

Importance of Decision-Making Skills in Primary School According to The Classroom Teachers' Opinions¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the importance of decision-making skill at primary school level according to the opinions of classroom teachers. Since a single situation related to a certain group of teachers in a school was examined in depth, the study was conducted using a case study, one of the qualitative research designs. The study group consists of 25 classroom teachers working in a primary school in Pendik District of Istanbul province with criterion sampling method. The data were collected with an interview form and analyzed by content analysis method. The research results are: According to the opinions of the classroom teachers; decision-making skills are important for primary school level, decision-making skills are not acquired sufficiently, mistakes are made, and problems are experienced in teaching at the primary school level. According to these results, The Ministry of National Education can carry out applications for the development of decision-making skills at the level of all lessons at primary school level.

Keywords

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¹ The data were collected in this study, in the 2019-2020 academic year; for this reason, ethics committee approval is not required.

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals direct their lives with the choices they make, and life is lived according to the choices made. Considering that the decision-making skill is essentially the behavior of choice, it can be said that this skill directs the person's life and is effective throughout her/his life. However, at this point, it is not correct to define the decision-making skill as an instantaneous skill based only on making a choice. Because, as Hansson (2005) stated, decision making skill is not an instant event, on the contrary, it should be evaluated as a process that takes a certain time. This process is expressed as a complex process that emerges in case of need or when faced with any problem and ends with an evaluation (Ada & Baysal, 2012). Kuzgun (2006), is a tendency to eliminate the problem when there is more than one option to meet a need, Ömeroğlu and Turla (2001), a process in which the choice to reach the goal ends with action, Eren (2009) expresses it as the sum of the processes related to the selection of one of the ways to reach various goals. Based on the fact that each process consists of certain stages, it can be deduced that the decision-making skill also includes certain stages. Based on all these, if we define decision-making skills; "it is the process of collecting the information necessary to solve a problem and creating multiple options for a solution and making comparisons between options and selecting and applying the most appropriate option that can solve the problem" (Demirbaş-Nemli, 2018, p.9).

Considering that the essence of the decision is choice (Mann, 1976), the decision-making skill covering a certain process is of great importance as it is effective in the whole life. Of course, it is not possible to talk about a single and sharp way or method to qualify our decisions on this issue as a good or right decision (Dawson, 1995). Because decision-making skill are not concrete (Lehrer, 2013).

As Luecke (2008) states, decision making is not a process that ends when a decision is made, people feel the need to implement the decision in their lives. If the decisions made are right, they affect the person's life positively, if they are wrong, they affect negatively (Üngüren, 2011). For this reason, care should be taken to understand the decision-making process well and to make the decisions in a way that makes people happy and does not regret in the future.

According to Fidan and Erden (1998), the 6-14 age range is the stage of acquiring basic skills to prepare students in this period both for life and for further education levels. For this reason, it is considered important to teach a skill that is need used throughout life, such as decision-making, in the specified period (primary school level). In this regard, Bacanlı (2006) mentioned that practical training should be given in the pre-adolescent period, also; as Schvaneveldt, and Adams (1983) stated, students live a more limited experience in adolescence compared to previous periods in order to gain problem-solving and decision-making skills (as cited in Köksal, 2003).

Based on all these, in this study, it is aimed to determine the importance of decision-making skills at primary school level according to the opinions of classroom teachers. In line with this purpose, the sub-objectives of the study are stated below:

- Is decision making skill important for primary school level?
- Can decision-making skills be adequately acquired at primary school level?
- What are the errors made while teaching decision making skills at primary school level?
- Are there any problems in the acquisition of decision-making skills at primary school level?

METHOD

This study is a qualitative study aiming to determine the importance of decision-making skills at primary school level according to the opinions of classroom teachers. "Qualitative research can be defined as research in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used and a qualitative process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in the natural environment" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; p.39).

Qualitative research argues that depth and specificity of knowledge are important rather than generalizations, focusing on deep and specific data from smaller study groups rather than large samples (Baltacı, 2019; s.369).

One of the most important purposes of qualitative research is to reveal the perceptions and experiences of the people included in the research. It is also important that the researcher has empathic skills and tries to understand the perspectives and perceptions of the people she is interviewing (Yıldırım, 1999; s.12). According to Shenton (2004) and Silverman (2016), qualitative research is highly subjective as it involves a researcher-oriented review process and can be affected by the personal views of the researcher (as cited in Baltacı, 2019; s.370). The data in the study; with a smaller sample instead of a large sample, in order to increase the clarity of the questions in the interview form, interviews were conducted. In addition, the researcher tried to understand the viewpoints of the participants in the process, it was conducted in the form of qualitative research as it allows for an in-depth research opportunity.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a case study, one of the qualitative research designs, since a single case related to a certain group of teachers in a school was examined in depth. *“Case study is research with a holistic approach of the factors associated with a situation”* (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; p.39). Case studies are original studies that examine a person, event or institution in depth and longitudinally (Paker, 2015; s. 119). According to Yin (1984), in a case study, the researcher has little or no control over events (as cited in Subaşı ve Okumuş, 2017; s.420). In this study, which examines the decision-making skills of classroom teachers according to their opinions, the researcher was not involved in the process and examined the "decision-making skill" of a subject and was conducted as a case study since he did not intervene on the subject and conducted interviews to examine the situation in depth.

Study Group

The study group of the research was determined by criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods. *“The basic understanding of the criterion sampling method is to study all cases that meet a predetermined set of criteria”* (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; p.112). The criterion in this study is that the teachers participating in the research participate in the study voluntarily and are determined as classroom teachers who teach 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades at least once. Within the scope of these criteria, the study group consists of 25 classroom teachers working in a primary school in Pendik, Istanbul. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

		Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Gender	Woman	16	64
	Man	9	36
Age	26-30 age	8	32
	31-35 age	5	20
	36-40 age	4	16
	41-45 age	5	20
	46-50 age	2	8
	51 years and older	1	4
Grade Level	1st Class	6	24
	2nd Class	5	20
	3rd Class	7	28
	4th Class	7	28
Seniority	1-5 years	4	16
	6-10 years	9	36
	11-15 years	4	16
	16-20 years	2	8
	21-25 years	5	20

		Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
	26 years and above	1	4
Have you taken any classes or training on thinking skills?	Yes	-	-
	No	25	100
	Total	25	100

When Table 1 is examined, the number of female teachers among the participants is higher (n=16), the teachers are mostly between the ages of 26-30 (n=8), they are mostly between 6-10 years of seniority (n=9), and it is seen that they did not take lessons about skills (n=25).

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

The data were collected by the researcher through one-on-one interviews with the teachers in the 2019-2020 academic year. The interview form prepared during the one-on-one interviews was used. The questions in the form were directed to the teachers and the data collection process was carried out by recording (writing) the answers given.

The data were collected in the 2019-2020 academic year. The data collection tool used in the study is the interview form prepared by the researcher in line with expert opinions. The form consists of two parts. In the first part, there are 5 questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, grade level, seniority and taking lessons about skills), and in the second part, there are 4 questions to determine the importance of decision-making skills. The research questions in the form are as follows:

- 1) Is decision making skill important for primary school level? Why is that?
- 2) Can decision-making skills be adequately acquired at primary school level? Why is that?
- 3) Do you think that errors are made in the acquisition of decision making skills at primary
 - i. school level? Why is that?
- 4) Do you think that there are problems in the acquisition of decision-making skills at primary
 - ii. school level? Why is that?

In the data collection process, which was carried out using the interview form in line with the research questions above, interviews were conducted that contributed to the clear understanding of the questions and supported the examination of the reasons and how of the questions. The interviews conducted are for in-depth analysis. For example; "Do you think that mistakes are made in the acquisition of decision-making skills at primary school level? Why?" While examining the question; What kind of mistakes are made to teachers who answer yes? Additional questions were asked and it was aimed to get more detailed and in-depth answers.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed by content analysis method. Content analysis is "bringing together similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and interpreting them in a way that the reader can understand" (Yıldırım, Şimşek, 2011; p.227).

Voluntary participation of teachers in the research was taken as basis and direct quotations were included while creating the research findings. The real names of the participants were not used while quoting, and the codes given to the participants (T1, T5, T10...etc.) were used. Voluntary participation in the research, collecting the data in a sufficient time by the researcher, providing feedback to the participants about whether the answers were understood correctly during the interview are seen as positive developments in terms of validity and reliability.

The categories created as a result of the findings and the research report were read to an expert who was not involved in the study, provided that the participant information is kept confidential. In the reporting part, a clear and understandable language was used, and feedback was received from the expert who read it in terms of clarity for the validity of the study.

FINDINGS

The findings regarding the opinions of classroom teachers on the importance of decision-making skills are given below.

Classroom Teachers Views about on the Importance of Decision-Making Skills

The answers given by the classroom teachers to the related question were examined and categorized and presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Situations and Reasons Why Classroom Teachers Find Decision-Making Skills Important for Primary School Level

	Frequency (f)	Reasons
Yes	24	T2: A necessary skill in problem solving.
		T5: Primary school is an important stage for the development of such skills.
		T17: I think that this skill is needed especially in order to raise solution-oriented individuals.
		T18: Lifelong necessary acquisition must be taken at the basic.
		T21: I think it is extremely important for children to gain these skills in order to gain self-confidence and bear the consequences of their decisions.
No	1	T3: I think it's early.
Total	25	

According to Table 2, 24 of the classroom teachers stated that decision-making skills are important for primary school level; 1 of them stated that it is not important for primary school level. The decision-making skill is considered important for the primary school level by the researchers, with reasons such as the importance of primary school in the development of these skills, its necessity for problem solving, and the fact that it is a life-long skill. The reason why the participants find the decision-making skill important in primary school, which is considered as the basic step of education, can be interpreted as considering the decision-making skill as a skill used throughout life.

Classroom Teachers Views about Adequacy of Students' Decision Making Skills at Primary School Level

The answers given by the classroom teachers to the related question were examined and categorized and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Opinions and Reasons of Primary School Teachers Regarding the Situation of Adequately Acquiring Decision-Making Skills at Primary School Level

	Frequency (f)	Reasons
Yes	7	T8: Different solutions can be offered.
		T19: With the activities we do, we try to acquired them by question and answer method.
No	18	T5: Because the curriculum is generally based on teaching and the general system is based on exams, knowledge transfer studies are more intense, and the training phase is less. The aforementioned subject, like many other subjects, requires education, guidance, psychological counseling and requires the teacher's special effort. The curriculum time allocated to the studies of getting to know the student adequately, exploring his inner world, determining his tendencies and interests, and capacity to receive is not enough.
		T10: The curriculum is rote.
		T12: I think teachers don't take the time to do this.
		T16: Many teachers either do not have practice conditions or do not know how to practice.
		T17: I don't think teachers have enough knowledge in this field. Including me.
Total	25	

According to Table 3, 7 of the classroom teachers stated that the decision-making skills could be adequately acquired at the primary school level; 18 of them stated that they could not be adequately acquired at primary school level. Most of the participants think that the decision-making skills are not adequately taught to the students in primary school. They stated the reasons for this as rote learning system, the curriculum being based on exams, and lack of information about time and subject. As mentioned by the participants, it can be interpreted that this conclusion was reached due to reasons such as our education system, the intensity of the curriculum, the lack of sufficient information and time to gain mental skills such as decision-making skills, and the lack of activity-material.

Classroom Teachers Views about Wrong Applications in Primary Schools Regarding Decision Making Skills

The answers given by the classroom teachers to the related question were examined and categorized and presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Opinions and Reasons of Classroom Teachers Wrong Applications in Primary Schools Regarding Decision Making Skills

	Frequency (f)	Reasons
Yes	18	T4: Decisions are made on behalf of children. T11: Teachers have not of knowledge and skills on the subject. T13: More rote education is using. T14: We do not offer a decision-making environment for the student. T24: Students are not included in the decision-making processes.
No	7	T7: Classroom teachers is doing what it takes T21: I do not think that the achievements have much effect on the course process in this regard. A teacher is already practicing these skills in his class without realizing it.
Total	25	

According to Table 4, 18 of the classroom teachers stated that errors were made at the point of acquiring decision-making skills at primary school level; 7 of them stated that there were no made errors in the point of acquiring them at primary school level. Considering the results of the research, most of the participants are of the opinion that many mistakes are made while teaching the decision-making skills to children in primary school. As the reason for this opinion, they stated that the children were not given the opportunity to make decisions, decisions were made on their behalf, and that children were not included in the processes that required decision-making. Perhaps the most important reason for this result can be interpreted as the fact that the people who teach at the moment are brought up with a rote education system, the constructivist approach cannot be internalized, the emphasis cannot be given to active participation studies due to the intensity of the curriculum, and the awareness of democracy cannot be fully established in schools.

Classroom teachers Views about the Problems faced at Primary Schools Regarding Teaching Decision Making Skills to Students

The answers given by the classroom teachers to the related question were examined and categorized and presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Situations and Reasons of Encountering Problems at the Point of Acquisiting Decision-Making Skills of Classroom Teachers at Primary School Level

	Frequency (f)	Reasons
Yes	20	<p>T6: Get professional educated is necessary.</p> <p>T8: The lesson materials are insufficient.</p> <p>T10: The contents are not suitable.</p> <p>T14: Children often come across as decision-making skills in family life undeveloped. Therefore, we need to acquisition of this to them from the very beginning and we have to do it with family cooperation. Our job becomes more difficult as most of the parents are not very helpful in this regard.</p> <p>T23: It is difficult in this system to create the necessary environments for the acquisition of this skill. And the acquisitions are insufficient in this regard.</p>
No	5	<p>T15: I haven't encounter yet.</p> <p>T19: I am not facing any problem.</p>
Total	25	

According to Table 5, 20 of the primary school teachers stated that encountered problems in acquisiting decision-making skills at primary school level; 5 of them stated that they did not encounter any problems at the point of acquisiting them at primary school level. Most of the participants stated that they had problems in gaining decision-making skills in primary school. According to the education system, reasons such as the difficulty of creating the necessary environment for gaining decision-making skills, the lack of materials, and the inadequacy of the content for skill teaching are seen as the reasons why teachers have problems while teaching decision-making skills. The reason for reaching this result can be considered as the fact that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about the subject, that skill teaching is considered as a professional process in itself, and that there are no skill training programs to be applied to students.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the research, in which the importance of decision-making skills at the primary school level is tried to be determined according to the opinions of the classroom teachers, are given below. In the literature review, the scarcity of studies on decision-making skills in primary school draws attention.

Bacanlı (2006) stated that the period between the ages of 6-12, which is called the middle childhood stage, is an important period for them to meet with cognitive skills; because of at this period children's conscience, moral values system develops, express their opinions about what is happening around them. Güneş (2012) mentioned that in order to educate thinking students at every level of education from preschool to university, activities that improve their thinking skills should be included in every lesson. In this context, giving importance to thinking skills and emphasis on primary school level for cognitive skills support the finding that our study; "according to the opinions of classroom teachers; decision-making skills are important for primary school level".

Another finding of our study; "according to the opinions of primary school teachers, decision-making skills are not adequately acquired at primary school level." Ministry of Education (MEB, 2006; p.4) in the primary school program, mentioned nine skills: research, communication, decision making, use of Information Technologies, correct, effective and beautiful use of Turkish, entrepreneurship, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving and aimed to acquire and develop these skills. In the literature study on the mentioned skills, Çelikkaya (2011) in his study titled "The Level of Acquisition of Skills in the Social Studies Program: Teachers' Opinions"; aimed to determine the views of Social Studies teachers on the level of social studies lesson to acquisition nine skills specified in the program (one of these nine skills is decision making as stated above by the Ministry of Education (2006; p.4)).

According to the results of the research; The teachers stated that the social studies course partially acquired the skills specified in the program; they also stated that they "partially" acquired their decision-making skills. It can be said that this finding also supports the finding of our study.

Other results of the research are as follows: According to the opinions of the classroom teachers, mistakes are made, and problems are experienced in the acquisition of decision-making skills at the primary school level. Özdemir (2006) in her study "Teacher's Views on the Level of Social Studies Course to Gain Thinking Skills" concluded that the social studies course is partially sufficient to gain decision-making skills. Tok (2010), in her study titled " The Need for Cognition of Preschool Prospective Teachers and Their Views on The Need for Cognition (The Case of Pamukkale University)", concluded that the ways that pre-service teachers use in making decisions are insufficient. Gelen (2002) in his study named " The Evolution of Fourth Grade Elementary School Teachers' Competences About Teaching Thinking Skills in Social Studies Course " concluded that teachers are completely inadequate in acquisition decision-making skills to them.

According to these results, the following recommendations can be made:

- On the importance of decision making skills; teacher, student, parent, administrator training can be given.
- Activities can be planned and presented to teachers to improve students' decision-making skills.
- Educational environments can be rearranged for the development of decision making skills.
- The Ministry of National Education can carry out applications for the development of decision-making skills at the level of all lessons at primary school level.

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