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Research Article

Exploring the attitudes of native and non-native (Turkish) English-speaking parents towards formal instruction of English in Turkish kindergartens

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Abstract

For many preschoolers in Turkish kindergartens, English instruction starts in the third year of their lives when they have barely begun to articulate their thoughts in their own mother tongue, Turkish. Parents have a dual role as models and decision makers in their children's foreign language education. As the fifteen participant parents of this study are either proficient non-native English speakers (NNEPs) or native English speakers (NEPs), they can provide linguistic input themselves and expose their children to limited or extensive input in different forms. Thus, this study aims to explore the attitudes of NEPs and NNEPs towards the formal instruction of English in Turkish kindergartens. Fifteen questionnaires and interviews were conducted to gather data using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The results demonstrated that all of the participants have positive attitudes towards their children's early initiation into English both in kindergartens and at home and they provide different kinds of scaffolding at home, including natural and self-provided input despite the fact that they mostly harbor a deep sense of mistrust in the qualifications of English teachers in Turkish kindergartens in general.

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» This paper does not require an ethics approval document according to ULAKBIM's (TR INDEX) new coverage criteria as the data were collected before 2020.

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Ethics statement: I hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of the study. I take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

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Ana dili İngilizce olan ve olmayan (Türk) İngilizce konuşan ebeveynlerin çocuklarına Türkiye'deki ana okullarında verilen İngilizce eğitime ilişkin görüşlerinin incelenmesi

Öz

Türkiye'de özel ana okullarındaki bir çok çocuk için İngilizce eğitimi hayatlarının üçüncü yılında, yani kendi ana dilleri olan Türkçe'de fikirlerini daha yeni yeni ifade etmeye başladıkları zaman başlar. Ebeveynlerin çocuklarının yabancı dil eğitimine ilişkin hem model oluşturma hem de karar alma gibi ikili bir rolü vardır. Bu araştırmada yer alan 15 ebeveynin bazılarının ana dili İngilizce'dir ve çok kültürlü ailelerden gelmektedirler, bazıları ise ana dili İngilizce olmayıp etkin bir biçimde İngilizce'yi kullanabilmektedirler. Bu nedenle çocukları için kolaylıkla kendileri dilsel girdi sağlayabilecek veya çocuklarını çeşitli biçimlerde sınırlı veya kapsamlı girdiye maruz bırakabilecek durumdadırlar. Bu araştırma, İngilizce bilen Türk ailelerin ve çok kültürlü ailelerin parçası olan ebeveynlerin Türkiye'deki ana okullarında verilen İngilizce eğitime ilişkin görüşlerini kapsamaktadır. Bu amaçla, katılımcılara önce anket uygulanmış, ardından ise mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar bütün katılımcıların çocuklarının İngilizce öğrenmeye hem ana okulunda hem de evlerinde erkenden başlamasına ilişkin olumlu tutumları olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca katılımcılar kendi sağladıkları doğal dilsel girdiler de dahil olmak üzere çocuklarının erken İngilizce dil gelişimi için çeşitli destekler sağlamaktadırlar. Ancak katılımcılar, aynı zamanda Türkiye'deki ana sınıflarında görev alan İngilizce öğretmenleri'nin yeterli düzeyde vasıflı olduğunu düşünmemektedir.

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Introduction

Children start devoting a great deal of effort to make sense of this world immediately after they are born into it. First language acquisition comprises a crucial part of their efforts as they begin to utter single words from around 1 and 1,5 years of age. Their syntactic development is largely complete by the age of 4 years (Hoff, 2013) For many Turkish preschoolers in private kindergartens in Istanbul, foreign language instruction also starts in the third year of their lives when they have barely begun to put in their lifetime efforts to articulate their thoughts in their own mother tongue.

Although challenged by some studies, the Critical Period Hypothesis, the idea that young children are better able to learn a foreign language than adults because their brains can still use the mechanisms that assist the first language acquisition before puberty, is frequently used to encourage the introduction of foreign language teaching in early childhood especially if native-like proficiency is the ultimate goal of this teaching (Cameron, 2001). In Turkish kindergartens, English can often be chosen as the main foreign language due to “the entry of neoliberal ideals into the education sphere that has caused language programs and departments to be shaped to meet the demands of the corporate sector” (Kananen et al., 2016, p. 16). As a result, many Turkish parents choose kindergartens for their children depending on whether English instruction is offered or not.

Apart from the choice of kindergartens, parents also have a dual role as models and decision makers in their children’s foreign language education. Wong (2000) points out that parents act as important language models for shaping children’s language behavior. As the participants of this study are either proficient non-native English-speaking (NNEPs) or native English-speaking parents (NEPs), they can provide linguistic input themselves and expose their children to limited or extensive input in different entertainment forms, play groups, games, stories etc. if they want. According to Oskamp and Schultz (2014, p. 126), “a child’s attitudes are largely shaped by its own experience with the world, but this is usually accomplished by explicit teaching and implicit modelling of parental attitudes”. Thus, it can be assumed that this implicit modelling of parental attitudes in English-speaking families and multicultural families towards formal instruction of English in Turkish kindergartens can help shape their children’s attitudes towards the targeted foreign language.

The aim of this study is to explore parental perceptions of NEPs as well as NNEPs towards formal English instruction in Turkish kindergartens. This study differentiates itself from the previous research (Ching-Ying & Hsiang-Chun, 2016; Lao, 2004; Liu & Chien, 1998; Oladejo, 2006; Shang, Ingebritson & Tseng, 2007; Tivil, 2009; Wu, 1998) in that all the parents in this study are members of either multicultural or English-speaking families. Thus, they can easily provide additional linguistic input and role model the targeted bilingual behaviors themselves.

Parental perceptions of formal English instruction in Turkish kindergartens are explored in this study using the below research questions:

- 1.What are the parental attitudes of English-speaking Turkish families and native English-speaking families towards their preschoolers’ English language learning in Turkish kindergartens?
- 2.How do parents support their children’s English language learning?

Young learners and language acquisition

Preschoolers can be great risk takers during the language learning process as they are mostly less afraid than teenagers and adults to make mistakes in their production and in most cases they are too young to have pre-existing hostile or favorable attitudes towards the target language, culture or native speakers of that language. Regarding this issue Oskamp and Schultz (2014) mentions “implicit modelling of parental attitudes” (p. 168) explaining that a child mainly shapes his own attitudes through his own experience in this world but in the lack of such direct experience the child mainly relies on parental attitudes especially in such issues as attitudes towards foreigners and other countries. If their parents have positive attitudes, they tend to encourage their children to become active language learners and even provide extra linguistic input and help whenever possible.

Preschoolers are still in Piaget’s preoperational stage of cognitive development (2-7 years old) which is characterized by the development of memory and imagination along with the use of symbols and language development (Shin, 2014). This stage has two phases: the symbolic function (ages 2 to 4 years) and the intuitive thought (ages 4 to 7 years) (Ashford & LeCroy, 2010). In the symbolic function stage, as Ashford and LeCroy point out (2010), children are able to mentally represent objects that are not present in their immediate environment, thus they can play pretend games, imagine whole scenarios and talk about people or things that are not present. In intuitive thought phase, children ask a lot of questions as they want to know the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of everything (Ashford & LeCroy, 2010, p. 302). Although they are extremely egocentric and cannot reason in this stage, they demonstrate their intelligence increasingly through the use of symbols and language (Shin, 2014). As a result, it could be argued that preoperational children would enjoy experimenting with both their mother tongue as well as another language that they are consistently exposed to.

There are several critical factors that need to be taken into account when teaching English to preschoolers between the ages of 2 and 7. Firstly, they do not know how to read and write, thus English instruction has to rely merely on listening and speaking. Hence, it is common for young learner (YL) classrooms to use songs, dancing, and movement for kinesthetic learning, and methods to make input comprehensible like using gestures, pointing at visuals, explaining, demonstrating, and using realia, or real objects or a combination of many techniques into one activity to engage children in the learning process (Shin, 2014). Secondly, unlike their mother tongue, EFL contexts lack an English-speaking environment outside the classroom and YLs cannot hear much English in their immediate surroundings (Shin, 2014). That is why, EFL context requires a lot of repetition in the classroom especially for YLs. In the case of multicultural families in this study, YLs have a parent who is a native speaker of English, so they are exposed to a considerable amount of natural English input. The children of English-speaking Turkish families in this study are also often exposed to English input in the form of songs, movies, TV shows or social circles that their parents choose for themselves and/or their children.

The third vital factor is that preschoolers are still in the process of acquiring their first language (L1) which is Turkish. Therefore, they are expected to acquire another language simultaneously with their mother tongue when they are immersed in English instruction. When the notable differences between English and Turkish in their sentence structures,

vocabulary and articulation are taken into consideration, acquiring both of them at the same time may even be reckoned as a herculean task. Nevertheless, children are particularly skilled to meet this challenge, and they have an innate ability to observe their environment carefully and decipher the meaning of utterances in their L1, hence L2 use must always be contextualized and visual support must be given whenever possible (Brewster et al. 2003). The importance of focusing on meaning is also pointed out by Gürbüz (2013) and she further explains that meaning-focused and interactional tasks as well as fun and creativity in the classroom will provide YLs with real purposes to speak the target language. Another notable point in teaching preschoolers is that they have their own sense of reality, their own heroes and heroines, favorite fictional characters and toys and their own L1 and L2 lexicon. Thus, the importance of adapting tasks and topics is emphasized by Cameron (2001) since this adaptation ensures that tasks and topics relate to learners' interests particularly by "building into a task an element of choice for pupils" (p. 58), i.e. grab your favorite colored balloon. Therefore, kindergarten teachers need to familiarize themselves with preschoolers' universe so that they can anticipate topics and activities of interest for their learners as they plan their lessons.

Preschoolers mainly engage in implicit learning as they "remain unaware of the learning that has taken place, although it is evident in the behavioral responses they make" (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). Thus, their behavioral responses can be assessed using such tools as arts and crafts or verbal feedback instead of traditional written exam-based testing techniques.

Various different studies such as Lee and Lin (2015), and Dzanic and Pejic (2016) point to the significance of music in the form of songs and musical storytelling to motivate YLs as they are more attentive in class thanks to the rhythmic nature of the teaching material (Lee & Lin, 2015) and develop a love for language learning (Dzanic & Pejic, 2016). Furthermore, songs have a positive influence on vocabulary retention of YLs (Dzanic & Pejic, 2016).

According to Wray (2002), very young learners "seem naturally adept at employing formulaic sequences" (p. 148). Thus, teaching English to YLs may allow for considerable numbers of chunks and social interaction between peers because children tend to interact and play with one another through the use of chunks that they hear from their parents, teachers and peers. McKay (2006) also mentions young learners' "propensity to employ formulaic expressions or chunks of language" (p. 193). He further explains that these chunks are not analyzed, meaning that children do not actually know the grammatical structure within these chunks but they can still engage in meaningful language use thanks to these chunks (McKay, 2006).

According to Gürbüz (2013) the main goal of foreign language instruction should primarily be to generate interest in learning a foreign language. Considering the fact that young children are naturally disposed to cooperate and please their parents (Talbot, 2009), parents are perfectly suited to generate interest in the target language and culture. The English proficiency of parents can be an indicator for the amount of linguistic support supplied at home or may serve as a function of indirect modeling (Portes and Hao, 1998). This is why, the participants of this study have been chosen from English-speaking Turkish families and multicultural families. Gardner (2010) distinguishes between active and passive roles that parents play in the language learning process of their children. Within the scope of active role, parents can encourage their children to do well in languages whereas they can question why their children are learning a

foreign language that they might never use later in life if they take on the passive role (Gardner, 2010). Parental involvement in children’s learning is positively related to achievement (Cotton & Wikelund, 2007). They further clarify that this involvement can entail both working directly with their children on learning activities at home, i.e. reading to their children and receiving phone calls, reading and signing written correspondence from school, attending parent-teacher conferences. The kind of involvement that Cotton and Wikelund, (2007) describe can apply to learners at all ages, including preschoolers. Parents also exercise attitudinal influence on their children by encouraging participation in the target language, exchange programs and excursions, helping the child with homework, encouraging the child to read material written in that language (Young, 1994) or reading to them in the cases of this study and by making the target language country the destination for a family holiday if possible. Participants of this study are potentially capable of adopting some or all of these to foster the improvement of their children’s target language use if they are willing to do so.

Methodology

Participants

The data was primarily collected from NNEPs and NEPs that work for a private university in İstanbul and have kids in a private kindergarten during the first term of the 2018-2019 academic year. 15 parents who have kids in this kindergarten that mostly offers at least two or three hours of English courses weekly were selected for this study. Four of the parents are native speakers of English and were born and raised in different cultures while the other eleven Turkish parents are all proficient speakers and writers in English.

Table 1. Participants’ ages, careers and nationalities

Number of participants	Age	Career	Nationality
11	28-35	English teacher at the preparatory school of a private university, flight attendant, civil engineer, housewife, general manager in an international airlines company, computer engineer, executive of a food chain, banker, psychologist	Turkish
2	28-33	English teacher at the prep school of a private university	Canadian
1	40	English teacher at the preparatory school of a private university	Australian
1	32	English teacher at the preparatory school of a private university	American

All the participants are at least university graduates and they mostly have jobs that require them to speak English fluently and/or handle correspondence on a daily basis in English. Five of them also have Master's degrees.

Data collection tools

In this study, two different tools, a questionnaire (Tavil, 2009) and individual interviews were used to gather data. Since the research incorporates the use of a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods, methodological triangulation is adopted as “a strategy to go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach and thus contribute to promoting the quality of the qualitative research” (Flick, 2009, p. 445).

A pilot study was not carried out to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire because the results of the pilot study in Tavil's research (2009) had already been analyzed using SPSS package program and the questionnaire had .97 reliability. The questionnaire was professionally translated into Turkish. Thus, all the participants answered the questions in their own native language, English or Turkish to overcome the language barrier.

Qualitative research entails the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials-case study, experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts etc. that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). That is why interviews were conducted in this study to obtain more relevant information about parents' and preschoolers' routine and problematic moments in second language acquisition. The interview questions (see the Appendix) were adapted from another study on parental perceptions of early childhood English education by Lin and Chen (2016). The interviews were conducted in each participant's own native language. To ensure further content reliability, the interview questions were discussed with a professor of English language teaching and several colleagues doing their PhD in English language teaching. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

The data collected from fifteen questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2013 programme. The qualitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide for doing qualitative thematic analysis because they provide clear guidelines for starting thematic analysis and conducting it in a deliberate and accurate way. Thematic analysis is used in order to identify recurring themes and categories in the data from the interviews. Recurring themes in the interviews are summarized under the relevant questionnaire results.

Results

The results from NEPs and NNEPs are compared and contrasted whenever it is meaningful to do so.

Table 2. Responses to question 1

I choose the kindergarten for my children depending on whether there is an English course or not		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	9	60%
Disagree	2	13%
Undecided	4	27% (All native speakers)

Although NEPs are all undecided about whether to choose their kids' kindergartens merely based on the English courses, most of the Turkish parents, 60% agree to do so. During the interviews, as another factor directly affecting their choices of kindergartens, nine of the parents voiced financial concerns about sending their kids to bilingual kindergartens on the grounds that those schools charge more, sometimes double the average tuition fee just because they offer extensive English courses, namely 15 hours or more. In addition, three NEPs stated that extensive English courses in the school would not be their priority as they will be "the icing on the cake anyway because the kid already learns English at home" as one of the participants, P10 stated.

Table 3. Responses to question 2

All kindergartens should have basic English courses		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	14	93%
Disagree	1	7%
Undecided	0	0%

Almost all of the participants, 93% agreed that all kindergartens should have basic English courses. However, in the interview all the participants except for one, P6, who is a psychologist at a kindergarten herself, expressed that they harbor a sense of deep mistrust in the English education both in general and in kindergartens in Turkey. Some of the relevant quotations are as follows:

P1: *"English teaching in general is not very educational or beneficial for adults in Turkey, the English classes in kindergartens will be no different."*

P2: *"I don't think that the English education will be enough or natural in Turkish kindergartens."*

P3: *"The English education in private kindergartens in Turkey is probably pretty reflective of the English education in general, which is less than positive, despite being in this field."*

P4: *"The English classes that they offer, it is just a way of marketing the kindergarten, unless they integrate English speaking naturally to the day to day conversations in the school, it is just two hours of English, for show only."*

The participants’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of learning English in early childhood are summarized in the below table:

Table 4. Responses to question 3

Learning English in early childhood is more effective than in elementary schools		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	15	100%
Disagree	0	0%
Undecided	0	0%

All of the participants agree that learning English in early childhood is more effective than in elementary schools. In the interview all of them also stated that it is not only more effective, but also easier in early childhood than later in life. Twelve of the participants mentioned better fluency and correct pronunciation as the primary reason for encouraging their preschoolers to learn English. They also expressed several different reasons for this. Some of them are as follows:

P1: *“It is harder to forget the things that are learned early in childhood, it is also easier for children to retrieve the information from their memory.”*

P5: *“Children are truly open to learning new things, particularly language learning, between the ages of 3 and 11 because they can learn languages really fast and have native-like fluency, my son, for instance, he repeats and tries to use the English phrases he heard even only once or twice, seeing that it makes me happy. It is amazing really.”*

P6: *“Learning a second language early in childhood helps them understand that objects can have multiple names, not just Turkish names, but names in other languages. It gives their brains flexibility, makes them smarter.”*

P7: *“It doesn’t take my kid ages to say something in English because he doesn’t really care whether his utterance is correct or not, he just wants to communicate. I think this is a good thing in the language learning process.”*

As mentioned in the above quotations, longer retention period, native-like fluency, increased brain flexibility, a lack of fear to make mistakes were all mentioned as the obvious advantages of learning English in early childhood.

The participants’ perceptions regarding the practical advantage of learning English to improve future career prospects are summarized in the below table.

Table 5. Responses to question 4

My child can be more competitive in the future job market thanks to the English instruction in kindergarten		
	Frequency	Percent

Agree	12	80%
Disagree	1	7%
Undecided	2	13% (Native speakers)

80% of the participants believe that early English instruction helps their children become more competitive in the future job market. Similarly, during the interviews, six of the participants emphasized the benefits of English proficiency especially in the business life. Three of them also placed equal emphasis on academic career. Some of the relevant quotations are as follows:

P4: *“It is much more difficult to build a good career in business life if you don’t know English today, nobody can deny that. You could say the same thing for academic career.”*

P8: *“Knowing English is a great advantage for her future as well, especially if she wants to go abroad for education. Even if she stays in Turkey, she can easily choose a department where the medium of education is English.”*

Most parents who participated in this study seem to place quite a lot of importance on learning English in early childhood as a practical way to improve their children’s future career prospects.

Participants’ perceptions regarding whether learning English can increase their children’s self-confidence or not are summarized in the below table.

Table 6. Responses to question 5

I believe my child’s self-confidence can increase when she is educated in a kindergarten having English education		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	10	67%
Disagree	4	27%
Undecided	1	6%

67% of the participants think that speaking English increases their children’s self-confidence. In the interviews, all of the participants emphasized several other advantages of early English input and instruction both at home and at kindergartens. Five of them asserted that learning English and Turkish simultaneously reinforces their children’s language acquisition process in general and makes retention easier. It also makes their children more curious and enthusiastic to learn more. These are the relevant quotations from P9 and P6:

P9: *“At home I think it (early childhood English education) may even be improving it (his kid’s Turkish learning) in some ways because sometimes when they come across a Turkish word that they don’t know the meaning of, they know the English word, they always equate the two and so I think it improves it. I don’t think he gets confused.”*

P6: *“It (Learning English and Turkish simultaneously) made my boy even more curious and he wanted to learn more and more. A second language definitely made his world a lot more colourful.”*

The majority of the participants believe that not only their children’s self-confidence but also their enthusiasm and curiosity increase as a result of their early initiation into English instruction.

The participants’ perceptions regarding whether bilingual education in kindergarten improves their children’s communication skills or not are summarized in the below table.

Table 7. Responses to question 6

I think that being a student of a kindergarten having English education helps my child improve her communication skills in general		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	13	87%
Disagree	0	0%
Undecided	2	13%

87% of the participants agree that early English education helps their children improve their communication skills in general. P2 also mentioned this in the interview: “He switches back and forth, English with his father, Turkish with me. He can find the words so quickly. Obviously this is making him better at communicating with other people as well.”

As another advantage of early English education, P4, P9, P5, P10 and P11, all from multicultural families also strongly emphasized that getting acquainted with another language means getting to know another way of life and this, in turn, helps their children gain cultural perspective. All of the participants clearly stated that learning English has had no negative effect on their children’s Turkish acquisition. However, one of them, P10 stated that her son “sometimes inserts English words into Turkish sentences.” She also added that she does not consider this as a disadvantage but a manifestation of the natural bilingual acquisition process. The boy’s father, P7 also confirmed this and affirmed that this alone cannot be a disadvantage because his son “is actually trying to get his message across using all of the words, English or Turkish available in his lexicon.”

The participants’ perceptions regarding whether they believe that English teachers in Turkish kindergartens are well-qualified or not are summarized in the below table.

Table 8. Responses to question 7

I think that the English teachers in the kindergartens are well-qualified		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	2	13%
Disagree	9	60%

Undecided 4 27%

Only two of the participants agree that the English teachers in the kindergartens are well-qualified. In the interviews, seven participants also voiced their concerns about the qualifications of English teachers in kindergartens. Four participants, who are all from multicultural families, are mainly worried about incorrect pronunciations of words and a detectable accent that their children would pick up at a Turkish kindergarten while English native speakers, P3 and P9 clearly affirmed that they would easily overcome such problems as they will provide the majority of the English input for their children as indicated in the below quotations:

P3: *“I am gonna be most of his English exposure. So, I want him to have a native accent. So I am gonna have to strive to do that.”*

P9: *“I mean because at the end of the day the amount of time that I am spending with him is much more, so I think the pronunciation of words and the accent and so forth, I think he’ll pick that up from me anyway hopefully and so it won’t be too much of a problem.”*

Three participants mentioned that the English teachers in most kindergartens do not necessarily have a degree in English teaching, but they specialize in preschool teaching in general and speak English to some extent. They also added that their proficiency level in English and their language teaching methodologies are also questionable.

P8: *“Most of the English teachers in Turkish kindergartens specialize in pre-school teaching only. How can they know how to teach English if they have no degree or training in language teaching?”*

P11: *“But they mostly just read an English book to the kids. One of the teachers asks questions about the book. They sometimes listen to a nursery rhyme and sing along or watch a video. I don’t think this does much to improve their English; they don’t encourage them to talk to one another in English. I was hoping for that. They are trying but I don’t think the teachers are qualified to teach English, they don’t know what to do.”*

Participants’ perceptions regarding their children’s early initiation into English, even before kindergarten are summarized in the below table.

Table 9. Responses to question 8

	Before starting kindergarten my child had initiated into English	
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	100%
No	0	0%

All the participants reported that their children had initiated into English before starting kindergarten. In the interviews, all the participants mentioned different ways of

exposure, intentional and unintentional, and different sources of English input for their children since they were born. Some of them include movies and cartoons, both for parents and their children, books, songs, mainly nursery rhymes, but also popular songs for adults, games and direct exposure to daily conversations in the cases of multicultural families. Twelve of the participants strongly emphasized that language learning should be natural (during daily communication) and fun. Thus, NNEPs try to teach English as implicitly as possible. This is also indicated by the below quotations:

P8: *“I try to scaffold her English acquisition in the same way I did when she was uttering her very first words in Turkish, by pointing at objects and repeating very simple words and simple imperatives.”*

P4: *“I try to help her enjoy learning English and provide ample enjoyable input, games, colorful books, cartoons etc. She enjoys repeating simple commands back at me.”*

P6: *“We have a play group where they speak merely in English for three hours. I take him there at the weekends.”*

P5: *“We sing along the nursery rhymes together. He loves that!”*

In the cases of NEPs, all four of them pointed out that they try to speak exclusively English with their kids and they also try not to respond to their kids’ Turkish utterances even though some of them are perfectly capable of doing so in order to provide the maximum amount of natural English input and set a code of mutual understanding that their kids feel the need to speak English with their native speaker parent.

Participants’ perceptions regarding their children’s extracurricular vocabulary learning are summarized in the below table.

Table 10. Responses to question 9

My child sings the songs or repeats the vocabulary items outside the school that she has practiced at school		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	14	93%
Disagree	0	0%
Undecided	1	7%

93% of the participants assert that their kids sing the songs or repeat the vocabulary items outside the school that she has practiced at school. P10 gave the following example related to this:

“My boy sometimes repeats the fixed phrases that he practiced at school, the other day he kept saying ‘It’s Monday.’ I told him that it was Tuesday that day, but he kept insisting it was Monday. I guess they repeat those fixed expressions so many times that they get drilled into their brains.”

Obviously, most parents believe that the repetition of chunks at kindergartens can aid their children’s vocabulary acquisition. Parents’ perceptions regarding the immersion of their children in English are summarized in the below table.

Table 11. Responses to question 10

I don’t think that the children need the immersion of English in kindergartens at that age		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	4	27%
Disagree	10	67%
Undecided	1	6%

67% of the parents think that their children need the immersion of English in kindergartens if they are to acquire English as well as their mother tongue. P2 and P4 also pointed out that the teachers in kindergartens need to find a way to integrate English into the kids’ daily conversations, daily routine and it will not be natural or effective if they only speak English in the classroom, as indicated in the below quotations:

P4: *“Even if the school has 20 hours of English, unless the kids are actually trying to talk to one another in English, it is not a bilingual kindergarten.”*

P2: *“I’d choose a kindergarten where they teach English not like a school subject in the classroom, like Maths, but as a tool to communicate in real life without boring kids out of their minds!”*

Participants’ perceptions regarding English teachers’ credentials at Turkish kindergartens are summarized in the below table.

Table 12. Responses to question 11

I surely think that the English teachers at kindergartens should have certificates or should be specialists on that field		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	15	100%
Disagree	0	0%
Undecided	0	0%

All of the participants believe that the English teachers at kindergartens should have certificates or should be specialists on that field. However only two participants, P6 and P7 stated that the kindergarten teachers that they have met specialize in English teaching.

Participants’ perceptions regarding their children’s English language skills before primary school are summarized in the below table.

Table 13. Responses to question 12

I will send my child to a primary school having English education		
	Frequency	Percent
Agree	13	87%
Disagree	0	0%
Undecided	2	13%

87% of the participants would like to send their children to a primary school having English education. As indicated in the quotations under Table 9, all participants support their children’s early initiation into English. The results of this question also point to the same conclusion.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study clearly indicate that when parental attitudes towards English education is positive, parents tend to get more involved in their children’s second language acquisition process. Parental involvement can take different forms. Firstly, they choose bilingual kindergartens even if they do not have much faith in the credentials of the English teachers who work there or they do not approve of the teaching methodology. Secondly, most of the participants confirmed that there should be some sort of immersion instead of classroom-based teaching so that their preschoolers can acquire and use the target language naturally rather than accepting it as a drudge they have to endure from time to time. However, financial concerns also play a crucial role as the kindergartens with immersion programs cost much more. Thirdly, all the participants except the ones with native speaker spouses feel the need to scaffold their children’s second language acquisition at home. They mostly use level-appropriate books, songs, pschodramatic role play games, theme-based teaching using books or flashcards, all acceptable methods in teaching young learners as indicated in the literature review.

Ching-Ying and Hsiang-Chun’s study (2016) on parental opinions about the advantages and disadvantages for children to attend early childhood English education and parental support for this early foreign language initiation revealed that most parents in the study concurred that infancy is the significant period for English learning and development. This finding was also confirmed in this study. Moreover, Ching-Ying and Hsiang-Chun’s (2016) study also showed that most parents agreed that early childhood English education did not affect Chinese (their mother tongue) learning of their children. All the parents in this study also thought that their children’s early initiation into English was advantageous rather than disadvantageous and had no negative effect on their children’s simultaneous Turkish acquisition.

Another relevant finding of the previous research (Ching-Ying & Hsiang-Chun, 2016) is that most parents agreed their children can get better jobs in the future by taking early childhood English education. Oladejo (2006), and Liu and Chien (1998) also asserted that Taiwanese parents believed that their children would have not only better chances of learning English well, but also better career prospects in the future if they received early childhood

English education in bilingual kindergartens. This parental beliefs in better career prospects thanks to learning English in early childhood have also been confirmed in Shang, Ingebritson and Tseng's study (2007) as well as Romero-Gonzalez's research (2008). The majority of the parents in this study also agreed that learning English in early childhood improved their children's future career prospects.

The results of Tavi's (2009) study demonstrated that most parents strongly support immersion of English for their children in Kindergartens whereas they have negative attitudes with respect to the qualifications of teachers. Moreover, Tavi's (2009) study is not the only one which raised parental concern about the qualification of English teachers at kindergartens. Several other studies (Chang, 2004; Na, 2016; Shang, Ingebritson & Tseng, 2007; Tsai, 2003; Wu, 1998) also showed that parents doubt the effectiveness of bilingual learning programs in kindergartens due to frequent arguments about the qualification of English teachers. More than half of the participants (60%) also harbored a sense of mistrust in the qualification of English teachers at Turkish kindergartens. Lao's (2004) research also showed that parents strongly support Chinese-English bilingual preschool education. The main reasons for this parental support include "the practical advantages of being bilingual (e.g., better career opportunities), positive effects on self-image, and development of skills enabling effective communication within the Chinese-speaking community" (Lao, 2004, p.1). The participants of this study also largely believed that learning English in early childhood improved their children's communication skills in general.

As for the limitations of this study, all participants expressed views similar to Critical Period Hypothesis or at least Sensitive Period Hypothesis because almost half of the participants professionally specialize in English language teaching. Another limitation is that there were tight time constraints during some of the interviews due to participants' day-time jobs, their answers were rather concise. Some participants asked for clarifications for some of the expressions in the questionnaire like "the immersion of English." However, in the interviews they were able to explain their expectations a lot more clearly, so the interviews helped to clarify the points which could have been impossible to illustrate just with the questionnaire results.

A further study could be conducted about the effects of spousal differences in parental attitudes towards second language acquisition in early childhood. In this study considerable friction was observed between some spouses regarding their involvement in their children's second language acquisition process. Generally, mothers were much more involved and invested in the process unless their spouse was a native speaker of English. This could easily be a starting point for further study. Moreover, socio-economic status of parents can also be an important role player in their children's foreign language education in Turkey. Butler's (2014) research investigates how parents' socio-economic status and their behaviors and beliefs about English education relate to their children's English language learning, and how such relationships may differ across different grade levels. It could be helpful to replicate such a research involving the relation between socio-economic status of parents and their children's preschool English education in Turkey.

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Appendix

Interview questions

1. Would you choose to take your child to study in a bilingual kindergarten? Why or why not?
2. In parental opinions, what are the advantages and disadvantages for children to receive early childhood English education?
3. In parental opinions, how does early childhood English education affect children's Turkish learning?
4. How do you as parents support your child's English learning?
5. What do you think about the English education in private kindergartens in Turkey?