

A STUDY ON EXPLORING PRESCHOOL TEACHER PRACTICES AND PREFERENCES IN USING EARLY LITERACY ACTIVITIES*

ERKEN OKURYAZARLIK ETKİNLİKLERİNİN KULLANIMINDA OKUL ÖNCESİ ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN UYGULAMA VE TERCİHLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ПРАКТИК И ПРЕДПОЧТЕНИЙ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ ДОШКОЛЬНЫХ УЧАСТНИКОВ В ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИИ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ДЛЯ РАННЕГО РАЗВИТИЯ ГРАМОТНОСТИ

Emine Eda ULUĞ^{✉**}
Belkıs TEKMEŒ^{***}

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to review the roles and practices of preschool teachers regarding reading and writing skills in preschool education. A sample of 234 preschool teachers working in Ankara participated to this study. Through employing complementary mixed method design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected by using a descriptive data collection instrument, semi-structured interviews and observation form. Research findings indicate that preschool teachers mostly conduct teacher centered activities focused on concept learning for literacy development at desk activities. The preschool teachers stated that they usually distribute books and other printed materials to children; to read poems, fairy tales, stories and picture books aloud, and to examine those to give information about their features such as the back and front covers, the beginning and the end of the book. Although misconceptions and different activities were observed, it was found that teacher preferences were generally made in the light of the materials and attitudes of the institutions they worked in.

Key words: Early literacy, Literacy activities, Preschool education, Preschool teachers, Reading and writing skills

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin okul öncesi eğitimde okuma ve yazma becerilerine ilişkin rollerini ve uygulamalarını incelemektir. Bu araştırmaya Ankara'da görev

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** ORCID: [0009-0008-2085-4106](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2085-4106), eddaulug@gmail.com

*** ORCID: [0000-0003-4470-4387](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4470-4387), Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Başkent University, Faculty of Education, , tekmen@baskent.edu.tr

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yapan 234 okul öncesi öğretmeni katılmıştır. Tamamlayıcı karma yöntem deseni kullanılarak betimsel veri toplama aracı, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve gözlem formu kullanılarak hem nitel hem de nicel veriler toplanmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin masa başında okuma yazma gelişimi için çoğunlukla kavram öğrenmeye odaklı öğretmen merkezli etkinlikler yürüttüğünü göstermektedir. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri çocuklara genellikle kitap ve diğer basılı materyalleri dağıttıklarını; şiir, masal, hikâye ve resimli kitapları yüksek sesle okumak ve bunları inceleyerek kitabın arka ve ön kapakları, başı ve sonu gibi özellikleri hakkında bilgi vermektir. Kavram yanılığları ve farklı etkinlikler gözlemlense de öğretmen tercihlerinin genellikle çalıştıkları kurumların materyalleri ve tutumları ışığında şekillendiği tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erken okuryazarlık, Okuma yazmaya hazırlık etkinlikleri, Okul öncesi eğitim, Okul öncesi öğretmenleri, Okuma yazma becerileri

АННОТАЦИЯ

Целью данного исследования является изучение роли и практики учителей дошкольных учреждений в отношении навыков чтения и письма в дошкольном образовании. В этом исследовании приняли участие 234 воспитателя дошкольных учреждений, работающих в Анкаре. Как качественные, так и количественные данные были собраны с использованием описательного инструмента сбора данных, полуструктурированных интервью и формы наблюдения с использованием дополнительного дизайна смешанного метода. Результаты исследований показывают, что учителя дошкольных учреждений в основном проводят деятельность, ориентированную на учителя, ориентированную на концептуальное обучение для развития письменной грамотности. Воспитатели дошкольных учреждений часто раздают детям книги и другие печатные материалы; Чтение стихов, сказок, рассказов и книжек с картинками вслух и их изучение для получения информации о таких особенностях, как задняя и передняя обложки, начало и конец книги. Хотя наблюдались неправильные представления и различные действия, было установлено, что предпочтения учителей, как правило, делались в свете материалов и отношения учреждений, в которых они работают.

Ключевые Слова: Ранняя Грамотность, Грамотная Деятельность, Дошкольное Образование, Воспитатели Дошкольных Учреждений, навыки грамотности

1.Introduction

The better equipped children are physically and psychologically in the early childhood, the more successful and stronger they will be in their future lives. The foundations of mental and physical development are formed between the ages of 0-6, and that is, in the preschool period, so this magical period is highly important. It is known that children who have negative experiences in the preschool education experience are likely to lose self-worth, consequently, their academic success in school and after-school life is low and they are apt to exhibit more behavioral problems (Ministry of National Education, 2013). Considering the fact that the formation of character, obtaining basic knowledge, skills and habits are shaped in this period in subsequent learning, the necessity of providing appropriate learning environments which children gain experience has understood.

Many educators state that there are some critical periods in human life and these periods should be tackled and emphasized separately and the necessary sensitivity must be shown (Yilmaz, 2003). One of the most critical periods in human life is the early childhood stage, covering the 0-6 age range, which includes the preschool period. The reflections of the experiences in childhood are observed in later ages. Preschool service, which is the most

important step of education, is too important to be left to coincidences and should be in a scientific and systematic manner (Sevinç, 2005).

Preschool teachers, provide children the opportunity to experience various environments enriched with appropriate materials that will increase their level of school readiness for primary school. One of the main objectives of preschool in Turkey is to "prepare children for primary school and support them in acquiring the necessary skills for primary school" (MONE, 2013). Preschool teachers, play an important role in facilitating children's transition to the first stage of education, helping them acquire basic skills such as reading and writing that they will use in their later years, and developing positive attitudes towards educational institutions and literacy (Taşkın, 2014). The philosophy of literacy development is that children to acquire basic skills in a meaningful way and become aware of this issue. Specialization in basic skills and increasing readiness in literacy are mostly fall in to the cognitive domain. It should be kept in mind that the role of teachers in this regard is to offer rich activities for supporting cognitive development of children who are in preschool age by showing them different and various activities, enabling them to encounter three-dimensional materials; drawing letters from sand, creating lines with foam, going over the numbers drawn with cars, deriving words from the initials of the objects in the classroom (Taşkın, 2014).

The MONE Preschool Education Programme is a "developmental" programme based on the developmental levels and characteristics of children and in this sense, it is based on the idea of supporting all areas of development. This programme, which has "spiral" characteristics as an approach, is "eclectic" as a model (MONE, 2013). The basic cognitive activities in the programme consist of the child's reasoning, perceptual ability and the development of various concepts. The importance of the family and then the preschool teachers in the development of the child's skills such as noticing the writings, boards, signs that exist in daily life from the moment the child is born and trying to read them, is enormous. The ability to understand, define and interpret the visual information sent to human beings is within the scope of visual perception (Brown, 2008). According to Frostig (1964) and her colloquies, visual perception is the ability to recognize, notice and interpret visual stimuli by associating them with previous experiences. It is the visual perception that helps children to improve their spelling, reading, writing, mathematical skills and all other skills necessary for their success in school (Frostig, et al.1964). While learning to read, children need to have visual perception skills in order to be able to distinguish the letters and words written on the paper well (Yost and Judi 2001). The literacy skills that children experience in the first years of their lives are alphabet knowledge, vocabulary, verbal language and writing with phonological awareness (drawing, peripheral writing, etc.). These skills related to literacy develop simultaneously with cognitive, social, visual, auditory and especially language development starting from the first day the child is born. The basis of literacy development consists of these skills (Strickland and Riley-Ayers, 2007). The ninth outcome in the language area in the MONE programme: "demonstrates phonological awareness" draws attention to the fact that there is no reading and letter teaching in the preschool period, what is important in the recognition of sounds and phonological awareness (MONE, 2013).

In the light of the above, the early professional experiences of the authors have been an impetus to engage in this study due to their curiosity to explore and understand different practices in different education programs in different institutions. While in some preschool institutions, students are taught to read and write as early as 36 months of age, it may not so for others. The aim of this study is to examine the roles and practices of preschool teachers in the development of literacy skills, to suggest recommendations for the preschool teacher's education curriculum and teacher training policy. Shortly, with this study, we

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attempted to reveal the variety of literacy preparation activities implemented by the teachers and the underlying reasons.

2.Method

Methodology of the study is presented in terms of research design, participants, data collection and data analyses parts including trustworthiness issues.

2.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a complementary mixed method, to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data sequentially in an explanatory manner. Verma and Mallick (2005) emphasized that it is common to use both quantitative and qualitative methods in the same research. While the data collected by quantitative method allows reaching large numbers of participants, the data obtained by using qualitative methods such as observation, interview, etc. allow a deep examination of the research subject (Patton, 1990). While quantitative data provide unbiased and objective information about the research, they are insufficient to explain the quality. On the other hand, in qualitative research, participants have the opportunity to use freer expressions while expressing their opinions; therefore, qualitative data were included in addition to quantitative data. The use of qualitative and quantitative research methods together will increase the reliability of the study as it will provide comparative results (Patton, 1990). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were used in order to determine the perspectives of preschool teachers on literacy activities in different preschool institutions.

2.2. Participants

The population of the study includes preschool teachers working in private institutions, private schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, public schools and institutional nurseries in Ankara between 2017-2019. Permissions for the study from the university ethical committee and MONE were taken at the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year (Document id:145488481-605.99. E.1655863 dated 12.10.2017). While determining the sample size and method of obtaining the data of the research, convenient/appropriate sampling from purposive sampling methods was employed, taking into account the geographical proximity and the cost, time and effort factors to be spent while reaching the mass to be applied to the scale (Yıldırım, 1999). Among the preschools located in seven central towns; Yenimahalle, Çankaya, Altındağ, Akyurt, Etimesgut, Gölbaşı and Keçiören in Ankara, 234 preschool teachers who volunteered to fill in the survey participated in the study, among them the observation form of literacy preparation activities was applied to 16 teachers and the semi-structured questionnaire was applied to 32 preschool teachers who participated in the applications on a voluntary basis. Data collection tools and the number of the participants in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Data Collection Tools and Number of Participants

Tools	Name	Participants
Face to face survey	Language and Literacy Activities in Center	234
	Based Early Childhood Settings	
Face to face interview	Semi structured Interview form	32
Observation form	Observation form for activities	14

2.3. Data Collection

Data collection in the study was carried out in two stages sequentially and to complement each other to reach a more comprehensive understanding.

Quantitative data

In order to collect quantitative data, the scale based on language and literacy activities in preschool, which was developed by (Green, Peterson, & Lewis, 2006) and adapted into Turkish by (Tuğluk, Kök, Koçyiğit, Kaya, and Gençdoğan, 2008) was used. The cronbach α coefficient of the scale prepared by Green, Peterson and Lewis in 2006 is 0.94. İ.H. Tuğluk, M. Kök, S. Koçyiğit, H. İ. Kaya and B. Gençdoğan translated this likert type scale into Turkish in 2008. The first version of the scale has 21 items. In the version adapted to Turkish, there are 19 items. Some items from the scale were as follows:

Read aloud to children in a group setting.

Read aloud to children individually.

Set aside special time each day to read to children.

Read aloud a variety of books.

Reread favorite books.

Talk about books read together.

Ask children questions about the books.

Provide opportunities for children to look at books and other printed materials..

Teach children features of a book.

Teach children that words run from left to right and from top to bottom.

Practice saying alphabet with the children.

Teach children to recognize letters of alphabet.

Teach children to distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters.

Help children learn the sounds each letter can represent.

Teach children to write letters of alphabet.

Help children to write their names.

Help children identify different colors, shapes, and sizes.

Help children learn opposites.

After the permission taken from the mentioned researchers to use the adapted scale for this study, the research approvals from the university and from MONE are taken accordingly (Document id:145488481-605.99. E.1655863). The scale was administered to 234 preschool teachers who accepted to fill the scale; they were asked either by face to face visits to the schools or by phone if they volunteer to participate to the study which lasted more than a semester to complete the first part of the data collection stage of the study.

Table 2
Summary for Demographic Variables of the Participants (N=234)

N	f	%	
Gender	Female	219	93.6
	Male	15	6.4
	Total	234	100.0
Student ages	2-3	46	19.6
	3-4	54	23.1
	4-5	66	28.2

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	5-6	68	29.1
	Total	234	100.0
Education status	High School	27	11.5
	University	199	85.0
	Master's Degree	8	3.5
	Total	234	100.0
Daily working hours	4-6 hours	55	23.5
	7 and more	179	76.5
	Total	234	100.0
Years of occupational experience	0-2 years	43	18.4
	3-5 years	61	26.1
	6-9 years	59	25.2
	10 and more	71	30.3
	Total	234	100.0
Literacy activities participated in the last two years	In-service training seminar	115	49.1
	Symposium	72	30.8
	Other (activities on reading and writing)	47	20.1
	Total	234	100.0
The Institutions (Kindergarten, nursery and day care center)	Private Institutions	82	35.0
	State Institutions	40	17.1
	Institutional Nurseries	112	47.9
	Total	234	100.0

Qualitative data

After the first stage was completed, the face-to-face interviews and observation forms are administered to the volunteered preschool teachers for the second stage of the data collection process, who also participated the first stage of the data collection part through the scale. In order to collect qualitative data a semi structured interview form including open-ended questions to explore their preferences on the early literacy activities and their practices were conducted. The items in the interview form aimed to explore the personal opinions of the preschool teachers about the activities they prepared in terms of achievement and content.

In the development procedure of the interview form, questions were designed parallel with the scale developed by Green, Peterson, and Lewis (2006), supported by literature research, and expert opinions were obtained about these questions. The interview questions were posed directly to the participants by the researcher and the answers given by the participants were recorded and analyzed by the researcher. The main aim was to explore their understandings about the concepts of early literacy applications and their preferences. Through the open-ended question, preschool teachers' opinions about the preparation and implementation processes of the activities they implemented were obtained.

As a complementary data collection tool, to observe the early literacy preparation activities of the preschool teachers, reading-writing preparation activity items were observed systematically with the observation form. The observation form for the activities was prepared based on the items taken from the Preparation for Reading and Writing Book published in 2013 by the Ministry of National Education. Firstly, the pilot implementation

was conducted and after expert opinions were taken and necessary arrangements were made, it was applied.

Internal validity and trustworthiness

In order to sustain internal validity issues for the interview and observation form results, expert opinions from two professors working at the preschool education department were taken and suggested revisions were made accordingly. All the process from developing the forms to analyzing the results obtained from the interviews and observations were conducted by the two authors of the study; the data analyses procedure including coding, categorizing and reporting within agreement. In order to complete the data collection procedure within a year and agreeing that the answers has reached a meaningful content the second stage is ended. All the participants were informed before and after the study to feel free to reach every data obtained from them to be checked and approved if they need. Every step of the study is explained in detail and well reported to have credibility and confirmability.

Some example questions for the face to face interviews are as follows:

Can you give examples for the “early literacy preparation activities”?

Can you give examples for the “literacy training activities”?

How competent you consider yourself about early literacy teaching?

How do you support your students’ early literacy development?

What do you think about the appropriateness of the activities to support early literacy in MONE 2013 Program Book?

From the 32 preschool teacher agreed to answer the interview questions, only 16 of them accepted to host the researcher in their classrooms to conduct the observation forms which consists of following items to check whether they are observed or not with the explanation part for each item if available. After completing the observation forms 2 of the forms were lost and it was not available to repeat the observation procedure unfortunately. Each observation lasted 20 to 40 minutes depending on the activities. Following sample items for the observation form were mostly referenced from the MONE program book for Preschool education (2013).

Activities are planned for the children’s age and interests.

The instructions are clear and age appropriate.

The teacher is active and observes the children during the activities and support them.

There are materials available for the children for their interest on literacy.

2.4. Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the quantitative data obtained from the scale were run. Average±SD (Standard Deviation) values are given for the descriptive statistics of the variables. Number (n) and percentage (%) values were given for demographic variables such as gender, age and institution of employment. IBM SPSS Statistics 21.0 (IBM Corp. Released 2012. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.) and MS-Excel 2007 programmes were used for statistical analysis and calculations. Cronbach's α coefficient for the internal consistency assessment of the scale based on language and literacy activities in preschool period used in this study was found to be 0.87, N=234.

The qualitative data, were summarized and interpreted according to the predetermined themes according to the aim of the study and the focused concepts. The data were organized according to the themes revealed by the research questions. In order to reflect

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the ideas of the observed and interviewed participants effectively, direct quotations were often used (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011, p.224). The answers given to the open-ended questions prepared within the scope of literacy activities were collected under similar categories, frequency was calculated and interpreted.

Firstly, the answers including similar meanings given to the open-ended questions prepared within the scope of literacy activities were detected. In doing so, sentences using similar words or sentences expressing the same meaning with different words were identified. After the similar statements/phrases were grouped under the same categories, appropriate names were given to these categories. The authors came together and reached 1 agreement with the categories and their labels after the initial coding. Next, the coding process included calculations of the frequencies and interpretations for each category. For example, the answers to the question "What comes to your mind when you think of preschool literacy activities?" were divided into 5 categories according to the answers containing similar words, and it was detected that there were 19 teachers who answered "Line work, number work, sound work, etc.". The same technique was applied in other questions.

3.Findings

Findings are presented in terms of the data collection tools; early childhood setting scale, observation form and semi structured interviews.

3.1. Findings Based on the Early Childhood Settings Scale

Findings related to the language and literacy activities in center based early childhood settings scale are presented in Table3.

Table 3
Findings On the Language and Literacy Activities in Center Based Early Childhood Settings Scale (N=234)

Phrases	Always n(%)	Often n(%)	Sometimes n(%)	Seldom n(%)	Never n(%)
Teaching numbers	181 (77.4)	43 (18.4)	1 (0.4)	6 (2.6)	3 (1.3)
Teaching colors and shapes	190 (81.2)	36 (15.4)	1 (0.4)	4 (1.7)	3 (1.3)
Conversation with children on read books and told stories together	193 (82.5)	31 (13.2)	2 (0.9)	6 (2.6)	2 (0.9)
Asking questions during reading	182 (77.8)	43 (18.4)	2 (0.9)	3 (1.3)	4 (1.7)
Teaching opposite concepts	172 (73.9)	48 (20.6)	4 (1.7)	8 (3.4)	1 (0.4)
Teaching songs and poems	168 (71.1)	52 (22.3)	5 (2.1)	6 (2.6)	2 (0.9)
Set aside special time each day to read to children	125 (53.7)	77(33.0)	18 (7.7)	10 (4.3)	3 (1.3)
Provide opportunities for children to look at printed materials on own	163 (70.0)	59 (25.2)	2 (0.9)	7 (3.0)	2 (0.9)
Read aloud a variety of books with pictures	156 (67.0)	48 (20.5)	8 (3.4)	12 (5.2)	9 (3.9)
Teach children features of a book.	109 (46.8)	92 (39.5)	16 (6.9)	11 (4.7)	5 (2.1)

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Reread favorite books	111 (47.4)	66 (28.2)	36 (15.4)	16 (6.8)	4 (1.7)
Teach children that printed letters and words run from left to right and from top to bottom	93 (39.9)	70 (30.1)	29 (12.4)	27(11.6)	14 (6.0)
Read aloud to children individually	84 (36.1)	45 (19.3)	38 (16.3)	47(20.2)	19 (8.1)
Help children learn the sounds each letter can represent	84 (36.1)	70 (30.0)	44 (18.9)	22 (9.4)	13 (5.6)
Help children to write their names	70 (30.0)	52 (22.3)	33 (14.2)	50(21.5)	28 (12.0)
Awareness to read aloud that focus on sounds, rhyming, and alliteration	52 (22.3)	64 (27.5)	42 (18.0)	44(18.9)	31 (13.3)
Teach children to distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters	54 (23.2)	50 (21.5)	29 (12.4)	58(24.9)	42 (18.0)
Teach children to write letters of alphabet	56 (24.0)	30 (12.9)	31 (13.3)	58(24.9)	58 (24.9)

As it is shown (Table 3), the first five items that were marked as "always" at the highest rate. These statements support children's literacy skills by serving the learning outcomes in the MONE programme and developing children especially in the field of language. In addition to this, the last five items of the scale marked as "always" at the lowest rate. The expressions such as “teaching how to express names phonetically”, or “teaching the difference between uppercase and lowercase letters” or “teaching the letters in the alphabet” were ranked the lowest.

It is noteworthy that teachers' practices in subjects that are not included in the MONE programme are at a low rate. When the results are analyzed, teaching the alphabet comes at the top of the activities that are said to be never done with a rate of 24% and similarly, the item of teaching how to express names phonetically has a rate of 22%. It can be concluded that these items are perceived as direct literacy teaching and avoided in preschools.

Another result is that while chatting with children about stories is always done (82%), one-to-one book reading (36%) is not. This situation also shows us that group activities are preferred. When generally evaluated, it was seen that teachers provided children with color, shape, number and concept recognition. It was also observed that teachers did not intensively carry out activities such as letter, phonetic studies, copying names.

3.2. Findings Based on the Observation Forms

Focused concepts during the classroom observations for the early literacy activities are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Findings of The Observation Form for Focused Concepts and Qualities in The Activities (N=14)

Focused concepts for observation	Observed (f)	Not observed (f)
Enough materials for each child	12	2

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Age appropriateness	12	2
Basic to complex	11	3
Clear and age appropriate instructions	10	4
Close observation and follow up planning	11	3
Designing supporting classroom environment	11	3
Supportive, available and developmentally appropriate materials provided	4	10
Teachers qualified and aware of early literacy necessity	5	9
Children show phonetic awareness	8	6
Children show visual, signal, alphabet and name awareness	6	8
Children are capable of necessary fine motor skills	14	0

Observations were made in private, state and institutional preschools in Ankara province. Each observation lasted 20-40 minutes and two observers made the observations. Observers were included in the classroom environment. At the end of the observation, the observation forms were compared and scored with agreement between researchers. In the observations, attention was paid to the classroom environment, teacher attitude, and material selection over the course of the activity. In the observation process, some classes included reading and writing activities in the books, while some classes used the blackboard and photocopying activities. The least observed item in the observation process was the item related to the materials that would create awareness about reading and writing in the classroom environment. The most observed concepts were “children are capable of necessary fine motor skills”, “close observation and follow up planning”, “designing supporting classroom environment” and “providing enough materials for each child”. On the other hand, the most “not observed” concept was “providing supportive, available and developmentally appropriate materials” during the observations (Table 4).

3.3. Findings Based on the Semi-Structured Interviews

In the preparation of the face to face interview questions for the qualitative stage, the focus was to understand the preschool teachers’ understanding on the difference between “early literacy training” and “providing preparation activities to support child development for literacy skills” in preschool education. Literature research, and expert opinions were obtained about these questions. The interview questions were posed directly to the participants by the researcher and the answers given by the participants were recorded and analyzed by the researchers.

Some of the example questions are given as follows:

Can you give examples for the “early literacy preparation activities”?

Can you give examples for the “literacy training activities”?

How competent you consider yourself about early literacy teaching?

How do you support your students’ early literacy development?

What do you think about the appropriateness and the sufficiency of the activities to support early literacy in MONE 2013 Program Book?

Table 5 presents the findings obtained from semi structured interviews for “the literacy preparation” and “early literacy training” activities.

Table 5
Findings for “Early Literacy Preparation Activities” and “Literacy Training Activities”

Codes for preparation activities to promote early literacy	Participant initials	f
Line work, drawing, counting activities, sound and phonetic activities, recognition studies for alphabet, concept learning for shapes and etc.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	19
Fine motor skills activities, hand –eye concentration activities,	3, 10, 13, 16, 17, 20, 24	7
Able to sit and work at desk for a while with paper or hand materials, gaining focus and increasing time for attention	9, 21, 25	3
Cognitive maturity, level of readiness for early literacy development	6, 7, 8, 12, 23, 25	6
School readiness	12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 25, 26	8
Codes for literacy training activities		
Line drawing work, Number studies and Concept learning	2, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 18, 21, 24, 26, 27, 28	12
School Readiness	3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13, 19, 20, 22, 29	10
Visual competency	5, 6, 14, 15, 23, 28,	6
Attention and perception studies	15, 21, 23	3
Increasing readiness to read and write	8	1
Fine motor skills	10, 11, 13, 15, 23	5
Teaching alphabet	16, 17	2
Supporting child development by enhancing the environmental stimulants	25	1
Developmental maturity, motor skills readiness	30	1
A natural developmental flow from birth	7	1

It was concluded that when preschool teachers think of literacy activities, they think of concept studies, book studies and worksheets. Contrary to popular belief, literacy preparation activities are not limited to book/concept/line work, and include activities such as play, art, music and drama in which the child actively participates.

The aim of preschool is not to teach reading and writing to children, but to raise their readiness level to learn reading and writing in primary school. Creating awareness, encouraging enthusiasm and making children love reading books should be the main priority in the preschool education (MONE, 2013, p. 42). The teachers who supported this view stated that this education should be given with music, stories, puppets in accordance with the age

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and that it should be given by an expert teacher without being too intense. Some of them emphasized that it should be given with various language activities, pencil work, and for recognizing sounds. Some teachers stated that it should be given with simple, interesting, colorful pages and as preparation for primary school.

Studies draw attention to the fact that in order to prepare children for the literacy process, activities should be planned in which they can express themselves and that these activities develop verbal language skills in children (Huls, 2002). The teachers who argued that it should not be given as a literacy education in preschools, stated that the children were not ready for education and that sound and rhythm activities could be carried out for the sake of familiarity or that a reading and writing preparation lesson could be given. Yangin (2007) concluded that 14.1% of preschool children could not hold the pencil correctly, 34.4% could not hold the paper properly while drawing, and 40.6% could not adjust the necessary distance between the paper and the eye. In addition, it was revealed that the children were inadequate in drawing horizontal, round, vertical, oblique and lines consisting of these and that they could not acquire hand skills at an "adequate" level. It can be said that these findings reveal that children cannot acquire some skills for reading and writing at preschool level. Another study by Şahiner (2013) concluded that most of the preschool teachers do not agree that reading and writing education should be given in preschools, 43.5% of these teachers work in institutional nurseries, 39.1% work in public and 17.4% work in private preschools.

There was a balanced half to half distribution among the teachers who stated that they could teach literacy education and considered themselves sufficient because they were experienced in their profession, and knew the basic rules such as how sounds are given, how they are combined, in which order they are given, and spelling. Özkaya (2018) concluded that preschool teachers have a high level of competence in literacy preparation activities. On the other hand, in a similar study on the early literacy competency beliefs of teachers, Denli, H. (2022) investigated the relationship between early literacy beliefs of preschool teachers and their proficiency in preparation for literacy. Although the study was based on their perceptions, it was found that there was a weakly positive relationship, but as an additional result, the competency perceptions of the teachers on early literacy activities differed significantly among the teachers whose professional seniority was between 6-10 and 11-20 years.

Another point to be discussed among the findings of the study is; teachers sometimes got confused by the concepts of literacy preparation activities and literacy education. Bay (2008) revealed that preschool teachers' perceptions of competence in literacy preparation activities had high average scores. Some of them stated that this education can be given by teaching vowel letters in our alphabet as sound teaching, number concepts as a worksheet, simple addition and subtraction by decreasing and increasing with Legos. Again, some of the teachers who stated that they could provide this education stated that they could provide this education aurally with fun melodies, by experiencing the sounds with drama activities or by using visual materials, and some of them stated that they could provide this education if the child has completed the literacy preparation process and psychomotor development. However, findings of another study on the related subject showed that preschool teachers' opinions on the usage of games in literacy training determined that they had a high level of knowledge on this subject (Özkaya, 2018).

Teachers who stated that they could not give literacy education to children aged 3-6 years stated that this education was not suitable for children at that age, that sound studies could be done instead, and that children at play age should not be forced. Some teachers united in the following opinion, "We did not receive training in writing, we received training in cognitive preparation for reading and writing. We received training in applying the

instructions in accordance with the age of the child." For the future academic achievement, it is considered that literacy is the most important building block. It is thought that failure to build that block successfully, will cause both academic and emotional problems in the future (Başar, 2013).

Findings for the appropriateness and the sufficiency of activities supporting early literacy in MONE 2013 program book is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Appropriateness of Activities Supporting Early Literacy in MONE 2013 Program Book

Example quotes from the participant teachers

Sufficient

"I think it is sufficient for numbers, patterns, attention exercises and letters".

"I find it sufficient as literacy preparation activities".

"The content is sufficient, and it is teachers job to enrich and plan the activities according to the children's needs and interests".

"Early literacy preparation activities which support the psychomotor development of preschool children for example by the help of visual awareness studies, are suitable for the developmental levels of children".

In sufficient *"Although the content can be considered enough, the application and giving activity plans to implement are not. More activity plans are needed".*

"Insufficient in terms of teaching vertical and italic writing skills"

"Not as good as the other literacy books at the market".

"A comprehensive update is needed for all the developmental areas and ages".

"Regional needs and differences should be considered. Standard books for all the country wide are not sufficient for all schools".

"I don't find the early literacy activity plans are so efficient".

"Not so appealing for the children. Visual materials are needed".

Among the teachers who filled out the questionnaire, 9 of them stated that the literacy activities in the MONE programme for the preschool period were sufficient in terms of numbers, patterns, attention studies and letters, while 15 of them stated that they were not sufficient. There were teachers who found the programme sufficient in terms of preparation activities for reading and writing, and ones who stated that it was sufficient in terms of content, but insufficient in terms of application (Table 6). Although teachers consider activities related to concepts such as numbers, colors and shapes within the scope of literacy preparation activities, there are studies which pointed out that numbers, numerical operations and geometric concepts should be handled within the scope of mathematics activities (Starkey, Klein, and Wakeley, 2004).

Some teachers were united under the following opinion: "Early literacy preparation activities which support the psychomotor development of preschool children for example by the help of visual awareness studies, are suitable for the developmental levels of children" (Table 6). The 15 teachers who thought that the programme book was not enough, stated that; the MONE programme was inadequate in terms of vertical and oblique writing, that it was inadequate when compared to the other books on the market, so that the MONE programme should be updated in general, that literacy preparation activities were not enough and that they should be made more detailed and more fun.

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4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, it was aimed to explore the preferences and practices of preschool teachers towards supporting preschool children's reading and writing skills development.

When the study was evaluated, it was seen that teachers support children to recognize colors, shapes, numbers and concepts. Similarly, Tuğluk, Kök, Koçyigit, Kaya, and Gençdoğan (2008), in their study, evaluated the views of preschool teachers on the implementation of reading and writing activities and found that teachers gave more space to activities especially for concepts. In the same study, preschool teachers answer for the survey, presented that they mostly prefer reading story books and having conversations as questions and answers with children. In another related study (Yılmaz Bolat, 2019), it was stated that in order to gain visual awareness, which is one of the sub-steps of reading-writing skill, activities such as finding similarities/differences of objects, distinguishing, sorting, matching, completing the missing picture, talking about visuals can be done. For visual literacy, it has been determined that activities such as expressing feelings and thoughts through pictures, dramatization, expressing what will happen before/after the picture/event, doing pantomime studies, sequencing events through pictures, creating patterns, interpreting pictures and graphics, etc. can be used.

In a similar study Küçüküran, Altun and Akbaba Altun (2013), found that preschool teachers included sound, concept and line activities in literacy preparation activities. The teachers emphasized the importance of concept and writing preparation activities in the process of preparation for primary education. While in contrast to the studies mentioned above, in another study, it was revealed that teachers did enough activities to develop preschool children's writing skills, but they did not include enough activities to develop sound, visual perception, informational awareness, listening, speaking skills and vocabulary (Erdoğan, Altınkaynak, and Erdoğan, 2013).

According to another finding obtained in the study, it was observed that teachers did not intensively implement activities such as letter, phonetic exercises and name copying. The least observed item obtained in the observation of the activities was the item related to the materials that will create "awareness about literacy" in the classroom environment. Preschool teachers being aware of the fact that the environment and materials are at vital importance at early ages, both the quality and quantity of materials for literacy activities in the classroom needs to be studied professionally.

In early childhood, children should be accustomed to the alphabet and should know what the letters stand for, even if they are limited in number. It is seen that children who cannot learn the alphabet, have difficulty in learning to read. Playing with the shapes of letters and decorating them gives pleasure to young children. In this context, it is important to ensure that children are engaged with materials that help them recognize the letters of the alphabet. ABC books, magnetic board, plastic rough letters, alphabet blocks, computer keyboard, puzzles, alphabet cards are among the materials used for this purpose. The aim in recognizing letters is not to teach the pronunciation of the letters, but to draw attention to what these letters want to tell (Altınkaynak, 2019). However, in a case study conducted with six preschool teachers working in private and public schools, revealed that regardless of the type of the school they work at, preschool teachers mostly prefer ready-made plans (Burhan, 2021).

In this study, the statement "I chat with children about the books, stories and tales I read" ranked first in the opinions of preschool teachers about the implementation of reading-writing preparation activities. These statements support children's literacy skills by serving the achievements in the MONE programme and developing children especially in the field

of language. The statements "I teach how to express names phonetically, I teach children the difference between uppercase and lowercase letters, I teach children the letters of the alphabet" are at ranked last. It is noteworthy that teachers' practices in subjects that are not included in the MONE programme are at a low rate.

In the findings obtained from the interview forms, it was concluded that the teachers gave answers in the light of the activity plans and attitudes of the schools they worked in. Some teachers were confused about the concepts of literacy preparation activity and literacy teaching. In this scope, it can be said that some of the teachers did not have a good guidance from the developmental milestones and indicators given in the MONE programme. Although concept studies and literacy preparation activities are not the same, it has been noticed that they are used interchangeably. Altun and Tanteekin Erden (2016) found that the majority of pre-service teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about early literacy. In addition, pre-service teachers reported that they saw themselves as inadequate in planning and implementing these activities by including a small number and variety of activities to support early literacy in the internship practice.

According to the results of the observation form for literacy preparation activities, preschool teachers mostly conduct concept studies designed to be implemented at desk like drawing or painting. Instead they could give more importance to visual boards, sound and phonological studies inside or outside the classroom for literacy skills, it has been observed that not much importance is given in daily activities.

The preschool teachers who participated in the study stated that they generally give books and other printed materials to children to examine, read poems, fairy tales, stories and picture books aloud, and give information about the features of the book such as back and front cover, beginning and end of the book. Considering the importance of the language domain in literacy skills, it is thought that all these activities are meaningful and useful. While half of the preschool teachers stated that the parents wanted for children to be taught to read and write, it was revealed as a result of the research that, half of them did not want this situation.

The concept of "literacy skills", which is also included in the title of the study, is discussed under two subheadings. "Literacy preparation studies" and "Early literacy training". While the expression "not teaching reading and writing at preschools" is used extensively in the MONE Preschool Programme, there are statements in various preschool institutions that teachers can teach reading and writing. In addition, it was observed that in some institutions, literacy teaching started at the age of 36 months. It has been noticed that these institutions adopt an education flow that is the opposite of the achievements and indicators mentioned in the MONE programme. In line with the answers received, it was seen that preschool teachers used the titles of literacy preparation studies and literacy training interchangeably, had misconceptions and did not have detailed information about literacy preparation other than the general structure of the programme. In their study, Başaran and Sidekli (2021) also found that there was a confusion on literacy preparation and readiness among the preschool teachers. Within the comparison between the preschool and primary school teachers, although they agree about the need for literacy preparation in preschool education, they had different views about the literacy preparation practices conducted in preschool education. Primary school teachers did not agree with the preschool teachers that the children were literately ready when they began to the first grade. It was recommended that preschool and primary school teachers should have collaboration in terms developing literacy preparation and readiness among children.

In addition to this study, further research on different variables such as the type of high school the teachers graduated from, their literacy education experience, perspectives

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and expectations of children's families on reading preparation and school readiness will provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the topic. A revision study to improve the preschool teacher education programs on early literacy is also recommended, with professional support for preschool teachers working in the field already.

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