

Relationship between the Phonological Awareness Skills and Writing Skills of the First Year Students at Primary School*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the phonological awareness skills and writing skills of the first year students at primary school. In the study, the phonological awareness skills and writing skills of the students were measured at the beginning of the term. Students' writing skills were measured in the middle of the first term, at the end of the first term and in the middle of the second term. At the end of the study, it was seen that the phonological awareness skills were measured at the beginning of the first term interpreted the students' writing achievements in the middle of the first term but did not interpret their writing achievements at the end of the first term and in the middle of the second term.

Key Words

Phonological Awareness, Writing, First Year Students.

Writing means conveying the feelings, thoughts and demands through written signs. It is a psychomotor skill of which the perceptual and motor sides are at high level (Yangın, 2002). The general objective of teaching writing is to develop the child's ability to convey his feelings, thoughts and observations in written mode with a clear, legible and productive writing skill (Çelenk, 2007). There are some studies mentioning that phonological awareness skill is also quite important besides all knowledge, skills and experience for bodily, cognitive, affective and social perspectives in child's reaching the required readiness for writing skill and developing this skill

as required (Anthony & Francis, 2005; Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1992; Chard & Dickson, 1999; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 1999; Goswami & Bryant, 1990; McGee & Morrow, 2005; Torgesen, Morgan, & Davis, 1992; Wright, Stackhouse, & Wood, 2008).

Phonological awareness is an oral language skill which is a prerequisite for understanding the relationship between the sounds and letters (Torgesen & Wagner, 1998). As phonological awareness aimed at making children conscious of the elements of a word, it requires mental processes like thinking on the sounds of a language, recognizing, distinguishing, being careful, exploring and realizing. A child can learn that a word is composed of sounds and syllabi, separate and combine syllabi, and produce new words using sound units due to this skill (Güneş, 2007). To sum up, phonological awareness can be defined as the skill of analyzing the words at the level of independent sound units (Aktan, 1996).

Phonological awareness is a skill, which starts to develop during the preschool period, can be developed and taught, cannot develop on its own, is a determinant of reading-writing problems and has an important role effect in reading-writing achievement in the future (Catts, Gillispie, Leonard, Kail,

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& Miller, 2002; Chard & Dickson, 1999; Ege, 2006; Olofsson & Niedersoe, 1999; Phillips, Menchetti, & Lonigan, 2008; Pullen & Justice, 2003; Roskos, Christie, & Richgelds, 2003; Torgesen et al., 1992; Rubba, 2004; Torgesen & Wagner, 1998).

It was mentioned that there was a relationship between the phonological awareness and reading-writing development in the studies carried out (Stahl & Murray, 1994). The hypothesis that the children who are successful in phonological awareness related tasks are more advantageous in learning how to read is generally accepted (Nation & Snowling, 2004). The studies revealed that phonological awareness is among the most important indicators of reading performance (Stahl & Murray, 1994). These findings showed that it is among the most important indicators of reading skill (Carroll, Snowling, Hulme, & Stevenson, 2003). Phonological awareness is considered as an important prerequisite of reading development in any languages. The findings of the numerous studies indicated that the relationship between the phonological awareness and reading skill cannot be ignored (Anthony & Francis, 2005). There are also some studies indicating that the phonological awareness skill measured in preschool period children is the descriptor of writing achievement (Abbott & Berninger, 1993; Allor, 2002; Diamond, Gerde, & Powell, 2008; Mäki, Voeten, Vauras, & Poskiparta 2001; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002; Segers & Verhoeven, 2005; Smith, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). As reading is a prerequisite skill of writing, the studies mostly focused on phonological awareness and reading skill. However, the number of studies examining the relationship between the phonological awareness and writing skill is very limited.

The Purpose of the Study

It is important to know which skills children should have while learning reading-writing or which skills help children to develop reading-writing skill more quickly and effectively as it helps to find out the required skills in preschool period. The experiences and skills the children have in preschool period effect their school life in the future. When the studies carried out abroad are examined, it could be seen that phonological awareness skill in preschool period is particularly given importance. The studies focusing on the relationship between the phonological awareness skill and reading-writing skill in preschool period are particularly carried out in languages like English, Finnish, etc. and on reading skill. At this point, the phonological features of

Turkish language should not be ignored. Turkish language is a language which is written as it is read and read as it is written. Sounds and letters can be matched one to one in Turkish language because of its phonetics features. Therefore, it is easier to learn reading and writing in Turkish than in other languages. The number of studies on the phonological awareness and writing skills taking these features of Turkish language into consideration is very limited. This study is quite important as it indicates the relationship between the phonological awareness skill that children develop in preschool period and their achievement in writing in primary school first year.

Method

Research Design

The descriptive model was used in this study in which it was aimed to determine the relationship between the phonological awareness skills of primary school first year students and their writing skills as it is aimed at presenting the current situation as it is.

Study Group

The universe and the sampling were not assigned in the study. Randomly selected 126 primary school first year students – 69 males and 57 females – who were enrolled at two state schools in Ankara province Çankaya district were determined as the study group.

Process

1. The writing part of the Basic Reading-Writing Skills Scale was applied in order to measure the writing skills of the students at the beginning of the term. At the end of this application, 3 students who were outside the normal distribution were kept out of the study.
2. The phonological awareness skills of the students were measure for two weeks before presenting the first sound. After that, reading-writing teaching started with Sound Based Sentence Method.
3. The writing skills of the students were measured in the middle of the first term, at the end of the first term and in the middle of the second term. The data obtained were analyzed using the appropriate statistical techniques.

Data Collection Tools

The writing part of “Basic Reading-Writing Skills Scale” was used in order to measure the writing skills of the students at the beginning of the term in the study. The scale was developed by Yangın in 2007. The reliability of the scale is 0.87. This scale determining the basic reading-writing skills is composed of 108 questions, 54 of which are for reading skills and 54 of which are for writing skills. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 108.

“Yangın, Erdoğan and Erdoğan Phonological Awareness Scale” which was developed by Yangın, Erdoğan and Erdoğan in 2008 was used in order to determine the phonological awareness skills of the students. There are 35 items in the scale – 7 items in 5 tasks. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 35. The reliability of this scale is $KR-20=0.74$.

The students were asked to write 5 sentences including the letters they had learned until the implementation of the scale in Writing-1, Writing-2 and Writing-3 scales. The participants were given 1 point for each sentence they wrote correctly and 0 point for each sentence they wrote incorrectly. The highest score to be obtained from the scale was 19. The reliability of the Writing-1 scale was $KR-20=0.90$, the reliability of Writing-2 scale was $KR-20=0.83$ and the reliability of Writing-3 scale was $KR-20=0.80$.

Data Analysis

While the independent variable is the score obtained from the phonological awareness scale, the dependent scale is the score obtained from writing scales in the study. The simple linear regression analysis was used in the study. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS 11.5 package program. The significance level was determined to be $p<0.01$.

Results

Firstly, the average and standard deviation values for the writing levels of the students were calculated in the study. It was seen that the scores that students got from the writing levels increased from the middle of the first term to the middle of the second term. This can be explained with the fact that students learned reading-writing.

The first research question of the study was “Is there a significant relationship between the pho-

nological awareness skill developed in preschool period and the accurate and fluent writing skill in the middle of the first term of the primary school first year?” According to the simple linear regression analysis related to the phonological awareness’ prediction Writing-1 level, phonological awareness is a significant predictive of Writing-1. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the phonological awareness and Writing-1.

The second research question of the study was “Is there a significant relationship between the phonological awareness skill developed in preschool period and the accurate and fluent writing skill at the end of the first term of the primary school first year?” According to the simple linear regression analysis related to the phonological awareness’ prediction Writing-2 level, phonological awareness is not a significant predictive of Writing-2. In other words, there is no significant relationship between the phonological awareness and Writing-2.

The third research question of the study was “Is there a significant relationship between the phonological awareness skill developed in preschool period and the accurate and fluent writing skill in the middle of the second term of the primary school first year?” According to the simple linear regression analysis related to the phonological awareness’ prediction Writing-3 level, phonological awareness is not a significant predictive of Writing-3. In other words, there is no significant relationship between the phonological awareness and Writing-3.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study indicated that the phonological awareness skill measured at the beginning of the first term had an important role in the achievements of the students in writing in the middle of the term. The scores of the students with high level of phonological awareness from the Writing-1 level indicated that students move to the formal writing process more easily at the beginning of the first term. This finding of the study is in parallel with the findings of the studies on the relationship between the phonological awareness and writing skill. The writing skills of the students until the third year were examined by Mäki et al. (2001). This study showed the direct relationship between the phonological awareness and visual-motor skills acquired in preschool period and the writing skill in the first year. Diamond et al. (2008) examined the relationship between the writing skills and letter knowledge, phonological awareness and

writing consciousness. The finding they found in their study was that the phonological awareness acquired in preschool period was in two-way relation with the writing skill. Abbott and Berninger (1993) investigated the relationship between the skills which had roles in developing writing skills and the writing skill. The writing skill in the first, second and the third year was mostly predicted with the phonological awareness and transferring words, sounds and shapes into the writing accurately. Welsch, Sullivan and Justice (2003) investigated the relationship between the writing skills of preschool students with the reading-writing skills acquired in preschool period. The alphabet knowledge, writing consciousness and phonological awareness skills of the students whose writing skill was developed were more developed.

Another finding of the study was that the phonological awareness level measured at the beginning of the first term did not predict the writing achievements of the students at the end of the first term and in the middle of the second term. Students learn all letters in the alphabet at the end of the first term and they move to the free reading-writing in the second term. The phonological awareness skills of the students who learned reading and writing developed. Therefore, the phonological awareness level measured at the beginning of the school is far away from being a predictor of the writing achievements of the students who moved to free reading-writing. The studies which revealed that the writing skills that children developed in time helped to develop the phonological awareness skills as well also supported this comment.

Craig (2006) investigated the effect of writing program applied to the students in preschool period on their phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and reading skills. According to the findings of that study, the applied writing program developed children's phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. In their study with primary school first year students, Huang and Hanley (1997) examined how the phonological awareness skill and visual skills measured at the beginning of the first term were effective in their reading achievement throughout the year. It was found that the phonological awareness skill measured at the beginning of the first term were predictive for the reading achievement in the middle of the first term. The phonological awareness skill that was measured in the middle of the term again was found to be higher than the one measured at the beginning of the term. This finding showed that students' phonological aware-

ness skill also developed while they were learning to read and write. Ukrainetz, Cooney, Dyer, Kysar and Haris (2000) offered phonological awareness training through shared reading and writing activities for preschool period students. At the end of the study, it was found out that the phonological awareness skills of the students increased in preschool period through shared reading and writing activities.

As a result of this study, it was found that although the phonological awareness skill measured at the beginning of the first term predicted the writing skill in the middle of the first term, it did not predict the writing skill at the end of the first term and in the middle of the second term.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made.

1. The students should be given phonological awareness training during the preschool period so that they could benefit from the formal writing training more effectively and they could move to the writing more easily.
2. The teachers at preschool educational institutions should help the students and the children to be aware of the sounds and to develop their phonological awareness skill using nursery rhymes, riddles, rhymed child poems or songs.
3. The phonological awareness activities should be carried out for the students who cannot perceive the sounds accurately, cannot be aware of the sounds they hear and produce, and, thereby, have problems in writing process in order to develop their sensitivity towards the sound in the process.

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