012-2013 period, the age of starting primary school was lowered with the transition to the 4+4+4 system. However, it has been removed from necessity by turning to dissemination studies for early childhood education (Arkan & Ozturk, 2018). However, the XI of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey was published in 2018. In line with the Development Plan, it is among the educational articles that the age of 5 will be included in the scope of compulsory education in early childhood education and alternative early childhood education models will be created simultaneously (Özsirkinti, Akay & Yılmaz Bolat, 2014; T.R Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2019). However, today, early childhood education has not yet been included in the scope of compulsory education. Until early childhood education becomes compulsory, it becomes even more important for parents to create a qualified learning environment.

When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that studies on learning generally focus on teachers and early childhood classrooms (Bautista et al. 2019; Griffin, 2010; Markowitz, Bassok & Hamre, 2007; Promling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Vidal-Hall, Flewitt & Wyse. , 2020; Wallersted & Promling, 2012; White Englund, 2019). However, there are also studies evaluating the home environment of parents (Bergen et al. 2017; Taggart et al. 2015). However, no research has been found on parents' views on learning. It is thought that parents' views on this issue are important in creating a quality home environment for their children. For this reason, this study, is aimed to determine the views of parents who have children in early childhood on learning. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. According to parents, how do children in early childhood learn?
2. In what ways do parents teach their children concepts?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study, which aims to examine parents' views on learning in early childhood, was designed using basic qualitative research, one of the qualitative research methods.

### Working group

The Snowball (chain) sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to select the sample. The process, "Who or whom would you suggest I talk to about this issue?" starts with the question, and the resulting names grow like snowballs (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Information on parents participating in the study is given in Table 1 and information on children is given in the Table 2.

### Data Collection Tools

In this study, demographic information forms and semi-structured interview questions developed by the researcher were used as data collection tools. The demographic information form included questions about the age of the mother/father, education of the mother/father, the number of children, the number of children mentioned in the interviews, the age of the child, whether the child has special needs, and if any, the type of special needs. There are questions about how parents learn and how learning in early childhood and what should be taught in the interview questions.

### Data Collection Process.

The data were collected by interview method. Due to the process of interviews, the interviews were carried out through programs with which video calls can be made. Twice interviews were conducted with each parent. In the first interviews, learning and how their children learned were discussed. In the second interview, what they taught their children and with which techniques were discussed.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information about Parents*

The person interviewed	Mother age	Mother education status	Mother job	Father age	Father education	Father job
Mother	34	University	Teacher	34	Master	Teacher
Father	38	University	Nurse	41	University	Engineer
Mother	39	High School	Housewife	42	High School	Artisan
Mother	31	University	Officer	38	University	Artisan
Mother	32	University	Teacher	33	Önlisans	Police
Mother	32	University	Teacher	32	University	Teacher
Mother	34	Master	Teacher	35	Primary School	Private sector

Mother	32	University	Private sector	34	University	Private sector
Mother	32	University	Officer	35	University	Police
Mother	30	University	Child development specialist	29	University	Teacher
Father	40	High School	Housewife	43	University	Manager
Mother	35	University	Teacher	35	University	Engineer
Mother	33	University	Nurse	36	University	Banker
Mother	33	University	Teacher	41	Master	Teacher

**Table 2***Demographic Information about Children*

Children number	Child's turn	Child's gender	Child's age	Whether the child has special needs	Type of special needs
2	2	Girl	4	No	-
2	2	Boy	5	Yes	ASD
2	2	Boy	6	Yes	ASD
2	2	Girl	5	No	-
1	1	Girl	5	No	-
1	1	Girl	6	No	-
1	1	Boy	6	No	-
2	2	Girl	4	No	-
2	1	Boy	4	No	-
1	1	Boy	5	No	-
2	1	Girl	5	No	-
1	1	Boy	6	No	-
2	1	Boy	4	No	-
1		Girl	5	No	-

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive analysis was used in the analysis of the data. In descriptive analysis, which is a method used to analyze the form, content, and context of social phenomena, systematic data is tried to be obtained by using the inductive method, and information is sought in social reality (Serttaş, 2018).

**Validity and Reliability of the Study***External Validity of the Research*

In this study, detailed descriptions and purposeful sampling were preferred to ensure external validity.

### ***Internal Validity of the Study***

In this study, expert review and participant confirmation were used to ensure internal validity.

### ***Reliability of the Study***

The external reliability method used in this study is a short confirmation.

## **Results**

### **Parents' Views Regarding How Children Learn**

Before starting with the questions about the learning issues in early childhood care, the parents were asked, "What is learning?" That question has been posted. When the answers given were examined, it was determined that the answers given were categorized under the Developmental Process and Behavior Change. Most of the parents stated that learning is a natural phenomenon in the development process of the child. One parent stated the following on this issue:

*"... As a result, learning is a process of development and a way of accumulating knowledge." (P.3)*

Apart from the development process, parents also focused on behavioral change. Regarding this issue, one parent stated the following:

*"Learning is life-long changes that leave positive effects on an individual's behavior. It should be beneficial to the individual, according to time and conditions. " (P.6)*

When the parents were asked how their children learn, it was determined that the parents focused primarily on learning through play. Sample responses from parents on this issue are presented below.

*"Play is a rehearsal of life. Therefore, he learns through play. "(P.9)*

*"We are in the pandemic process, and the pandemic has somewhat hampered school education. In this process, we usually do educational activities. She learns by playing lots of games and exploring the environment. " (P.6)*

Outside of play, parents stated that their children learn by experiencing and doing. Regarding this issue, the answers of the parents are as follows:

*"My child learns easily. Especially visual objects affect his learning positively. A curious kid loves to learn by discovering. I do not interfere much in this process (pandemic), and I try to support it. " (P.7)*

*"He learns by doing and living. He learns with games. Apart from these, he sometimes learns from a movie or from the sounds he hears, from the things he listens. He also learns from the social environment he is in. In other words, he learns through questions and answers from his friends or the adults around him. "(P.12)*

As can be seen, parents state that their children can learn in several different ways instead of one way. One of the methods that parents emphasize most on this issue is modeling. The answer given by a parent on this issue is as follows:

*"The teacher or the parents must first be doing and applying the training they will give. The person who is a model should exhibit the behaviors that should be given to the child. No education or training, that is, what has been learned, is independent of other learned. .... " (P.2).*

### **Parents' Preferred Teaching Methods**

The subjects/concepts that parents think should be taught in early childhood before the teaching methods they prefer for their children to learn were discussed. While all the parents focused on many issues, it was seen that all parents' primary focus was the self-expression of their children. Regarding this issue, one parent responded as follows:

*"In general, he should learn to express himself, to act with his friends, to be social, to use healthy eating and drinking habits, and technology. He must learn not to be selfish and not to hurt living things. I think these are the things that every child should win in his life. A child who cannot express himself cannot establish healthy communication. If he cannot act with his friends, he cannot cooperate. If he is selfish, he cannot be happy, he cannot establish healthy relationships. If it hurts living things, it will harm them. This is wrong behavior. " (P.13)*

In addition, parents think that their children should be taught information about abuse. Regarding this issue, a parent (P.3) *" must be able to tell the other person enough information about his family, learn important phone numbers and use them when necessary. He must learn to love animals, to smile. He should know his boundaries and not allow himself to be entered. He must learn how to react in such a situation. "stated herself as.*

Many of the parents think that universal values such as tolerance, compassion, respect, and helpfulness should be taught during this period. Sample statements of the parents regarding this issue are given below.

*"I think it will be easier to learn and continue life if you know yourself, knowing yourself, knowing your feelings, responsibilities, respect, love, and sharing." (P.14)*

*"He must learn basic moral knowledge, etiquette, respect for elders, tolerance and sharing. Because the learning at this age is permanent." (P.7)*

Some parents also emphasized that children should learn numbers and letters as preparation for primary school during this period. P.8 on this subject, *"Must learn some of the primary education so that they know letters and numbers when the first year starts."* She stated her views.

When parents were asked what techniques, their children were taught, the parents stated that they used more than one method. However, it was observed that most of the parents preferred to be a model. Regarding this issue, P.2 said, *"... I choose to be a model. The child learns by modeling. In addition, since my child has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), we receive expert support."* stated his opinion in the form. The other parent with a child with ASD said, *"I teach as a model and by showing colorful picture educational cards with various objects on it. I teach with educational cards, for example, fruits, vegetables, animals, and professions. Apart from that, we also work with a special education specialist for autism. It helps to open the perception of the special education specialist and teach the basic concepts."*

Apart from being a model, the parents interviewed emphasized the narrative technique. Parent 4 states, *"Our child is first and foremost a person; She has thoughts. I talk to my daughter all the time. I teach her to share her toys and food with his brother. I teach that fighting with friends is wrong and not to speak badly to people. I need to respect my elders. Like any mother, I want the best for her. For example, she does his best to do what she wants, but I don't get what she wants. I teach that she must win through her efforts in life. For example, if you collect your clothes today and arrange your bed, I give you a response by saying that I will get what you want. Like every parent, we do our best. But it is complicated to keep up with innovations. I hope she will apply the things we teach when she grows up."* She stated her views in the form. Play technique is also one of the issues that parents emphasize. Regarding this issue, P.5 expressed her views as follows:

*"I teach with games. Or I am reading a book, we evaluate the events in the book together. I teach by telling the people around me who do right or wrong. I also try to teach by explaining the reasons and consequences of our behavior."*

Some of the parents focused on opportunity teaching. Regarding this issue, P.10 stated the following.

*"Our attitude changes depending on what we teach. If it's something about manual and muscular dexterity, I allow him to do it himself. When he makes a mistake, I try to encourage him to do it again. If I am trying to teach behavior, I tell it or act out through characters in games."*



## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Covidien pandemic-19 as mentioned in the introductory part of Turkey and all over the world has affected the education system. The 2019-2020 academic year has continued with distance education since March, although schools reopened in the fall term of 2020-2021, due to the rapid increase of cases, the fall term continued in the form of distance education. Although schools are open in the spring term, some of the parents did not want to send their children to school. For this reason, parents need to choose topics and techniques suitable for the development of their children, especially in early childhood. From this point of view, it is aimed to determine the views of parents who have children in early childhood on learning in this study.

As a result of the research, it was determined that parents define learning as a developmental process and behavior change. When the definitions of learning from past to present are examined, Hergenhahn and Olson (2001) defined learning as a relatively permanent behavioral change that occurs as a result of an individual's experience. On the other hand, Schunk (2008) defines learning as a permanent change that occurs in behaviors or the capacity to behave in a learned way and gives results in various fields from practice to other forms of experience. As can be seen in the definitions, there should be a change in behavior, albeit partially, in the learning process and this change should be in its potential, that is, in the developmental process. Therefore, it is seen that parents focus on the basic points of learning. It is thought that the basic situations they focus on will also affect their methods in the teaching process.

When parents are asked how their children learn, it is seen that they focus on play, exploration, living by doing, and modeling. Even in most preschool pedagogical programs, since the time of Fröbel until today, play has been an important aspect in the work with children (cited in Pramling Samuellsen & Johansson, 2006: 48). In a recent meta-analysis of early childhood education and developmental science journals, Cheng and Johnson (2010) suggest that their and others 'findings' attest to the fact that play has been a topic of immense importance in early education and child development research and practice throughout the twentieth century and into the present decade. Considering that kindergartens today are more academically oriented (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Russell, 2011), it is gratifying that their parents are game-oriented. Learning by discovering, which parents focus on, is defined as the process of collecting information for the individual (Bruner, 1961). Wood and Bennett (2000) emphasized in their research that children learn more easily when they discover it. It is considered a gratifying finding that parents allow their children to learn by discovering. Again, learning by doing and experiencing, which is one of the most emphasized topics by parents, is a teaching strategy developed by Dewey. Accordingly, children learn as a result of research and

examinations by making applications in the process (Yazar & Karataş, 2019). Being a model, one of the most frequently mentioned topics by parents, has an important place in behavioral and social learning theories (Gredler, 1992). Modeling is an extremely important practice for children with developmental disabilities as well as children with typical development. For example, National Autism Center and The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (NPDC) stated that being a model is a scientifically based practice in teaching children with autism. When the answers given were examined, both parents who had children with autism stated that they preferred to be models for their children. Modeling is currently used as an application in a wide range from language development to obesity prevention efforts (Englund, 2010; Natale et al. 2014). It is gratifying that the parents participating in the study are aware that their children can learn in different ways and use these techniques.

Finally, when examining which topics are prioritized by parents in teaching and with which methods they use them, it is seen that they coincide with the answers they gave about how children learn. Parents stated that they teach their children as a model, by offering opportunities and by teaching. It is seen that the subjects they focus on in the teaching process are self-expression, abuse, universal values, and preparation for primary school. Abuse is one of the most at-risk factors for children. For this reason, it is essential to teach body limits from an early age (Ruiz-Casarez, 2019).

For this reason, it is thought that it is a pleasing finding that parents inform their children about this issue. Since values are living factors, they are affected by the society they are in (Davidov, 2010), affecting society (Döring, 2010). In this context, families, and schools have great responsibilities in helping children acquire values. Parents' focus on universal values is also considered a favorable situation.

### **Suggestions**

Basic qualitative research and snowball sampling were used in this study. The research can be repeated for different risk groups. Because even under normal conditions, children at risk (low socio-economic, children with special needs etc.) are in the disadvantaged group in terms of education. During the pandemic period, it becomes more difficult for these children to attend school. For this reason, it is important to determine the views and practices of the parents of these children. By combining these results, different training programs can be prepared.

### **Limitations**

In this study, parents' views on learning were determined through interviews. Using a combination of Home Observation for the Measurement of the Environment (HOME) and interview questions will strengthen the findings.

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