



Preschool Age Children's Views about Primary School

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Abstract

Starting primary education is one of the most important changes that children encounter in early childhood. Moreover, especially within the last twenty years, as an outcome of the idea that children are active learners, listening to children's ideas about their learning, lives, and experiences has gained importance. In this sense, this study is thought to be significant in terms of its aim to analyze the transition to primary school according to the thoughts of children and to offer suggestions for preschool education. For this purpose, the study was conducted with 55 children who were attending 7 independent kindergarten schools in Aydın city center. The participants were selected by a systematic sampling method. The study was conducted using a phenomenological design. For the data collection, a mosaic approach including different verbal and visual techniques that allowed the children to express themselves comfortably was used. The data were analyzed by descriptive analysis using the NVivo Qualitative Analysis program. According to the findings of the study, preschool age children described primary school as big, crowded, complex, and distant. They referred to their family, teachers, and television as information sources. Further, they thought that there were many rules in primary school and they could never play. When the dialogues were considered in general, nearly all of the interviews included negative thoughts. It is thought that this case stems from the lack of right information about primary school.

Keywords

Transition to Primary School, Readiness, Preschool Education, Mosaic Approach, Phenomenology.

Starting primary education is one of the most important changes that children encounter in early childhood (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). For a student attending school for the first time, school is a new social environment full of new things. In addition to being together with other children from different ages, new rules and developmental tasks to be achieved are also included in the child's life as outcomes of this social environment (Işık Erdoğan & Şimşek, 2014).

For a child to start primary education without any problems, s/he has to achieve the necessary developmental tasks. Senemoğlu (1994) lists the skills that a child should gain in his/her development as self-awareness, awareness of his or her own culture and other cultures, social skills,

communication skills, perceptual-kinetic skills, analytical thinking and problem solving skills, and creativity and esthetical skills. For Oktay and Unutkan (2005), children who will start primary education should express themselves, be aware of their responsibilities, not experience sadness at leaving home or the family, have good communication with the teacher, have friendships, keep themselves clean, dress on their own, wait in a line on their own, protect themselves during course breaks, and be able to sit at a desk and focus their attention.

All the elements such as changing environment, curriculum, school culture, pedagogical approaches, and classroom communication are related to how the transition to primary school

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affects a child (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). This information highlights that children's adequate self-awareness and awareness of the school environment are the skills necessary for their successful transition to the primary school. These skills are related with primary school readiness in the literature. Güler (2001) defined the concept of readiness, which can also be called school maturity, as a child being prepared to meet the requirements of primary school in terms of physical, intellectual, and social skills. Oktay (1983) defines the concept as a child's being ready to learn easily and successfully without having any emotional compulsion. For Koçyiğit (2009), school readiness is a concept that can change from child to child, can be defined according to different ages, and includes the child's maturation in all developmental areas with a balanced basis, as well as having a performance that shows all the necessary characteristics for learning and intellectual development: language development, socio-emotional development, kinetic development, and self-care skills are criteria for school readiness.

In many countries, whether a child who is at the age for compulsory education is ready for school or not is determined via developmental tests, and a document is prepared about his or her ability to start school (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2011). In Turkey, families can submit a written application that presents their reasons, in terms of their child's physical development, to postpone the child's school entry (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2012). This makes parents the only authority for their children's school readiness process and determination.

Especially within the last 20 years, as an outcome of the acceptance of the view that children are active learners, listening to children's thoughts about their learning, lives, and experiences has been considered important (Einarsdottir, 2011; Mayall, 2000; Smith, 2007 as cited in Harcourt and Einarsdottir, 2011). According to various studies, preschool teachers' and primary school teachers' views and criteria about the issue are different (Epstein & Sanders, 1998; Johnson, Gallagher, Cook, & Wong, 1995). Although some studies have investigated children's views on their experiences after starting primary school (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Einarsdottir, 2006, 2010; Işıklı Erdoğan & Şimşek, 2014), there are fewer studies on children's views of primary school before they begin attending (Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2005b; Einarsdottir, 2011). Also, it is difficult for children to do their own planning and to understand what they should do in primary

school completely without having attended yet (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Within this information, it is thought that the analysis of preschool age children's views about their transition to primary school and primary school itself will contribute to the literature.

Method

Research Model

This study used a phenomenological design, which is a qualitative approach. The phenomenology design focuses on the phenomena that we are aware of but do not have detailed information about. We can encounter various phenomena such as events, experiences, perceptions, tendencies, concepts, and cases in our world (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The study was conducted to identify and describe the views of preschool age children related to the concept of primary school readiness from different aspects and comprehensively.

Study Group

The participants were selected via a systematic sampling method. They were 55 children, 26 girls and 29 boys, who were going to 7 independent kindergarten schools in Aydın city center during the A.Y. 2011–2012.

Data Collection

It is necessary to select the data collection tool carefully in studies that include children. Using different verbal and visual methods that make children feel comfortable will help obtain the truest data (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2007). Therefore, for data collection, the mosaic approach was used in this study. The mosaic approach can be defined as using multiple data collection methods to ask the topic to different people in gathering information (Clark & Statham, 2005).

It was decided that the most suitable techniques for the aim of the research and the characteristics of the study group are open-ended densified interviews with small groups and drawing-and-telling. Small group interviews were applied to groups of twos and threes accompanied by the class teachers in March and June 2012. The interviews lasted between 12 and 13 minutes and were video-taped. After the small group interviews, the children were asked to draw pictures about what kind of place a school is/would be. After that, they were

asked to comment by answering questions about the pictures that they had drawn. The drawing-and-telling technique was used because it elicited the children's active participation and successful visual expression. Moreover, drawings can provide valuable data about how children see cases and phenomena (Clark, 2005; Dockett & Perry 2005a; Einarsdottir, 2007).

Data Analysis

The data that were obtained from the small group interviews and children's comments on the pictures were interpreted using descriptive analysis. According to this technique, the data are summarized and interpreted according to the themes determined beforehand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this study, the themes are sub-purposes of the research. The data were organized under the sub-purposes and interpreted. Moreover, to increase the internal reliability and validity of the findings, references from the children's views were shown frequently. The data were coded by another academician who has performed related studies and is an expert on qualitative research. Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula ($\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}}$) were used for the coding by the two coders. The inter-rater reliability was 88%. A reliability score of over 70% is accepted as sufficient. The findings were also given systematically in accordance with the sub-purposes of the research.

Results and Discussion

The first sub-purpose of the research, to answer the question "What are the knowledge and expectations of preschool age children regarding primary school?" was labeled "Primary School;" the second sub-purpose of the research, to answer the question "What are the knowledge sources of preschool age children about primary school?" was labeled "Information," and the third sub-purpose, to answer the question "Which skills do preschool age children think are necessary in primary school?" was called "Readiness."

When the children's definitions of primary school were analyzed under the theme "Primary School," it was seen that the most frequently mentioned characteristic was "Big." One of the children mentioned that primary school had a bigger building than his current school and that it was a "hundredfold bigger than my school" (Ahmet, 65 months). When the pictures that the children

had drawn about primary school were analyzed, it was determined that 35 children had drawn a "Big Building," as mentioned in the small group interviews. Under the theme "Information," children used the concept "Family" ($f = 27$) most frequently as the sources from which they obtained knowledge and ideas about primary school. Under the theme "Readiness," the skills that children must know/do in primary school were collected under the categories of "Rules," "Information," "Physical Skills and Chronical Age," "Self-care," and "Emotional Skills." When the skills that had been expressed by the children were analyzed, it was determined that "Rules" ($f = 54$) was the most frequently mentioned skill.

According to the findings of the study, when the dialogues with the children were considered in general, it can be said that nearly all of the dialogues included negative thoughts. Primary schools being "big," "crowded," "complex," and "distant" was an exceedingly worrisome situation for the children. It was thought that this worry stemmed from their lack of knowledge about primary school. "Parents" and "Teachers" were shown to be the children's sources of knowledge about primary school under the theme "Information." However, the mentioned shareholders should struggle more to give information and help children adapt to primary school. Hence Koçyiğit's (2009) study about school readiness reported that it is primarily the family and teachers who are responsible for giving information to children about primary school, according to the views of parents and primary school teachers. However, nongovernmental organizations and parents, teachers, and other adults around a child have an important mission in the process of developing the child's readiness for primary school. In most places around the world, the primary people responsible for the child's school readiness are families; however, the state should support families through services that they need for the education of their children (Kunesh & Farley, 1993; National Task Force on School Readiness, 1991). Under the theme of sources of information about primary school, the children listed television and cartoons. Media can be used as an important tool for informing children about primary school. Thus, the preparation of cartoons, public service announcements (PSA), and special broadcasts for children can be beneficial for supporting the children in regard to this issue. In former studies, children primarily preferred television programs that they were exposed to from birth (Erdoğan & Baran, 2008).

The last sub-purpose of the study, to answer the question "Which skills do preschool age children think are necessary in primary school?" was called "Readiness," and the expressions under this theme were collected under the concepts "Rules," "Information," "Physical Skills and Chronical Age," "Self-care," and "Emotional Skills." The most frequent expressions that the children used in describing their transition to primary school under the theme of Readiness were "Cannot do what I want," "Cannot play," "Learning to read," "Learning the numbers," "Going when I am old enough," "Going one year later," "Protect myself," and "Can be away from my family." This is parallel with other studies about the transition from early childhood to compulsory education (Brostrom, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2011; Griebel & Niesel, 1999, 2003). In Einarsdottir's (2011) study, it is told that the most useful skills for primary school children who have had preschool education are academic skills and the ability to follow rules in the process of transition. The most conspicuous finding is the thought of "never playing games in primary school" ($f = 13$). The children criticized primary school, whether intentionally or not. As Durualp and Aral (2011) indicated, nearly all around

the world, the focus point of primary schools is academic success. Teachers focus on teaching reading and writing, but they do not use "Games" as a common instruction technique. However, games are handled as a basic communication tool and work for children. Thus, studies emphasize that intellectual development and kinetic development are highly related to each other, especially in early childhood. It can be said that healthy, physically fit, and relaxed children are more successful at school, and children who do not play regularly and actively are more inattentive and possibly behave distordedly toward others (Trawick-Swith, 2013).

When the findings of the study are considered, it can be said that children who are going to independent kindergartens need to be informed about primary school correctly. Primarily, parents and then preschool teachers should appropriately inform children about primary school, including make visits to primary schools as an introduction. Preschool teachers' helping children gain rich experience related to primary school by offering activities that help prepare them can provide valuable support in the children's process of transition to primary school.

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