

## Parents' Views Regarding Foreign Language Teaching In Pre-School Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

Gradually, learning a foreign language has become a necessity to capture the era in a changing world. In recent years, the importance attached to multilingualism in pre-school-age children has also raised the issue of teaching foreign languages. This issue is also becoming increasingly important in our country, Turkey. Present study was conducted to examine the parents' opinions of private kindergartens within the province of Istanbul according to some variables. The research was examined through a survey based on the opinions of 140 parents of children in pre-school education on foreign language education. The obtained data were analysed by using SPSS program and descriptive statistics. The parents attending the survey were asked what the most important reason they wanted their child to learn a foreign language in pre-school term, 60.7% expressed the opinion that learning a foreign language should start at a young age. As a result, it has been observed that the vast majority of the parents favour teaching foreign language in pre-school. It has been expected that learning a foreign language in pre-school education positively affects children's cognitive, lingual, and social development.

**Key words:** Pre-school institutions, Parents' views, Foreign Language Teaching, Games, Drama.

### INTRODUCTION

Children have the power of creation, reflection, and learning more than one language. Pre-school children know the general structure of their mother tongue and they may evaluate the accuracy of their utterances. Children at this age are able to grasp a new language. They can fully capture the accent, rhythms, and speech patterns. Adults are rarely able to do that. A two-year-old child can use two languages without mixing them into each other (Küçük, 2006).

It has been observed that a two-year old child whose native language is Hindi and also knows English stopped using his/her native language when the child went to the United States. According to psychologists, Mother tongue is not forgotten but taken out of consciousness. Second language becomes easier to children because of their environment. Therefore, the child preferred to use a second language but when s/he returned to their native country, s/he used his/her native language again (Küçük, 2006).

### Teaching Second Language in the present day

Nowadays, the issue of learning a second language apart from the mother tongue has gained importance. It has become a factor that people need education in the work area and other social domains.

People, rapidly developing and trying to keep up with innovations, cannot be satisfied only with native language, but they also need to learn and acquire foreign languages. One of the reasons of this is the rapprochement among countries in social, economic, cultural, and technological fields. From the beginning of the last century till now, teaching foreign language is considered growingly important by societies in an incrementally shrinking world without borders (Canbulat and İşgören, 2005:124)

### Foreign language schooling in Turkey

Today, Turkey has membership in many international organizations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, NATO, OECD etc. In these international organizations, several languages are being used as a common means of communication. For instance, the United Nations' official languages are Chinese, French, English, Russian, and Spanish. In this organization "French and English" as working languages, and "Spanish" as the working language of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (UN, 1958) are in use. In the international organizations that are important for Turkey such as NATO, "English" is being used as the official language.

Due to the rise of international relations as such, a necessity to learn other languages especially the Western languages that are accepted as official languages in international organizations occurs in Turkey and as a result of this teaching foreign languages is involved in school programs (Demirel, 1999:15)

### **Games in Foreign Language Teaching**

Games activity especially colouring books can be used effectively in the second language learning process. Starting from kindergarten, all of the linguistic skills develop in children's play environment in the best way. During this period, a child may be enabled to prepare his/her textbook so that his/her participation in the process of learning and teaching is effectively achieved.

For children acquiring their native language is an extremely complex process. Children face absorbing and understanding a very complex symbolic string in this process. Therefore, the second string can only be realized from the acquisition of the first symbolic string, beginning at the age of four or five. In the first phase, one needs to take care of developing children's sensitivity regarding the second language and be careful about equipping them with communication tools that they can use in their daily activities by starting from the utterance speed and the volume.

Since we cannot use the child's non-acquired native language skills and writing activities at the age of four, we have to base language learning on speaking language. Taking into account that a child at this age has a limited capacity to concentrate on one particular task, it should not be forgotten that children need to interact with their friends.

Therefore, time prescribed for the teaching of a unit should not exceed 20-25 minutes. If one needs more time, it should be split into shorter units. Considering the sensitivity of children, making the foreseen activities variable and rich should be taken into account. In short, it is inevitable that education should be realised in a dynamic style in a rich gaming environment. In the classroom, kindergarten, and children's garden or at home as well as on holidays or in other places, most of children's daily activities are in the form of a game. This game stage is a stage that children try to emulate by observing adults. Thus, the teaching of foreign languages at an early age and this emulation should be designed as a continuation of play activities (Kara, 2004).

### **Music in Foreign Language Teaching**

According to Özkardeş (1988), one of the benefits of music is to expand children's vocabulary and accelerate language development through singing and listening. In the same structure, repetition of certain words helps the child recognize these words and enables them to make a sense of them. Again through singing, a child has a chance to pronounce accurately by continuous repetition of certain words (Özkardeş, 2005).

A researcher conducted a study on teaching foreign language through music with a group of age 5 children with the problem statement "Does education with music help embedding the information into the memory of children at this age?" Consequently, it is concluded that in pre-school, learning with music helps students to save data in their memory more easily and is more effective than the other rote classical teaching methods. Thus, as emphasized in the Multiple Intelligences Theory in pre-school, to develop a mental space, one can utilize music intelligence as well as other intelligence areas, and in language teaching, age appropriate musical activities can be organized. (Modiri, 2010).

### **Drama in Foreign Language Teaching**

Communication is an element of a "natural" environment where the best development and training for foreign language are based on. Since the optimal natural environment for a child of this age is the "playing" environment that he creates and he himself is directly involved in, similar environments for gaming carry great value in terms of development and education. Educational drama contributes to the development of a child regarding communication and language skills with its "natural" environment similar to Onder, 2003: 98).

Drama technique is suitable for the use of new foreign language learners and students at all levels. Especially to motivate and encourage shy students at the elementary level, puppetry and improvisation can be used. Similarly, when teaching new words to students of initial level, mime technique may be used. In this way, children can guess the word that is taught without using the native language.(Cevik, 2006).

### **Effects of Foreign Language on Cognitive Development**

There are different opinions in society about the education of foreign languages at an early age. For example, speaking two languages divides the brain into two, or adversely affects the ability to think. Such opinions can be based on the considerations that bilingualism will create an undue burden on the brain and will create complexity in mind.

For Mc Laughlin (1984: 101), when a foreign language is obtained after the age of four, it will be difficult to integrate it into the structure of the brain because changes in the neural system cannot occur easily after that age.

Many researchers advocate that learning a foreign language at an early age has several advantages. For example, it has been suggested that bilingualism provides mental flexibility for a child and helps the formation of mental skills to detect, treat, and use the information.

Besides all these, In a study conducted on bilingual children, Bamford and Mizokawa (1990) found positive impact of problem-solving skills at an early age in foreign languages. In the light of some research, children learning a foreign language at an early age are proved to be better at abstract thinking skills by comparison with those who are not. This also affects cognitive skills such as concept development and evaluation in a positive way (Canbulat and İşgören, 2005).

### **Effects of Foreign Language on Language Development**

Bleyhl (2000: 1-5), in his study on foreign languages in primary education, mentions empirical research of Bristol, and underlines the important thesis obtained in this study. Accordingly, when so many stories, fairy tales are read and told to a pre-school child, then the child's ability to understand what is told or comprehension skills by hearing improve that much and as a result it boosts up his success the success of the child in school.

How should it be interpreted when these data are adapted to language development? Linguistic consciousness develops in a child depending on the action of hearing the language intensively, which means it is aurally developed. Therefore, the factors such as the quality and quantity of language, and the language used in a variety of child-centred environments play important role in language development. Also, one must not forget that when the child notices that he/she can only express something with words, in short when they are forced or encouraged, they prefer speaking. The process of the formation of a foreign language is not very different from the process of LI development. Use of a language (output) cannot occur without the accumulation of a particular language named "critical mass"; this case is valid for both native language and foreign language. In short, in order for the child to start using a particular language, specified language material needs to be stored in the brain beforehand Akdoğan, 2004).

### **Impacts of Foreign Language on Social Development**

Undoubtedly, teaching foreign languages at an early age will primarily give children the opportunity to learn about different cultures. It will allow the child to recognize the value that what he/she perceives in his/her own culture also exists in others. It will also improve the capacity of the child to see analogies and differences between cultures and to respectfully approach different cultures (Canbulat and İşgören, 2005).

### **Role of Families in Foreign Language Teaching**

One of the major requirements in early foreign language education is that the family should be included in language education. An effective training is only possible with the collaboration of school, family, and the environment. Because children can learn foreign languages in kindergarten, at home, and in a natural environment through game activities. Foreign language instruction given in the kindergarten will not be effective if it is not applied home. By giving children simple commands such as "Let's go to the kitchen, let's play a game, tell me...", foreign language education can be permanent. In addition, education dosage should be well adjusted. That is, if the child does not volunteer, s/he should not be compelled.

If language training is turned into a fun game for kids, it can grab their attention. For this reason, educators should make use of appropriate methods for children in their development period considering their interest areas. For example, babies love sounds, rhyme, and stories. While learning a foreign language; baby songs, puppets, and plush toys attract the babies' attention. They receive training along with their mothers. Under the name of family activities, some of the books and other visual materials in the 3-6 and 0-3 age groups are intended for parents and generally with the help of family, they are transferred to the child. If parents continue home schooling for early foreign language learning, success can be achieved (Kara, 2004).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In İterand Er (2007)'s study entitled "Teachers and parents' views on early foreign language teaching", no significant difference between the opinions of teachers and parents with regard to foreign language teaching in the early years has been found. Both groups support teaching of foreign languages at an early age and they both agreed that games, songs, and rhymes are needed to be utilized when teaching children foreign languages at this age.

When we have a look at Aytar and Öğretir (2008)'s study named "Examination of mother, father and teacher views on language education in pre-school as per variables", we spot that teachers are in favour of pre-school foreign language teaching. Contrary to this common opinion, teaching foreign languages to children before they pick up their native language learning their native language is considered to have negative effects on children's personality and their social development.

In the study of Küçük (2006) named "Opinions of families and educators in pre-school foreign language education early childhood", it was found that educators and teachers find pre-school English education useful and necessary, and in their opinion, language education should start from pre-school and be continuous until the end of secondary education.

Anşin (2006) in his article entitled "Foreign language teaching for children", he is of the opinion that if the natural attitude of the child is observed in the native language acquiring process, foreign language education will be more effective and lasting. He studied on the institutional foreign language teaching, foreign language teaching in France and generally in Europe, and his studies revealed that the age factor, foreign language teaching methods and techniques implemented to teach children at the primary stage should be applied taking their cognitive, communicative and pedagogical features into consideration and pedagogical factors that foreign language teachers create in class.

The result of the research of Batdı (2012) named "Teachers' opinions on the use of educational games in language teaching" shows that instruction with educational games creates a fun learning atmosphere and positive attitudes towards language learning and they offer alternative activities for the development of the four language skills.

It is recommended that educational activities that have a great role in meaningful and lasting language learning should be particularly used in foreign language classes at the elementary level.

Akdogan (2004)'s study, "Early foreign language teaching in the light of new projects" examines foreign language education and training matters in early age with its international dimensions and focuses on the developments and studies in Turkey, and introduces two intensive foreign language training and teaching Project that are designed and carried out within this framework.

One of the important research studies was conducted by Sevinç and Sertkaya (2006), "Evaluation of the effects of foreign language education to notion development cognitive and skills in pre-school term". Looking at the results of these studies, it is clear that children studying in foreign languages schools get ahead of children studying in their mother tongue in terms of notion development and cognitive skills. When comparing children's performances in institutions implementing bilingual programs, it revealed significant results in terms of mainly contextual activities, notion development of child-centred language program, establishing meaningful similarities and differences among objects, problem solving and numeracy abilities on statistical levels.

In their article named "Bilingual / multilingual children's language acquisition process", Yazıcı and İter (2008) stated that when research is analysed on more than one language acquisition during early childhood, bilingualism or multilingualism is a subject of sociology, psychology, pedagogy, anthropology, and linguistics. In this study, developmental processes of bilingualism in early childhood were examined in terms of linguistic skills.

When we look at Sevil's article (2003) entitled "Foreign language teaching: Principles in the early age" the following items are highlighted; 1. According to the theorists of foreign language teaching, early foreign language education aims to realize the interests of language and culture in children. 2. Foreign language education at an early age requires the establishment of new methods for the training of foreign language teachers. 3 Since playful activities do not require an effort on the basis of learning process, they provide a basis for foreign language teaching at an early age. 4. Projects such as Evlang that takes place in Lingua 1998, a European Union program, are put into practice. 5. Foreign language education at an early age is an essential element of today's understanding.

The result of study conducted by Od (2013) "Contribution of cartoons to listening comprehension and speaking skills in early childhood foreign language teaching" points out that foreign language teaching and learning to capture the era has become a necessity in a developing and changing world. In recent years, with the start of focusing on the importance of multilingualism, teaching foreign languages at an early age has become a crucial issue. In our country, required activities have begun to be carried out in this regard. Therefore, we can say that in some public schools and private schools, foreign language is being taught to pre-school students in the 5-6 age group. However, one must admit that there are problems with course materials in foreign language teaching

practice. For the solution of these problems, it has come to the conclusion that cartoons and audio-visual tools are useful for teaching.

When analyzing the study of Kocaman and Kocaman (2012) named "Age factor in foreign language education at pre-school level", it is stated that foreign language training should be given by a pre-school teacher certificated in English or by a teacher of English certificated in pre-school education. Still, the majority of the interviewees stated that foreign language training at the level of pre-school must be given by a native speaker for the sake of correct pronunciation.

Based on the theoretical framework and related research results of the research named "Parent views regarding foreign language teaching in pre-school educational institutions", one can say that as a result of studies conducted in the field of foreign language teaching in pre-school institutions, children's awareness of foreign language should be raised., parents should be aware of the programs implemented in the institution, samples of activities should be sent to the parents in order inform and guide them for a parallel education.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement of this present research was "What are the views of parents on foreign language education in pre-school educational institutions?"

### METHOD

In this section, model of the research, population and sampling, data collection tools, and statistical process to analyse the data take place.

#### Model of the Research

This research with its scientific nature is based on quantitative dimension. Firstly, literature has been searched regarding the topic of the research and in the light of information based on the literature; A "Parents' views on the teaching of foreign language in pre-school institutions" survey has been developed. The questionnaire was used to gather the views of parents of children who attended special education institutions in European and Asian sides of the Istanbul Province in 2013-2014 academic year.

#### Sampling of the Research

The population of the research consisted of 140 parents whose children are pre-school students.

#### Data Collection

The related literature has been reviewed to benefit from domestic and foreign sources to prepare the data collection tool. By analysing survey questions in similar studies, required question pool was prepared by the researcher. Questions taken from this pool, "The Survey of Parents' Views on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in Pre-school Institutions" formed the questionnaire as the data collection tool. Expert opinions were taken for the coherence of data collection tools regarding scope and clarity.

The survey has been implemented on parents whose children attend some private pre-school institutions in Istanbul Provincial National Education Directorate in 2013-2014 academic year. 140 parents participated in the survey. In order to gather information, in the form of selective survey, 27 items include 7 personal information and 20 items are related to the subject.

### STATISTICAL RESULTS

This part of the research presents demographic information of parents regarding the foreign language teaching in pre-school institutions, results of parents' opinion in the foreign language teaching in pre-school educational institutions.

#### Demographic information of parents gender distribution

Table 1. Gender distribution of the parents participated in the survey

Gender	N	%
Female	103	73,6
Male	37	26,4
Total	140	100,0

Table 2. Age distribution of the parents participated in the survey

Age	N	%
18-25	0	0
26-30	10	7,1
31-35	34	24,3
36-40	59	42,1
40 and over	37	26,4
Total	140	100,0

Table 3. Efficiency distribution of foreign language in selecting pre-school education

	N	%
Yes	130	92,9
No	10	7,1
Total	140	100,0

Table 4. Distribution of given activities joined by the children

	N	%
joins all of the events	135	96,4
Only joins foreign language activities	3	2,1
joins all activities except for foreign language	2	1,4
Total	140	100,0

Table 5. Distribution of foreign language knowledge of the participating parents

	N	%
Yes	58	41,4
No	18	12,9
Missing	64	45,7
Total	140	100,0

Table 6. Distribution of participating parents' level of foreign language knowledge

	N	%
I know very well	80	57,1
I know well.	35	25,0
I know very little.	16	11,4
I do not know.	9	6,4
Total	140	100,0

Table 7. Distribution of problem types parents experienced due to insufficient knowledge of foreign language

	N	%
It prevented me from having the education that I want	32	22,9
It prevented me from raising standards of my life	37	26,4
It prevented me from understanding other cultures	32	22,9
There was no problem since I know a foreign language	28	20,0
Others	11	7,9
Total	140	100,0

Table 8. Degree of foreign language knowledge of the spouse of the participating parent.

	N	%
S/he knows very well	45	32,1
S/he knows well.	43	30,7
S/he knows very little.	33	23,6
S/he does not know.	19	12,9
Total	140	100,0

Table 9. Parents' views regarding the necessity of foreign language education in pre-school

	N	%
Yes	133	95,0
No	7	5,0
Total	140	100,0

Table 10. Parents' views regarding how old the foreign language teaching should start according to parents participated in the survey

	N	%
0-2 years	32	22,9
3-4 years	94	67,1
5-6 years	8	5,7
7-8 years	2	1,4
9-10 years	1	0,7
11-12 years	3	2,1
13 years and over	0	0
Total	140	100,0

Table 11. Parents' views regarding which social developments of children are affected by starting the foreign language teaching in an early age

	N	%
Lingual development	11	7,9
Mental development	1	0,7
Social development	1	0,7
Lingual and social development	10	7,1
Lingual and cognitive development	14	10,0
Social and mental development	2	1,4
Lingual-mental-social development	101	72,1
Total	140	100,0

Table 12. Parents' views regarding what the most important reason is they want their child to learn foreign language in pre-school education

	N	%
I had difficulties for not knowing a language, therefore I want my children not to experience the same thing	74	52,9
Since I wanted to learn a language, but I couldn't	61	43,6
Since he/she can learn a foreign language as early as he/she started	4	2,9
Since it facilitates the future education life	0	0
To recognize that there are languages other than their own language	1	0,7
All	0	0
Total	140	100,0

Table 13. Parents' views regarding what the most important reason is to learn foreign language in pre-school term

	N	%
Children learn better foreign language at an early age.	85	60,7
Lessons learned at this age are permanent.	23	16,4
Better learn to pronounce foreign words.	3	2,1
Facilitate future educational life.	29	20,7
There are no pre-school education benefits of learning a foreign language.	0	0
Total	140	100.0

Table 14. Parents' views regarding to what extent the children are interested in foreign language in pre-school term

	N	%
Sings songs in the language he/she has learnt	54	38,6
Says the object name in the language that has been learning, e.g. says "elma" to apple	44	31,4
Listens carefully the foreign language speeches on TV or elsewhere	9	6,4
Repeats the words he/she has learnt.	19	13,6
Shows no interest in foreign language learning.	14	10,0
Total	140	100.0

Table 15. Parents' views regarding how to make the foreign language the child has been learning permanent

	N	%
I encourage him/her to repeat what he/she has learned	62	44,3
I provide programs like cartoons in foreign language for my child	15	10,7
I provide technology-supported programs.	6	4,3
I answer their questions	10	7,1
I apply all of the above	41	29,3
I do not do anything, I will do in elementary school	6	4,3
Total	140	100.0

Table 16. Parents' views regarding how the starting foreign language at an early age affects the mental and lingual development of the children

	N	%
Affects positively	134	95,7
Affects negatively	3	2,1
Does not affect	3	2,1
Total	140	100,0

Table 17. Responsive Distribution on the views of parents regarding the most important positive effect of starting foreign language at an early age and effects on the mental and lingual development of the children

	N	%
Cognitive and lingual improvement occur	103	73,6
Self-expression skills increase.	12	8,6
Self-confidence increases.	19	13,6
Currently do nothing about foreign languages.	4	2,9
It does not affect in the positive direction.	2	1,4
Total	140	100.0



Table 18. Parents' views regarding the most important negative effect of starting foreign language at an early age and effects on the mental and lingual development of the children

	N	%
Foreign words cannot be pronounced since lingual development is not completed	13	9,3
Since native language education is not completed, foreign language education can be difficult and it can make him/her get away from school.	5	3,6
Ability to express themselves decreases.	4	2,9
It does not affect negatively.	118	84,3
Total	140	100.0

Table 19. Parents' views whether the foreign language education in pre-school institutions is adequate or not

	N	%
Yes	85	60,7
No	28	20,0
I have no idea	27	19,3
Total	140	100.0

Table 20. Responses regarding what parents would suggest for foreign language education in pre-school if they found it inadequate.

	N	%
Longer time of teaching	10	7,1
Including whole activities	10	7,1
Speaking in foreign language at school all the time	4	2,9
Teachers to be more concerned about this	3	2,1
I would like to inform about foreign language	9	6,4
Teaching through games and drama	19	13,6
I have no suggestions	22	15,7
Blank	63	45,0
Total	140	100.0

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

When we look at the results of the research, out of 140 parents, 103 of them were female and 37 were male. 59 of the 140 parents participating in the survey are in 36-40 years age range. The gender distribution of children of parents surveyed 79 have boys and 61 have daughters. Out of 140 parents that are surveyed, 70 of them have 1 child, 60 of them have 2 children and 10 of them have 3 or more children. Regarding the educational status of the mothers who participated in the survey, 96 have a graduation certificate at the university level. Educational levels of the parents who participated in the survey, 73 have a graduation certificate at the university level. Participants stated that 28 parents doing freelance work, 22 parents are teachers, 20 parents are engineer and 16 parents are housewife. 92.9 % of the parents said that foreign language is an effective factor that affects parents' choice of pre-school. Almost all of the parents (96.4%) reported that of pre-school children continued all the activities provided in educational institutions. 97.9 % of the parents stated that they did not pay extra for the events given in the pre-school educational institutions. 41.4 % of parents said they know a foreign language. 57.1 % of the parents, said they know a foreign language at a good level. 26.4% of the parents stated that not knowing enough foreign language hindered the rise in their life, 22.9 % stated that it prevented them from getting the education they want for, 20.0 % stated that they experienced no problem. 72.9 % of parents' husbands/wives speak a foreign language. 32.1 % of parents' spouses speak a foreign language fluently. 95% of parents found teaching foreign language in pre-school institutions is required. 67.1 % of parents reported that the age to start teaching a foreign language should be 3-4 years. Some of the parents 52.9 % stated that since they do not know a foreign language, they experienced difficulties; in order not to make their children to experience same problems in the life, they marked it as the most important reason for pre-school foreign language education. Some of the parents ,60.7 %, who participated in the survey stated as the most important reason for foreign language in pre-school is that children learn foreign languages better at an early age. Some of the parents, 38.6%, underlined that the interest of children in learning foreign language in pre-school is shown by singing in the language that they learnt. 44.3% of parents stated that encourage their children to repeat what they have learned in foreign language to become permanent. 95.7% of

parents reported that starting an early foreign language teaching affects the child's mental and lingual development in a positive direction.73.6% of the parents stated that the most important reason of positive effect of early foreign language education on children's cognitive and lingual development is its improvement in mental and lingual development.9.3% % of the parents stated that the most important reason of negative effect of early foreign language education on children's cognitive and lingual development is that since language development is not complete, children cannot say foreign words and 84.3% stated that it affects in a negative way. 60.7% of the parents implemented that they have found foreign language education in pre-school institutions is adequate.13.6% of the parents suggested that in order foreign language in pre-school to be adequate, it should be given with fun and games within drama.

As a result, parents participated in the survey, think that foreign language teaching in pre-school educational institutions is essential and children learn foreign language at an early age and what they learn at this age is permanent.

It has been observed that the majority of parents are in favour of foreign language in pre-school. It is expected that learning a foreign language in pre-school education will positively affect children's cognitive, lingual and their social development. This idea is determined in light of literature examinations and this applied research.

### SUGGESTIONS

With foreign language teaching in pre-school children awareness on this issue can be raised. Children can be aware that there are other languages and cultures outside of their native language. Mandatory or selective courses that include required information, skills, methods, techniques for foreign language teaching to teacher candidates in pre-school education programs can be given. Education Faculty of Foreign Languages Education Department can provide the necessary training to for their own students to educate children of pre-school. Information meeting and seminars about the foreign language teaching for pre-school children to pre-school teachers can be arranged. Language training programs can be rearranged as to include foreign language teaching for children in pre-school, according to the common European framework program. Besides all these, when the parents were asked about their suggestions when they found foreign language education inadequate in the pre-school 63 of them (45%) did not answer the question which indicates that parents are not qualified enough to evaluate the education and make necessary contributions. Therefore, parents should be informed about the content of foreign language education at pre-school level.

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