

# An Exploration of Parents' Perceptions Concerning the Forest Preschool

Deniz Kahrیمان-Pamuk\*

Mersin University, Mersin, TURKEY

---

## Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate parents' perceptions of forest school. Qualitative research was adopted as a research design. The study was carried out with parents who have children enrolled in the forest school. Thirty-nine parents participated in this study. Their perceptions about forest school were investigated through interviews. In the interview schedule, five open-ended questions were asked parents to obtain their perceptions of forest school. A content analysis technique was used to interpret data. According to parents, a forest school is a place where children have positive feelings, discover nature and life and interact with nature. Their reasons for preferring the forest school were listed as nature as a learning environment, the role of nature in wellbeing, education philosophy, and staff characteristics. Findings also revealed that parents consider children's increasing interest in environmental issues in terms of environmental awareness and knowledge; social-emotional development in terms of enhancement in self-confidence, and taking responsibility; motor development in terms of physical strength and speed; cognitive development in terms of inquiry skills.

**Keywords:** Forest school, early childhood education, parents' perception.

---

## Introduction

*"I love to play the most in the forest. With trees, flowers, butterflies... They are my friends... And watching birds... And let the wind blow my hair... And smiling, because forest always makes me smiling...."* (Child, 5 years old).

Pioneers of early years such as Frobel, Montessori and Steiner appreciated the interaction between nature and children. Children's development and learning were prominently improved by hands-on experiences of nature and natural materials (Davis, 1998). The benefits of outdoor education experiences have also been mentioned by a variety of researches (Burke, 2014; Close, 2012; Rickinson et al. 2004; Jorgensen, 2015; Nicol, Higgins, Ross & Mannion, 2007; Lovell, O'Brien & Owen, 2010). Outdoor experiences have many different kinds of methods. Providing a variety of outdoor and environmental education experiences, a forest school is emerged as a unique learning approach that has been rooted in a variety of philosophy, theory and research (Knight, 2018). Murray & O'Brien (2005) described that forest school offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland environment. Forest School aims to inspire learning within natural settings (O'Brien, 2009) and according to Knight (2011), a forest school is a dynamic approach that allows rich outdoor experiences to promote learning and development of all children of all ages.

According to Knight (2009), there are some key elements that motive forest school. Forest school practices take place mostly in a forest or wooded area. This area could be close to reaching out by walking or bus ride from the school. Each forest school has its own session in special settings, has its own rituals, such as starting with circle time and

closing with a song. Besides, forest school must be led by a qualified practitioner who is experienced with first aid, health and safety requirements besides teaching. A forest school practitioner is required to be certified by Level 3 forest school qualification. During forest school sessions, there should be more adults and fewer children to let practitioners observe each child. There should be regular visits to the forest over a significant time period. Although there is no upper limit, it can be a minimum half a day per week for at least 10 weeks. Forest school practices can take place in any weather conditions therefore appropriate clothing is essential. If it is needed to emphasize educational features, forest school roots on play-based and child-initiated learning. Children are supported to take and manage risks. As well, forest school pedagogy should be integrated into the school curriculum.

There is a growing body of research about forest school, primarily focusing on early childhood. Williams-Sieghredsen (2012) acknowledged that forest school pedagogy is not only an academic oriented-process but also a highlighted development of whole child within a natural woodland setting. Relevant literature claimed that enrolling in forest schools positively affects children's outcomes. For example, Davis and Waite (2005) emphasized the improvement of physical and motor skills through forest school. Similarly, Bilton (2010) claimed that as an outdoor environment, forest schools provide children to take benefits of fresh air and sunlight as well as promotion in motor development. Maynard (2007) described the aims of forest school as nurturing self-esteem, self-confidence, independence and risk taking. Waters and Begley (2007) also reported that forest school supports the risk taking behaviours of children. Murray and O'Brien (2005) and Knight (2013) also highlighted the opportunities provided by forest school practices to build self-confidence for children. In addition, Murray and O'Brien (2005) also claimed that forest school can motivate children's curiosity and their exploration and observation skills. Considering social-emotional development, Tiplady and Menter (2020) claimed that forest school can be an effective process for improving well-being. Besides these benefits related to physical, mental and emotional health, forest school provides young people to interact with nature and natural elements which may result in higher levels of interest in nature, such as respecting nature and developing compassion towards the natural world (Louv, 2008 & Sobel, 2008). According to Harris's (2017) study, which is conducted with forest school practitioners, children who are enrolling in forest school have respect and compassion for the natural environment. This compassion allows children to develop environment friendly-behaviours (Davis, 1998). Forest Schools was based on Danish early year's outdoor pedagogy. Then it has spread to Europe, China, New Zealand, America and Canada (Knight, 2016). Nowadays, it is an emerging issue also in Turkey both in theory and practice. There are a few numbers of forest schools in Turkey, and these forest schools generally serve preschool children. Dean (2019, p.53) highlighted "forest school has unique characteristics which is bounded to the cultural setting" advocating the impacts of regions' culture, history, and educational perspective of outdoor learning. Despite the forests and/or woodlands are accepted as good places for children to learn and develop by adults from all around the world (Lovell et. al., 2010), the question of what do parents think about forest schools still needs to be clarified in detail. Knight (2013) stated that how to sustain the positive impacts of participating in forest school on children's development and learning strictly depend on how to involve the parents in the process. At is point, exploring the parents' perception is supposed to be significant for investigating the forest school phenomenon.

When the parent perceptions about forest school was examined in the relevant literature, the study of Close (2012) was significant to explain parental perceptions regarding forest school. Close (2012) researched with parents and children to investigate their perceptions about their experiences in forest school. It is reported that although parents are in a supportive manner since they believe in the benefits for their children, some of them did not seem to grasp the underlying principles of forest school. According to parent

reports, children do not see forest school apart from their other school subjects and children learn to discover nature (Close, 2012). Eroğlu (2018) conducted a study that examined the forest school program of a preschool in Turkey. In this study, participants were children, forest school leaders and parents. Parent's positive feedback and interest are significant to maintain and promote forest school practices. According to Eroğlu (2018), parents perceive forest school as a place where each developmental area of children promotes. Koyuncu (2019) conducted a study to examine views of teachers, administrators and parents about forest school. Eighty-three parents involved in the study and they reported that forest school promotes the whole child. Kanat (2020) evaluated the development of children based on teacher, parents and children reports. According to Kanat (2020), parents think that forest school contributed to the development of children's creativity, critical thinking skills, self-confidence, discovery skills, experimental learning, well-being, health, physical abilities, communication skills, environmental knowledge, and environmental awareness. Accordingly, in the current study, forest school phenomena was investigated by the lens of Turkish parents. In this regard, the research question sought for answers is formulated as what are parents' perceptions of the forest school?

## Methodology

As this study aimed to explore the perceptions of parents whose children are enrolling in a forest school, a qualitative research paradigm is thought to be enabled for catching the opinion of the parents. Creswell (2003) highlighted that the qualitative research method provides researchers to understand and interpret the comprehensive meanings of the investigated phenomenon. In this research, a holistic single case design was used. The holistic single case design is preferred when there is only one unit of analysis (an individual, an institution, a program, a school, etc.) (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

### *General Information about the School and the Participants*

Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative research should include rich information about the research settings. A thick description of the school context and the participants provided here to acknowledge the boundaries. The school named "Serpil Forest School" where the data collected was one of the first forest schools in Turkey. The school is in a cosmopolitan city named Mersin and is located close to the forest. Four containers and a tent are used as indoor classrooms if needed.

There was a school manager, an education expert, four preschool teachers, and four assistant personnel in the school. The school manager had three years of teaching experience in nature-based preschools in addition to 10 years of experiences in preschool administration. The education expert is qualified for outdoor learning and environmental education, employed to design the curriculum and to monitor its implementation. The teachers are all female and they have a bachelor's degree. School manager, education expert and all teachers have enrolled in forest school leadership courses.

Children spend all day in the forest, even the lower temperatures around -5 degrees. The daily routine starts with breakfast, followed by children's walk into the forest. In the forest, the children play and explore nature. In addition, they have been provided open-ended science, math, and language and art activities.

Totally, 59 children who are aged 40-70 months (28 females, 31 males) have enrolled in the forest school. Children are grouped into four by their age. Parents belonged to middle and upper-middle socio-economic levels and most of them had bachelor's degree. The age range of the parents was 31-47 years. While most of the parents (n = 30) have one child, 15 of them have 2 children, the others have 3 or 4 children. The Serpil Forest

School considers parent involvement and collaboration as an important issue. Parents are regularly and frequently informed about educational activities and children's developmental progress. In addition, parents are invited to actively participate in activities, projects and workshops conducted either in the forest or school. Accordingly, totally 39 parents (37 mothers, 2 fathers) volunteered to participate in this study.

#### *Data Collection Tools*

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents to get their perceptions concerning the forest school. Patton (2002) proposed that unobservable processes in terms of experiences, attitudes, and perceptions can be understood through interviews. A Semi-structured interview protocol was prepared in order to get the perceptions of the participants based on the pre-determined themes: description of forest school, reasons for preferring forest school and benefits of forest school for children. The interview schedule included an introduction that explains the purpose of research and the questions for getting demographic information. There were five open-ended interview questions in accordance with the themes and probing questions to support the main interview questions. An example of the interview question is, "How was participating in forest school affected your child?". The interview protocols were reviewed by two experts. After receiving expert opinions, pilot studies were conducted to examine the interview form. After the pilot interviews, the form was applied to the participants. Data were obtained by face to face meetings. Interviews were recorded with the permission of participants. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes.

#### *Data Analyses*

In this study, the data were analyzed using the content analysis technique to reveal the facts that may be hidden within the data. During the content analyses process, certain concepts and themes within the framework were organized to interpret for readers. Data were coded according to the concepts that are extracted from the participants' opinions as Creswell proposed (2003). These steps were followed to analyze the data: (1) Transcription of interviews (2) Encoding data (3) Organization of existing themes (4) Arrangement of codes and themes (5) Definition and interpretation of findings.

These texts were encoded by a second coder to ensure the objectivity of the study. The consistency among the coders were checked. To increase credibility, all of the findings were given directly without any comment. The generated codes were used to calculate the inter-rater reliability as .90. The opinions of the parents were supported with direct citations to increase the credibility of the research, as Patton (2002) suggested. The researcher established a long-term interaction with the participants to ensure prolonged engagement, as Miles & Huberman (1994) offered. This interaction has been assured by weekly visits to school and meetings with parents. For the transferability of the research, the research context was described in thick descriptions above, as Ponterotto (2006) proposed.

### **Findings**

To disclose parent's perceptions about forest school, parents' descriptions of forest school, their reasons for preferring forest school and benefits of forest school for their children were reported.

#### *Theme 1: Description of forest school*

When parents were asked about their descriptions of forest school, they mostly emphasized "positive feelings", "discovery" and "interaction with nature".

Table 1 Parents perceptions about description of forest school

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>f</i>
The place where children have positive feeling	Feeling happy	15
	Felling joyful	9
	Feeling peaceful	7
	Feeling safe	6
The place where children discover	Discovering nature	14
	Discovering life	9
	Discovering self	3
	Discovering learning	2
The place where children interact with nature	Playing in nature	6
	Learning about nature	5
	Respecting for nature	4
	Love nature	4

Parents generally described the forest school as a place where children have positive feelings. For example, P3 mentioned that *“Forest school makes children happy. As I have observed, children have fun when they also learn”*. Similarly, P25 added *“the forest school is the place where my child is happy and peaceful”*. And P30 commented:

*“...When I think about forest school and my experiences as a mother in the forest school, I can say that forest school is children’s home where they feel themselves safe, where they desire to go every morning, where they have fun, where they are willing to learn and where they miss...”*

“Discovery” was also frequently mentioned by parents to define what forest school is. Parents perceive forest school as a place where children discover themselves and life through nature. In this regard, P1 commented that *“In the forest school children are in a journey which they discover life.”* P10 added that *“forest school is where nature helps children learn how to observe, investigate and question life.”* And P20 concluded that *“forest school is a big laboratory where children can test the future life discovering nature and cycles in nature. They can test everything. They observe, they experience, they realize... I sometimes think, they are very alike to discover meaning of life.”*

Finally, “interaction with nature” was cited by parents to propose their accounts for the forest school. According to parents, a forest school is a place where children interact with nature. To illustrate with a representative narrative:

*“Forest school is not surrounded by walls on four sides. The sky is the roof of the school. Trees and birds are friends. In this school children not only learn mathematic but also, they can recognize trees and flowers. A forest school teaches children to love and respect for nature. Forest school gives opportunity to children playing in nature. In summary, forest school is the place where children and nature are connected.” (P 31)*

*Theme 2: Reasons for preferring forest school*

Why parents prefer the forest school is also examined in this research to comprehend perceptions of them about the forest school. Findings revealed that the preferences of the parents are mostly related to nature as a learning environment, the role of nature in wellbeing, the non-academic orientation of education philosophy and staff characteristics.

Table 2 Parents' perceptions about reasons for preferring forest school

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>f</i>
Nature as a learning environment	Providing the opportunity for experimental learning	14
	Providing the opportunity for observation	11
	Providing the opportunity for investigation	9
	Prompting five senses of children	9
	Prompting curiosity of children	7
Role of nature in wellbeing	Promotes children's physical health	10
	Promotes children's emotional health	8
	Promotes children's mental health	6
Education philosophy	The non-academic orientation of education philosophy	8
	Child-centered approach	8
	Opportunity for play	7
Staff characteristic's	Innovative	5
	Well-educated	3

Parents who participated in this study believed that nature provides a variety of opportunities for children, which promote their learning. The most frequently mentioned reason for deciding forest school is nature's various and vibrant learning environments. P28 mentioned that "*Forest School is in nature. Children are bounded with soil, mud, animals, plants, and all living things not plastics. My child plays with and learns from nature. That is why we obviously chose the forest school.*" Related quotations are listed below:

*"Like an instrument of education, nature provides children an enchanted learning opportunity."* (P18)

*“Children can observe what changes in the forest. Think about a tree. It blooms in spring and leaves fall in autumn. And children try to understand what happens to the tree and try to make connections among trees and life. This is pure learning.” (P1)*

*“Children obviously will learn in nature using their five senses. It is clearly observed that learning in nature is the best way to activate children’s senses.” (P27).*

*“Nature provides children such an unbelievable learning environment. Children have opportunities for learning by doing. They can experiment with nature.” (P31)*

*“Children have a chance to learn by touching, feeling, seeing and smelling of the wonders of nature such as trees, birds, soil, sun, etc.” (P36).*

Parents disclosed the role of nature in children’s wellbeing as a reason for their preferences. According to parents, nature helps children to be physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy. The quotations including the statements are given below:

*“The only reason for my decision about the forest school is nature because nature makes children open-minded and calm (P27).*

*Forest school is a chance for them to be healed by nature.”(P2)*

*“I believe nature and education in nature make children much healthier; that is why I decided forest school to other schools.”(P4)*

*“We chose the forest school because I and my husband assume that is related to nature in terms of trees, flowers, animals will develop our child’s serenity. We are sure that when children learn in nature, their brain, their heart, and their body develops in harmony.”(P22)*

*“Children spend most of their times indoor and that brings unhealthy living conditions. To maintain their physical and mental health, I believe that, forest school provides clean air, oxygen and vitamin D”(P35)*

*“If children spend most of their time in nature, they will be mentally and physically healthier than before. That is the most important reason why I chose forest school.” (P17)*

The reason for parents’ choices about forest school was found related to the education philosophy of the school. According to the parents, forest school focuses on abilities rather than typical academic outcomes, adopts a child-centered approach and provides an opportunity for play. Related quotations are listed below:

*“I believe that reading and writing learning process can be learned in any circumstances like in regular schools. Whereas learning life skills like feed and care for animals, using tools such as hammer and nails, daily greetings, kindness, pick up trash and recycling, and respecting all living things are much more important than regular schooling.”(P4)*

*“In forest school children learn to handle with problems, challenges, and dangers. That’s why we do not believe in the importance of academic achievements gain by exams and tests. So, we are totally bonded to forest school.” (P11)*

*“The reason why I prefer forest school is not defending the memory-based teaching.”(P3)*

*“Forest school is the best school where it allows children for individual development. Children observe, explore and discover what they are interested in. Children are active learners in the forest school. They do not just sit down and listen to the teacher, they also actively construct their own learning. On the other hand, children in forest school wonder, ask, investigate what they would like to learn.” (P33)*

*“Forest school provides opportunities for free play. Children spend most of their time playing outdoors.” (P35)*

*“In the other schools, children spend their time in buildings surrounded by stone walls, children do not have any space to play freely. On the other hand, forest school provides natural spaces and times for free play of children.” (P5)*

*“Forest school children are very lucky, they do not have to enroll in academic workload as their colleagues, they learn unconsciously by playing, which is the reason why I preferred forest school.” (P14)*

Finally, a small part of parents' choices is related to the staff characteristics. Some of the parents expressed that forest school staff are well-educated and innovative. P33 stated that forest school teachers show such a big effort to improve themselves to be a more competent teacher. P21 supported this idea by adding that *“I think to be a forest school teacher requires extra proficiencies. Hence, they need to improve themselves by reading more and/or enrolling in professional development courses to be more qualified. And this is the biggest impact to choose the proper school whose teachers are eager to learn for my child.”* P 39 said: *“Since forest school is an alternative educational approach, it owns teacher who can adapt innovations in education system to grow up children of twenty-first century.”*

### *Theme 3: Benefits of forest school for children*

Finally, the benefits of forest school for children were investigated. Findings revealed that parents consider children's increasing interest in environmental issues in terms of awareness and knowledge; social-emotional development in terms of enhancement in self-confidence and responsibility; motor development in terms of physical strength and speed; cognitive development in terms of inquiry skills as benefits of forest school.

Table 3: Parent's perceptions about the benefits of forest school for children

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>f</i>
Interest for environmental issues	Environmental awareness	15
	Environmental knowledge	11
Social-emotional development	Self-confidence	11
	Taking responsibility	9
Motor development	Physical strength	8
	Physical speed	7
Cognitive development	Inquiry-based skills	10



Parents mentioned children's of environmental awareness and knowledge. To illustrate, P17 expressed that *"My child is connected to nature with compassion. She is aware of the harms given to environment by people and she wants to protect trees, insects, birds, and flowers... anything related to nature."* P15 added that *"it was very interesting for me to hear tree species form my son. He listed the names of the trees in the school. I think forest school feeds children's compassion to nature and promotes their knowledge."* P 11 supported the idea of that forest school raise children's awareness and knowledge about natural and environmental issues as given below:

*"My girl used to be afraid of animals. But after enrolling in forest school, she does not hesitate to touch any animal. Her love and bonds to nature makes her happier. She is also aware of environmental problems. Sometimes warns us to conserve water and not to mix organic and inorganic wastes. Once she warned his brother not to pick up a flower and said "it is an endemic species". Forest school would improve children in any area; however, I'm sure that they become environmentally friendly people"*(P11).

In relation to social-emotional development, enhancement in self-confidence and responsibility are mentioned by parents to express the benefits of forest school. Quotations are presented below:

*After enrolling in forest school, my son becomes a self-confident child.* (P1)

*My little girl was a bit shy. Forest school made her talkative and self-confident.* (P 5)

*R..... have started to express himself better, while he is communicating with others, he feels more comfortable and confident.* (P28)

*The most important benefit for my child is the promotion of taking responsibility. Forest school helped her develop a sense of responsibility. For instance, she would like to help me by household such as washing the balcony, folding clothes, etc.* (P18)

*My son was unable to choose the proper clothing, to brush his teeth on time, tidying his room and toys and to do this kind of personal chores. Forest school motivated and taught him about taking responsibility.* (P9)

Physical development was the other most frequently mentioned category by parents to express the benefits of forest school for their children. Parents highlighted increasing physical strength and physical speed. For instance, P8 commented that *"He's physically stronger much better than before. He can walk long distances without complaining. He can climb to a high tree in minutes. When he falls down, he goes on as nothing happened."*

Similarly, P20 stated that *"the motor development of my girl was enhanced after enrolling in forest school. She is now more physically flexible. The increasing physical strength and speed were simply observed after the forest school process"*. And P21 pointed out increasing physical abilities of his son. He added that his son wants to be challenged with physical tasks and preferred pathways to regular streets.

Parent's views about the benefits of forest school were finally related to children's cognitive development in terms of inquiry-based skills. Parents commonly pointed out that children began to inquiry, to wonder, and to explore rather than before. P37 commented, *"A... became a little researcher, even a naturalist. Her observation ability has increased. For example, she started to realize the changes in nature and to talk about cause and effect relationships of events."* P9 also supported this idea by saying *"forest school brought out curiosity, inquiry and exploration to my child's life."*

## Discussion and Conclusion

How parents perceive forest school was stimulated from findings and discussed with reference to existing literature. Parents' perception was exposed probing their perceptions about what forest school is, why they prefer forest school and what the benefits of forest school are.

According to parents, a forest school is a place where children have positive feelings, making discovery and interact with nature. Their description of forest school revealed that parents connected children's positive feelings with forest school. Knight (2009) also associated positive feelings of children with the time they spend by free play in forest, interaction with nature, and being outdoor, etc. Close (2002) and Kahrman-Pamuk and Ahi (2019) reported that children regard forest school as a place where they are happy and joyful.

The findings of this study revealed that parents see the forest school as a place where children discover nature. As Knight (2009) proposed, in forest school, children have a variety of opportunities to discover nature and natural elements. In the forest school, children have opportunities to go after their curiosity and explore nature (O'Brien, 2009). While discovering nature, children wonder, observe, and question a variety of circumstances which are not available indoors (Jacobi-Vessels, 2013).

Besides discovering nature, parents also described forest school as the place where children interact with nature. According to parents, nature is also a school as well. As Ernst and Theimer (2011) concluded, nature based educational approaches strengthen children's bonds to nature. In this century, children have limited opportunity to access the natural environment due to safety issues. In this regard, forest school as a nature-based approach brings nature and children together as expressed by parents.

To comprehend parental perceptions about forest school, parents were asked about the underlying reasons for preferring the forest school. Their reasons were listed as nature as learning environments, the role of nature in children's well-being, education philosophy, and staff characteristics. Parents perceive nature as a learning environment that provides an opportunity for experimental learning, observation and investigation which prompts five senses and curiosity of children. Lovell (2010) reported woodlands are rich learning environments which prompt children's senses. It is an ongoing idea that direct experiences of nature enhance the learning and development of children (Davis, 1998). It is well-known that children learn best in a rich, stimulating environment (Rushton & Larkin, 2001).

Parent's statements also revealed that one of the reasons for their preference for forest school is about children's wellbeing. According to a report of the Blackwell (2015) wellbeing includes not only physical and mental health of the children but also it encompasses emotional and social health. In the literature, there are other evidences for the benefits of time spent in nature on wellbeing (Goodenough & Waite, 2020; Tiplady & Menter, 2020). This finding should be highlighted since children's wellbeing have a significant impact on their overall development and learning (Ho & Funk, 2018). Louv (2008) and Bilton (2010) emphasized the mental and physical benefits of interacting with nature. Munoz (2009) specified these benefits by reducing levels of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and obesity. There is a greater need for children to have contact with nature to avoid harms of contemporary life (Bingley and Milligan 2004; Fjørtoft 2004).

The education philosophy of forest school is regarded as a reason for parents' preferences. Parents' highlighted non-academic orientation of education philosophy, child-centered approach, and opportunity for play. As described by Knight (2009) school curriculum and program goals should be integrated in forest school practices and forest

school programs encompassing all subjects and disciplines such as science, math, literature, art, etc. However, the way of how children enroll in these issues differs. Instead of passively listening, children engage in these contents by observation and exploration, which is initiated by themselves and they play. As Blackwell (2015) mentioned forest school approaches are child-centered, process-oriented and play-based, as well as children's curiosity and self-directed learning are aimed to be nurtured.

Lastly, what parents think about the benefits of forests school for their children was investigated in this study. Findings revealed that parents consider children's increasing interest in nature and natural elements in terms of environmental awareness and environmental knowledge; social-emotional development in terms of enhancement in self-confidence and responsibility; motor development in terms of physical strength and speed; cognitive development in terms of inquiry skills.

Relevant literature provides arguments for the relationship between children's environmental knowledge and attitudes and the time they spent in nature. The more children interact with nature the more they develop sensitivity and caring attitudes towards nature (Chawla, 1998; Phenice & Griffore, 2003; Murray & O'Brien, 2005; Sobel, 2008). In addition, children became familiar with the flora, fauna, abiotic and biotic factors in forest school (Kahriman-Pamuk & Ahi, 2019). In this regard as parents supposed and supported by relevant literature, forest schools are a vehicle that can stimulate children's respect, love and compassion towards nature, which turns in environmentally friendly behaviors.

Parents stated that the self-confidence and responsibility of children are promoted after participating in forest school. Relevant literature supported this perception of parents. Kellert and Derr (1998) and O'Brien and Murray (2006) reported increased levels of self-confidence after enrolling in forest schools. Blackwell (2015) associated enrolling in risky activities such as using tools, climbing trees, playing with animals, etc. to increasing self-confidence of children. According to Blackwell (2015) managing these kinds of activities encourage children to take on more challenging activities with higher levels of independence. Concerning responsibility, Harris (2015) declared forest school leaders' perception that children participating in forest school learn to take responsibility.

Parents expressed the improvement in their children's motor development which is also an expected result. Forest school in nature challenges children to walk by long and irregular paths. Children climb trees, jump in muddles, and handle tools. In this manner, children learn to control their bodies, develop in eye-hand coordination, and gains physical strength and speed, as O'Brien and Murray (2007) proposed.

According to parents, forest school increase children's inquiry skills. Why parents think so is related to that forest school practices stimulate curiosity, exploration and observation. Similarly, Murray and O'Brien (2005) claimed that forest school can motivate children's curiosity and their exploration and observation skills.

#### *Educational Implications and limitations*

These findings interpreted as parents' perceptions are closely linked to the reported vital points and benefits of forest school in the relevant literature. Parent involvement in the early years promotes the development and learning of children. Hence, collaboration among forest schools and parents would be encouraged to maintain its' benefits. Future implementations of forest school can emphasis on parent involvement. Number of forest schools where children learn and develop in joy and parents are actively involved would be increased. Besides, nature based outdoor activities would be conducted by all types of preschools to inspire parents spending time in nature with their children.

In future, to get a more complete picture referring key points of forest school related to parent involvement, more comprehensive studies can be conducted. This study was

conducted with only a group of parents whose children were enrolled in a forest school. All of the parents belonged to middle and upper-middle socio-economic levels. In the future, more than one forest school from different social-cultural and economic backgrounds can be involved in studies to have a deeper understanding of parent's perceptions. Besides, the role of parents can be investigated to understand the importance of parent involvement in forest school.

▪       ▪       ▪

## References

- Bilton, H. (2010). *Outdoor learning in the early years: Management and innovation*. New York: Routledge.
- Bingley, A., & Milligan, C. (2004). *Climbing Trees and Building Dens: Mental health and well-being in young adults and the long-term effects of childhood play experience*. Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University.
- Blackwell, S. (2015). Impacts of long term forest school programmes on children's resilience, confidence and wellbeing. Retrieved from <http://getchildrenoutdoors.com/resilience-wellbeing-and-confidence-development-at-forest-schools/>
- Burke, R. S. (2014). Taming the Wild: Approaches to Nature in Japanese Early Childhood Education. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 2(1), 76-96.
- Chawla, L. (1998). Significant life experiences revisited: A review of research on sources of environmental sensitivity. *The Journal of environmental education*, 29(3), 11-21.
- Close, M. (2012). *The Forest School initiative and its perceived impact on children's learning and development: an investigation into the views of children and parents*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). Cardiff University, GB.
- Cresswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: qualitative and mixed-method approaches*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Davis, B., & Waite, S. (2005). *Forest Schools: An Evaluation of the Opportunities and Challenges in Early Years. Final Report. January 2005*.
- Davis, J. (1998). Young children, environmental education, and the future. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 26(2), 117-123.
- Dean, S. (2019). Seeing the Forest and the Trees: A Historical and Conceptual Look at Danish Forest Schools. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 6(3), 53-63.
- Ernst, J., & Theimer, S. (2011). Evaluating the effects of environmental education programming on connectedness to nature. *Environmental Education Research*, 17(5), 577-598.
- Eroğlu, S.B. (2018). *An evaluation of the forest school program in a state preschool in İstanbul*. (Unpublished Master Thesis). Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü.
- Fjørtoft, I. (2004). Landscape as playscape: The effects of natural environments on children's play and motor development. *Children Youth and Environments*, 14(2), 21-44.
- Goodenough, A., & Waite, S. (2020). Introduction: The Good from Woods Project. In *Wellbeing from Woodland* (pp. 1-7). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Harris, F. (2017). The nature of learning at forest school: practitioners' perspectives. *Education 3-13*, 45(2), 272-291.
- Harris, S. (2015). *Bravo principall!: Building relationships with actions that value others*. Routledge.

- Ho, J., & Funk, S. (2018). Preschool: Promoting Young Children's Social and Emotional Health. *YC Young Children*, 73(1), 73-79.
- Jacobi-Vessels, J. L. (2013). Discovering nature: The benefits of teaching outside of classroom. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 41(3), 4-9.
- Jorgensen, P. (2015) Building an evidence-based practice. Waldeck, J. H., & Seibold, D. R. (Eds.). *Consulting That Matters*. (pp. 63-85) Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang US.
- Kahriman-Pamuk, D., & Ahi, B. A Phenomenological Study on the School Concept of the Children Attending the Forest School. *Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 7(4), 1386-1407.
- Kanat, T. (2020). Orman Okulu Uygulamalarının Okul Öncesi Dönem Çocukları Üzerindeki Etkilerinin Değerlendirilmesi. (Unpublished Master Thesis). Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü.
- Kellert, S. R., & Derr, V. (1998). A National Study of outdoor Wilderness Experience. *National Outdoor Leadership School*. Retrieved from <https://www.childrenandnature.org/uploads/kellert.complete.text.pdf>
- Knight, S. (2009). *Forest Schools and outdoor learning in the early years*. London: Sage.
- Knight, S. (2011). *Risk & adventure in early years outdoor play: learning from forest schools*. Sage Publications.
- Knight, S. (2013). *Forest school and outdoor learning in the early years*. London: Sage.
- Knight, S. (2016). *Forest school in practice: For all ages*. London: Sage.
- Knight, S. (2018). Translating forest school: A response to Leather. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 21(1), 19-23.
- Koyuncu, M. (2019). *Okul öncesi eğitimde alternatif yaklaşım: orman okullarında öğretmen, veli ve yönetici görüşlerinin incelenmesi*. (Unpublished Master Thesis). Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü.
- Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Lovell, R., O'Brien, L., & Owen, R. (2010). Review of the research evidence in relation to the role of trees and woods in formal education and learning. *Forest Research*.
- Maynard, T. (2007). Forest Schools in Great Britain: an initial exploration. *Contemporary issues in early childhood*, 8(4), 320-331.
- Merriam S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. 3rd ed, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.
- Muñoz, S. A. (2009). *Children in the Outdoors*. London: Sustainable Development Research Centre.
- Murray, R., & O'Brien, E. (2005). *'Such enthusiasm - A joy to see': An evaluation of forest school in England*. Forest Research.
- Nicol, R., Higgins, P., Ross, H., & Mannion, G. (2007). Outdoor education in Scotland: A summary of recent research. *Perth & Glasgow, Scotland: Scottish Natural Heritage & Learning and Teaching Scotland*.
- O'Brien, L., & Murray, R. (2006). *A marvellous opportunity for children to learn. A participatory evaluation of Forest School in England and Wales*. Surrey: Forest Research.
- O'Brien, L., & Murray, R. (2007). Forest School and its impacts on young children: Case studies in Britain. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 6(4), 249-265.
- O'Brien, L. (2009). Learning outdoors: the Forest School approach. *Education 3-13*, 37(1), 45-60.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative social work, 1*(3), 261-283.
- Phenice, L. A., & Griffore, R. J. (2003). Young children and the natural world. *Contemporary Issues in early childhood, 4*(2), 167-171.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept thick description. *The qualitative report, 11*(3), 538-549.
- Rickinson, M., Dillon, J., Teamey, K., Morris, M., Choi, M.Y., Sanders, D., & Benefield, P.A. (2004). *Review of research on outdoor learning*. London: NFER.
- Rushton, S., & Larkin, E. (2001). Shaping the learning environment: Connecting developmentally appropriate practices to brain research. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 29*(1), 25-33.
- Sobel, D. (2008). *Childhood and nature: Design principles for educators*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Tiplady, L. S., & Menter, H. (2020). Forest School for wellbeing: an environment in which young people can 'take what they need'. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, 1*-16.
- Waters, J., & Begley, S. (2007). Supporting the development of risk-taking behaviours in the early years: An exploratory study. *Education 3-13, 35*(4), 365-377.
- Williams-Siegfredsen, J. (2012). *Understanding the Danish Forest School Approach: Early Years Education in Practice*. London: David Fulton publications.
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2006). *Qualitative research methods in social sciences*. Ankara: Seckin Publications.

# Ebeveynlerin Orman Anaokuluna İlişkin Algılarının İncelenmesi

Deniz Kahrıman-Pamuk

*Mersin Üniversitesi, Mersin, TÜRKİYE*

Bu çalışmanın amacı ebeveynlerin orman okulu hakkındaki algılarını araştırmaktır. Çalışma nitel araştırma yöntemi temel alınarak tasarlanmış ve uygulanmıştır. Çalışmaya, çocukları orman okuluna devam eden 39 anne-baba gönüllü olarak katılmıştır. Anne-babaların orman okulu hakkındaki algılarına ilişkin veriler görüşmeler yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Görüşme protokolünde beş adet açık uçlu soru yer almıştır. Veriler içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın bulgularına göre ebeveynler orman okulunu çocuklarının olumlu duygular hissettikleri, doğayı keşfettikleri ve doğa ile bağ kurdukları bir yer olarak görmektedir. Ebeveynler, orman okulunu tercih etme nedeni olarak ise doğanın bir öğrenme ortamı olması, doğanın çocukların fiziksel ve ruhsal sağlığındaki rolü, eğitim felsefesi ve personel özellikleri gibi sebepleri sıralamışlardır. Bulgulara göre ebeveynler, orman okuluna gittikten sonra çocuklarının doğal çevreye yönelik ilgisinin beslendiğini, özgüven ve sorumluluk alma becerilerinin iyileştiğini, fiziksel güç ve hızlarının arttığını ve sorgulama becerilerinin geliştiğini ifade etmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Orman okulu, erken çocukluk eğitimi, ebeveyn algısı.