

# Which Perceptions Do We Have Related to Our Rights as Child? Child Rights from the Perspective of Primary School Students

Erdem Hareket<sup>1</sup> & Selma Yel<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Kırıkkale University, Kırıkkale, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Department of Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

Correspondence: Erdem Hareket, Department of Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Kırıkkale University, Kırıkkale, 71450, Turkey. E-mail: erdemhareket@gmail.com

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*“Only children who exist with their unique rights will take the first step into a world in which all the people in the world will know their rights and respect each others’ rights...”*

## Abstract

This study was carried out with the goal of investigation of perceptions and views which are related to children’s rights of forth grade primary school students. The research was designed properly to qualitative research approach. This research was made with 156 4th grade students. In determining of the research group, criterion sampling technique was used. In the process of getting research data, survey form, written documents and semi-structured interview form were used. The research data were analyzed with content analysis method. As a result of research, it was determined that children indicated that they have some rights such as have adequate nutrition, be respected by everyone, play games, feel being loved and attract attention, have fun and get qualified education. On the other hand, some rights such as make decisions and choices independently on issues related to self, live, shelter, protect themselves from all kinds of danger and get information are expressed by participants more less than other rights. In addition to this, it was determined that some responsibilities are perceived as rights by children. Consequently, it was determined that the children have not adequate awareness about own rights. Depending on the research results it was suggested that awareness and perceptions of students related to own rights should improved with qualified and entertaining children’s rights education.

**Keywords:** children, children’s rights, perceptions about child rights, education of children’s rights, qualitative research

## 1. Introduction

It can be said that within a social life in which individuals do not have sufficient awareness and level of information, it won’t be very difficult to predict the chaotic situations that can arise and problems in human relations. Educational processes are thought to be one of the primary factors that can influence the course of this situation within the process. At this point, it can be said that educational system and educational activities will have a direct effect on the development of child rights and on creating the awareness about this subject in individuals. Indeed, Lansdown, Jimerson and Shahroozi (2014) emphasized that individuals’ interests and likes will be influenced by the quality and nature of the education system they are in and within this context, children’s rights and needs can be easily forgotten within the system. In parallel with this view, Theron, Liebenberg and Malindi (2014) stated that school psychologists and school communities called for practices that will support positive youth development with methods that take children’s rights in the center. Within this context, educating children within family and educational environments as individuals who are aware of their rights, starting from early ages, should be seen as one of the necessities of social life. In parallel with this view, Elvan (2016) stated that educating individuals who are aware of benefits of society and who have respect for human rights is possible by educating individuals who are aware of their own rights and who have internalized these rights. At this point, it is very important for the adults of the future to have information and awareness of children’s rights, which are defined as third generation rights. Akyüz (2012) emphasized that, when children are not educated about their rights, they will both not be able to use their rights as they should and it will not be

possible to think that they can take legal action when these rights are violated. Yıldırım Doğru (2014) stated that the concept of children's rights is a universal concept which includes all of the rights that all children in the world possess from birth such as education, protection, health and shelter. Within this context, conscious attitudes and awareness about children's right should be seen in the political approaches of rulers, in the content of educational process elements and within their practice processes, in the works of non-governmental organizations and in the attitudes of families. Dündar and Hareket (2017) stated that perceptions about children's rights should be developed through the country's policies, awareness on this issue should be increased, children's rights should have a more qualified place in social life and in accordance with these objectives, scientific, real and feasible policies should be developed. At this point, it should be considered that children's developing perceptions and awareness of their own rights refers to a multi dimensional process. In this direction, Waldock (2016) pointed out that children's rights are frequently associated with liberal welfare states and children protection paradigms and thus family service paradigm to be adopted on this issue will get away from the focus of children's rights and protection and be conceptualized. From this point of view, Dündar and Hareket (2016) stated that in developing perceptions about children's rights, starting from early ages, the attitudes and knowledge levels of parents, teachers, school administrators and students on this issue, in addition to these, the contents of the prepared educational programs and the way these programs are applied are important factors. With the question "Although we aspire to a social structure in which all individuals are aware of their own rights and show behaviors which are sensitive and respectful to the rights of other world people, can we give our children living conditions and environments with sufficient qualifications and equipments that can serve this purpose, starting from very small ages?", Hareket, Çağlayan and Dündar (2016) present a remarkable point of view to the aforementioned view. Liebel (2012) stated that the low level of attention shown to children who live in different cultural and social contexts is still disputed. At this point, it is thought that the components of family and educational institution, which are the places that children's perception of their rights will develop initially, are important in terms of children's rights.

Individuals' continuing their development by being aware of their own rights starting from very early ages is very important in terms of both the necessities of social life and also in terms of the dignity of individual life. At this point, determining the awareness and thoughts of children about their rights at an early period of their lives is necessary to guide educational activities on this issue. Within this context, finding out the thoughts of primary education fourth grade students about children's rights was discussed as an important research dimension thinking that it could present a scientific argument to researchers doing research on the subject, to different scientific researches on the field and on studies conducted to increase awareness of children's rights within educational environments.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Aim of Research*

This research was conducted to find out the awareness and thoughts of children between the ages of 9 and 11 studying at fourth grade of primary education about children's rights. In this direction, researches were conducted within the framework of the research questions listed below:

- 1) What are the existing perceptions of children studying at fourth grade of primary education about children's rights?
- 2) Around which of the children's rights do the perceptions of children studying at fourth grade of primary education focus?
- 3) Should the perceptions of children studying at fourth grade of primary education be developed about children's rights?
- 4) If the perceptions of children studying at fourth grade of primary education should be developed about children's rights, which suggestions can be developed to realize this?

### *2.2 Research Approach*

This research was conducted with a design suitable for qualitative research approach. Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative research approach is a method which enables the data to be discussed separately and the results of the study to be readable within the framework of specific codes and themes. Creswell (2014) defined qualitative research approach as a process in which the steps of the research process are developed, researchers get data from their own environments, the data are analyzed with inductive approach and the meanings of the data are interpreted by the researchers. This study has a design of case study, which is one of the qualitative research approaches. Case study is defined by Yin (2009) as a method which is used under many circumstances and

which enables us to create information about individual, organizational, social, political and related events. This study is a case study in that the participants of the study did not receive an education, did not participate in any Project or a different scientific research about children's rights within their formal education process. Within this context, in line with the purpose of detailed examination of awareness and perceptions of children studying at fourth grade of primary education about children's rights, the study was designed as a case study.

### 2.3 Research Group

This study was conducted with children between the ages 9 and 11 who were studying in four different primary schools which were in different socio-economic parts of the city center of Kırıkkale during the academic year 2016-2017. A total of 156 children, 84 girls and 72 boys participated in the study. In the process of determining of the research group, criterion sampling method which is defined by Büyüköztürk et al. (2011) as a method that can be preferred by researchers when observational units are chosen from people or situations with specific qualifications was used. In line with this, while choosing the children in the research, the criteria taken into consideration were;

- 1) Not having received any education about children's rights during their educational life,
- 2) Not being a member of an organization or institution that carries out activities within the context of children's rights,
- 3) Not having participated in any Project about children's rights,
- 4) Not having participated in a different scientific research conducted before this research.

Table 1 gives detailed information related to the participants' genders, ages and their status of taking part within the process of gathering research data.

Table 1. The some quantitative information about participants and the process of getting research data

The number of participant in terms of the data getting process	Level of Education/Sex/Age Range		
	Primary school fourth grade students		
	Age range of Participants		
	9-11		
	Girls (f)	Boys (f)	Total
The Number of Children in The Survey	84	72	156
The Number of Written Documents by Children	84	72	156
The Number of Children in Focus Group Discussions	14	10	24

### 2.4 Data Collection Tools

The data of the research were collected by a questionnaire form with open-ended questions prepared by Patton (2014), which give the participants the chance to give their opinions without any pre-determined categorical limitations; focus group discussions which are defined by Glesne (2014) as a way of discussion which enables to reach the views and thoughts of specific people simultaneously and written documents created by the participants which are stated by Patton (2014) to be one of the primary methods of obtaining qualitative findings. Creswell (2014) stated that the data to be obtained in qualitative researches can include special or public documents gathered by the researcher during the research. Of the data collection tools used in the study, the questionnaire form prepared by the researcher and the semi-structured interview form used in focused group discussions were examined in detail by two experts in the field who have researches on different dimensions of the related subject and who have completed their doctorate studies, and also an expert on language before the main practices. After revisions made in line with the feedbacks as a result of these examinations and the pilot study, the data collection tools were finalized.

### 2.5 Obtaining of Research Data

The process of obtaining the research data was completed in three stages with the direct participation and under the control of the researchers to this process. The first stage of the data collection process was the completion of the questionnaire form that included four open-ended questions by 156 children. The questions in the

questionnaire form were answered by the children in 45 minutes. In the second stage of the data collection process, the children in the study group were asked to create written compositions within the framework of the theme of children's rights. At this stage, the compositions were completed within approximately 50 minutes by the children. In the last stage of the data collection process, four different focused group discussion groups were formed within the axis of the criterion of variety of answers consisting of 6 children in the study group, separately for each school. With the focus groups formed, focus group discussions were conducted on different days in four different sessions which were completed in 75-90 minutes on average. In the discussions, semi-structured interview forms with five open-ended questions prepared by the researchers were used. In order to prevent data loss, the discussions, which were conducted with the permission of the children, were voice recorded within the protocol of voice recording. The voice recordings were later transcribed by the researchers. After this stage, the transcripts were analyzed by the members in the focus discussions. At this point, the participations' confirmations were taken in order to raise the validity and reliability of the study data.

### 2.6 Analysis Process of Research Data

For the analysis of the qualitative research data obtained from the questionnaire forms, written documents and focus group discussions used as data collection tool, content analysis technique was used. Berg (1998) defines content analysis as the process that occurs up to transfer of interviews, field notes, unremarkable various data or information which are not thought to be suitable for analysis by making them systematically comparable. Processing, visualizing and interpreting the data obtained in the study were realized with the cooperation of the researchers. Within the process of the data analysis, in order to increase validity and reliability, the data processed were analyzed by two independent researchers. Creswell (2014) stated that the participation of independent researchers for the analysis of the research data from different perspectives is an approach that increases the validity of the qualitative research conducted. In addition to this process, the intercoder agreement formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to increase the validity and reliability of the research results. Within the process of forming codes and themes, some disagreements were seen between coders, though in low levels. For this reason, intercoder reliability value was calculated. As a result of this process, the rate of intercoder agreement was found as 91%. The detailed information about this calculation is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Findings about results of calculation of intercoders consistency

<i>Reliability = [Agreement/(Agreement + Divergence)] X 100</i>	
Number of codes arrived at agreement	41
Number of codes discussed over	6
Number of codes not to be arrived at agreement	4
<b>Consistency Rate (%)</b>	<b>91</b>

The findings about the codes and themes which were formed as a result of the analysis of qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions, answers of the participants to the questionnaire form which consisted of open-ended questions and their written documents about the theme of children's rights are included in detail below. The research findings obtained as a result of the analysis process are given in detail in the following section with different tables. In addition, there are sections of some of the direct expressions of children coded as "C2, C34, C102, C....." about the related themes.

### 3. Research Findings

The results of the analysis of qualitative research data which were attained to find out the perceptions of children between the ages of 9 and 11 studying at primary education fourth grade about children's rights were categorized under 5 different themes. The following section gives the research related theme topics and the results under these topics in detail.

#### Theme Topics

- Children's rights within the frame of basic needs of life and developmental period needs
- Children's rights within the frame of legal assurances
- Children's rights within the frame of freedoms and personal qualifications

- Children's rights within the frame of personal development and social life
- Children's rights within the axis of responsibilities

The findings of the theme of Children's rights within the context of basic needs of life and developmental period needs are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Children's rights within the frame of basic needs of life and developmental period needs

Codes	Frequency
To play	77
To be respected	72
To be loved and cared for	55
To be happy and cheerful	40
To be protected from all kinds of evil and violence	26
To get enough nutrition	18
To grow up in healthy environments	15
To have a peaceful family life	12
To have a shelter	10
To behave childishly and get spoiled	9
To live	6
To rest and sleep	4
To cry	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>

When the results in Table 3 relating to the theme of children's rights within the frame of basic needs of life and developmental period needs are examined, it can be seen that children mostly noted that they had the right to play, to be respected by other people, to be loved and cared for, to feel happy and cheerful, to be protected from all kinds of danger and violence, to get enough nutrition and to grow up in healthy environments. It can be seen that the children less frequently indicated that they had the right to behave childishly and be spoiled, to live, to rest and to cry. Some of the direct expressions of the participants under this theme are:

*C77; "As children, we have the right to play comfortably and as much as we want. We can be happy only this way. All the children have the right to be happy and cheerful." C24; "Children have fun by playing. Our most basic right is to play." C36; "Adults should not see us only as children. They should respect us. This is our right." C90; "Children should not be sad....We should be loved and taken care of. As a child, I have the right to be loved and to be happy." C12; "Please, don't let the children to be exposed to violence ... We don't want to be scared and exposed to violence. Adults should know about our rights and they should not shout at us." C8; "We, children, have the right to get sufficient nutrition. We should be able to play the games we love and be protected from the evil."*

The results of the theme of Children's rights within the frame of legal assurances are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Children's rights within the frame of legal assurances

Codes	Frequency
To learn their rights and to defend these rights when necessary	66
To attend school and to get education	41
To have equal living opportunities with other children	10
To reach and learn information	10
To have areas in which they can act according to their rights	7
To be the citizen of a country	6
To become members of associations suitable for them	3
Not to be forced to work under unsuitable conditions	2
To benefit from qualified health and care services	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>

When the results of the theme of child rights within the frame of legal assurances are examined, it can be seen that the children mostly stated that they had the right to learn their rights and to defend these rights when necessary, to attend school and to get education, to have equal opportunities with other children, to reach and learn information, to have areas in which they can act according to their rights and to be the citizen of a country. It can be seen that the children less frequently stated that they had the right not to be forced to work under unsuitable conditions and to benefit from qualified health and care services. Some of the direct expressions of the participants under this theme are:

*C14; "Every child should be able to learn their rights. Adults should also know children's rights and respect them." C9; "All children should attend school. Getting education is our most important right." C142; "All children in the world should be equal. We should be able to have the same opportunities. I think this is children's right ...." C32; "All children want to learn... Getting information and learning are among children's rights." C18; "We should live in a society in which I can easily live and defend my rights ... Children have this right." C45; "Every child should be able to live in a country ... Be the citizen of a country... All children should have this right." C12; "As a child, I have the right to be a member of an association about children's rights... Thus, I can know and protect my rights better." C109; "No child should be made to work under unsuitable conditions and they should be protected from this."*

The results of the theme of child rights within the frame of freedoms and personal qualifications are in Table 5.

Table 5. Children's rights within the frame of freedoms and personal qualifications

Codes	Frequency
To be taken into consideration by other people	26
To make independent decisions and choices related to self	20
To express thoughts freely	18
To act freely	16
To be able to choose friends and have friends	14
To be able to choose a job and have a job	13
To be curious and ask questions	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>

When the results in Table 5 are examined, it can be seen that the children mostly stated that they had the right to be taken into consideration by other people, to make independent decisions and choices related to self, to express thoughts freely and to act freely. The children also expressed that they had the right to choose their friends, to be able to choose a job and ask questions. Some of the direct expressions of the participants under this theme are:

*C154; "As a child, it is an important right of us to be taken into consideration by adults." C78; "My opinions are not asked about many things... I want to make decisions about some things. I believe that this is my right." C140; "All children should be able to talk when they want and tell their thoughts to adults... No one should prevent this." C6; "Children have the right to act freely and be curios." C84; "I should be able to choose the job that I want and I should have a job when I grow up... This is one of my rights." C106; "As children, we have the right to choose our friends."*

Table 6 shows the results of the theme of children's rights within the frame of personal development and social life.

Table 6. Children's rights within the frame of personal development and social life

Codes	Frequency
To participate in social activities and to have fun	26
To read	19
To spend time with friends	17
To shop	14
To support personal development	13

To celebrate holidays	5
To be interested in art	4
To participate in sports activities	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

When the results in Table 6 about the theme of children's rights within the frame of personal development and social life are examined, it can be seen that the children mostly stated that they had the right to participate in social activities and have fun, to read, to spend time with friends, to shop and to develop personal development. The children also stated that they had the right to celebrate holidays, to be interested in art and to participate in sports activities. Some of the direct expressions of the participants under this theme are:

*C34; "All children and I have the right to have fun. I will be happy if I spend as much time as I want with my friends." C14; "All children should be able to buy whatever they want and shop... Everyone has the right to have fun with friends." C122; "My greatest right is to read the books that I like... I also like drawing. All children's rights to read and draw should be respected ..." C64; "Children have holidays... It is our right to celebrate holidays." C134; "I want to buy the things I want... Shopping is one of my rights." C66; "Children should run, fly a kite, have fun and ride a bike... It is our right to do these ..."*

Table 7 gives the results of the theme of children's rights within the axis of responsibilities.

Table 7. Children's rights within the axis of responsibilities

Codes	Frequency
To study	16
To do homework	7
To do tests	6
To be tidy	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

When the results in Table 7 are examined, it can be seen that the children mostly saw activities such as to study, to do homework, to do tests and to be tidy, which can be considered within the context of responsibility, as their rights. Some of the direct expressions of the participants under this theme are:

*C148; "I want to be successful in my lessons and exams... Thus, I need to do tests and study regularly. These are my rights..." C46; "As children, we have the right to study and do homework when we come home." C51; "Children can want to do homework and study every day... Adults should respect this right."*

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This research was conducted to analyze and specified the perceptions and views of primary education fourth graders related to child rights. The research data obtained as a result of the study were grouped under five different themes of "Children's rights within the frame of basic needs of life and developmental period needs", "Children's rights within the frame of legal assurances", "Children's rights within the frame of freedoms and personal qualifications", "Children's rights within the frame of personal development and social life" and "Children's rights within the axis of responsibilities". The following section discusses the research data under related themes in detail.

When the results of the category of *Children's rights within the frame of basic needs of life and developmental period needs* were examined, it was found that children mostly indicated that they had the right to play, to be respected by other people, to be loved and cared for, to feel happy and cheerful, to be protected from all kinds of danger and violence, to get enough nutrition and to grow up in healthy environments. In addition, it can be seen that the children less frequently stated that they had the right to behave childishly and be spoiled, to live, to rest and to cry.

When the results of the category of *Children's rights within the frame of legal assurances* were examined, it was found that the children mostly stated that they had the right to learn their rights and to defend these rights when necessary, to attend school and to get education, to have equal opportunities with other children, to reach and learn information, to have areas in which they can act according to their rights and to be the citizen of a country.

It was found that the children less frequently stated that they had the right not to be forced to work under unsuitable conditions and to benefit from qualified health and care services.

When the results of the category of *Children's rights within the frame of freedoms and personal qualifications* were examined, it was found that the children mostly stated that they had the right to be taken into consideration by other people, to make independent decisions and choices related to self, to express thoughts freely and to act freely. The children less frequently expressed that they had the right to choose their friends, to be able to choose a job and ask questions. When the results of the category of *Children's rights within the frame of personal development and social life* were examined, it was found that the children mostly stated that they had the right to participate in social activities and have fun, to read, to spend time with friends, to shop and to develop personal development. The children also stated that they had the right to celebrate holidays, to be interested in art and to participate in sports activities. Lastly, when the results of the category of *Children's rights within the axis of responsibilities* were examined, it was found that the children mostly saw activities such as to study, to do homework, to do tests and to be tidy, which can be considered within the context of responsibility, as their rights.

Within this context, the results of the research were discussed in detail with some studies which had results that could support our results or shed light on our results from different aspects. In a study conducted with primary school students, Kaymak Özmen, Öcal and Özmen (2014) stated that children generally indicated that they had the right to be educated, to play and to be protected from violence; however, they were not found to have perceptions about rights such as going to other countries and having new identities. At this point, it can be seen that the results of our research are in parallel with the results of this study in that we did not reach any results related with the right of citizenship and having different identities. In parallel with the results of our study, it was found in Demirezen, Altıkulaç and Akhan (2013)'s study conducted with primary education students that children's perceptions about children's rights focused within the context of the freedom to play, have fun, to get education, to be protected, to live and to express their thoughts, while on the other hand it was found that children did not have sufficient perceptions about rights of freedom, thought and living. The results of the study conducted by Ersoy (2011) showed that students mentioned their rights about education, play and fun more, while they mentioned rights such as being respected, being treated equal, developing interests and skills, expressing their thoughts and participating in decisions which interest them less. In our study, it was found that children had perceptions about their rights to play and to have fun, besides their rights to be respected by adults, to be treated equal, to express their thoughts and to make decisions freely about subjects that interest them. The results of the study conducted by Uçuş (2016) showed that the first thing that came to children's minds about the concept of children's rights was the words freedom, peace and love. In addition, it was found that children did not have detailed information about the subject of children's rights. In parallel with the results of this study, it was found that children's perceptions about some rights should be developed. In the study conducted by Ersoy (2012), it was found that children could not learn their rights enough and they could not apply their rights within the environments they lived in.

The results of the research conducted by Hareket and Gülhan (2017) showed that in general, pre-service primary education and pre-school teachers had similar perceptions about children's rights. In addition, it was also carried out that, both pre-service teacher groups did not have sufficient awareness and perceptions about some rights within the axis of children's participation and development rights, which was in parallel with the results of our study. Based on the results of the search they conducted, Karaman, Kepenekçi and Baydık (2009) stated that in all undergraduate programs of teaching departments, there should be lessons about children's rights or lessons about this subject should be enriched so as to include the theme of children's rights. Similarly, the results of this study points that perceptions and awareness about children's rights should be developed with different educational activities. The results of the research conducted by Türkoğlu and Akduman (2013) found that pre-service pre-school teachers did not have sufficient information related to child rights and children's rights lesson was not in the teaching program of many universities. Within the context of children's high-benefit, it was concluded that the lesson of children's rights should be included in the pre-service education programs of all jobs about children.

Erbay (2012) criticized the practices of Ministry of National Education in terms of the insufficiency of the related lessons in the curriculum about raising awareness, the insufficiency of teaching methods in meeting this objective and in general in terms of the structure of Ministry of National Education and administrators' and teachers' contradicting attitudes about the participation rights of children. Tintor (2013) mentioned that adults' attitudes about children's rights were shaped within the axis of child dependency, immaturity and the need of protecting the child, and pointed out that the processes of explanation about the concept of children's rights depended on respectful and appreciative attitudes shown by adults. Özer (2013) stated that with the Convention

on the Rights of Children, the necessity of supporting children's participation arose. At this point, it was emphasized that the participation of children should not be underestimated and on the contrary, not supporting children's participation was considered as a threat for the democratic life of the future. In a study by Musaoğlu and Haktanır (2012), it was found that pre-school teaching program prepared for 36-72 months old children was not depend on Convention on the Rights of Children and that the program had to be reconstructed to raise children within the context of children's rights.

As a conclusion, it is thought that the perceptions of children who participated in the study focused on specific fields. These fields are thought to point to rights within the frame of basic living needs and developmental period necessities and within the frame of legal assurances. At this point, it was found that children mostly mentioned perceptions related to being respected by adults, being loved and cared for, playing games and being happy and cheerful. In addition to these rights, it was found that children stated that they had the rights to learn their rights and defend these rights when necessary, to attend school and get education, to have equal rights with other children and to reach information. On the other hand, it is thought that children's perceptions about children's rights focused less on specific fields. These fields are thought to point to rights that can be discussed within the frame of freedoms and personal qualifications and personal development and social life. Related with these fields, it was found that children mostly stated that they had the rights to be taken into consideration by other people, to make independent decisions related to issues related with them and to express their thoughts easily. It was also found as a result of the study that the children thought that some activities such as studying, doing homework and doing tests, which can be seen as responsibilities, were their rights. Based on the results of the research, it can be said that children had some perceptions about their rights. However, it is thought that perceptions about more extensive rights that can be discussed within the axis of the child's rights of participation and development should be taught to children and should be developed through various educational activities.

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## Note

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