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The Practices of Admission to School and the Effectiveness of Individualized Supported Education*

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Abstract

This study has been prepared by assessing students' level of readiness to school about the subjects of Language, Psychomotor, Affective, Social, and Cognition developments and to support the development of students who are incapable in those fields of the first grade students who started primary school. The Kiel Test of Admission to School has been employed in this study to assess the level of readiness of newcomers to primary school. After the pre-application of the test, individualized supporting educational programme has been applied to students who are incapable in the fields of language, psychomotor, emotions, social, and cognition. After the supporting educational programme, the final application of Kiel Test of Admission to School has been applied and the effects of educational supporting on the development of children have been discussed. In the pre-application of the Admission to School, the research group consists of 10 students chosen randomly from primary schools in Bolu through the method of sampling among 87 first grade students who started primary school. The study has been carried out as an action research. The data of the research have been analyzed with the descriptive content analyze, which is used in qualitative research. At the end of the research, positive developments have been observed who had inability and/or lack of knowledge during the pre-applications. Therefore, this study can be regarded as an effective operation. It is thought to prevent barriers to learning that caused by individual differences through this kind of study

Key Words

Test of Admission to School, Individualized Supporting Education, Language Development, Psychomotor Development, Affective Development, Social Development, Cognitive Development.

The individual needs to learn new information to cope with the complexity of current conditions and to adapt to the changes and developments in the country and the world. The quality of knowledge acquisition process and the success obtained at the culmination of this process are dependent on well structured educational environments. Achievements of individuals in education and training affect the acquisition of success in other domains; hence, individuals need a strong foundation in education.

Starting primary school is one of the milestones in an individual's life since it represents the start of regular/formal education and training (Kırca, 2007). Starting school requires maturation in mental, physical, affective and social domains and learning readiness. Deficiency in one of the factors in children such as learning readiness, linguistic skills, visual and auditory perceptions, muscle coordination, motor skills, numeracy skills, ability to follow directions and interest in group activities may cause the child in the first grade to face difficulties in learning (Çataloluk, 1994). The child who has reached the required maturity levels will not only be successful in primary school but also in future learning undertakings (Binbaşıoğlu, 1995; Çoban,

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1996). In addition to being provided support for academic achievement, children can be supported after identifying their competencies in such domains as social, affective, physical, cognitive, creative and self care. Determining the levels of children at school age will guide both teachers and parents in the planning of future learning activities (Polat Unutkan, 2003).

The issue of the school importance, need for school, and reading readiness are among the interests of researchers both at home and abroad since acquisitions of children prior to school and their school readiness are the foundations for their future learning. Not all children are ready for school equally at the same time which necessitates the preparation of different educational programs (Meisels, 1987; Acarlar, 1991 cited in Çıkrıkçı, 1999).

Children in Turkey who turn six, regardless of attendance in preschool education and individual differences, start primary school. It is not known by parents, preschool teachers and primary school teachers which ones among these children who start school have the required maturity for it. The children who are not yet ready for school are only identified after having problems in schools and being sent to counseling services. Placing children in an environment that they are not ready for and forcing them to read and write causes the children experience failure in school and contributes to the development of negative attitudes towards schooling. Preparing primary school age children for school environment beforehand, making the necessary arrangements in the environment and guiding the children according to their individual attributes will prevent these children from going through negative experiences. Undertaking necessary environmental arrangements will contribute to an easier transition to life in primary school (Yılmaz, 2003) which will only be possible with getting acquainted with/identifying the children and following their developments.

Purpose

This study involves identifying the students, following their developments and making decisions about their competencies in order to present them with the educational experiences that they need and also aims to support holistic development of the students.

Process of Action Research

Phase I: Identification of the Problem: By employing the question of "*What can be done for different levels of school readiness in students starting first grade in primary school?*" in planning and implementations after the phase of identification of the problem in the action research; the study seeks answers to the questions below:

1. How can the research process be planned?
2. How can readiness levels for students in linguistic, psycho-motor, affective, social and cognitive development be determined in the implementation phase?

Phase II: Training Phase:

1. How can students whose readiness levels are found deficient or insufficient be supported in terms of linguistic, psycho-motor, affective, social, and cognitive development?

Phase III: Observing the Change:

1. The students who receive individualized support training;
   1. Do they show progress in linguistic skills?
      a) Do they show progress in listening and comprehension skills?
      b) Do they show progress in speaking and expression skills?
      c) Do they show progress in reading skills?
      d) Do they show progress in writing skills?
   2. Do they show progress in psycho-motor skills?
      a) Do they show progress in general motor skills?
      b) Do they show progress in fine motor skills?
   3. Do they show progress in social skills?
   4. Do they show progress in the affective domain?
   5. Do they show improvements in cognitive skills?
      a) Do they show progress in knowledge and abilities?
      b) Do they show progress in logical thinking?
      c) Do they show progress in visual perception and visual memory skills?
   2. What sorts of problems were encountered during support training applications and how were these problems solved?

Phase IV: Decision Making: What effect did support training have on student development?

Limitations

This research is limited to the students in the working group registered after receiving the Kiel School Admission Test to the first grade of the primary school that was selected randomly from among primary schools in Bolu in 2009-2010 educational year. The research is also limited to the researcher who will undertake the first training implementation in Turkey.

Method

The study is designed as an action research which is a qualitative research method. Action research is one of the strongest research designs that aims to develop quality by observing a social situation and it can contribute to the change and development through these observations (Selanik Ay, 2010), in other terms, action research is a continuous process oriented towards problem solving that is composed of phases such as identifying the problem, collecting and analyzing data, determining the action plan, implementing the actions and determining alternatives or a new action plan.

It can be said that action plans offer the implementers opportunities to do research about the implementation process and the results hence it provides opportunities for seeking solutions to a problem, collecting related data and analyzing them and trying out a new implementation in the framework of a systematic plan. In action research, research process and implementations can be undertaken simultaneously. Action research can be regarded

Table 1.
*Process of Action Research**

Process of Action Research	Research Process
I. Identification phase	
A problem /Matter of interest/Who is it related to	Are the first graders ready for school learning in terms of cognitive, affective, linguistic, physical and social development?
Identification of Research Questions	Identification of the problems and sub problems
Looking for Solutions	Starting with the question "How can school readiness levels be determined?" and doing research on school readiness tests and identifying one for use, adapting it to Turkish
Data Collection	Implementing Kiel School Admission Test as a pre-test to all students who start school
Analysis	Implementing all the phases of school admission test and making decisions about school readiness regarding the developmental domains of students/presenting the results to the approval of the monitoring committee/ identifying the students for the working group
II. Training phase	
Trying out a new implementation in the framework of a systematic plan/Which changes are foreseen?	Development of an individualized support training geared towards developing the identified deficiencies or shortcomings in students/ Presenting the results to the approval of the monitoring committee and implementation
Turning the results to implementations	Implementing the plans, recording student development, recording the implementations to send them to the monitoring committee
Corrected Action Does the implemented training serve its purpose?/Which changes shall we initiate?	Trying out different methods in case some activities do not work in the implemented plan (for example; moving on to mixed approaches when student has difficulty in learning how to read and write in sound based teaching approach)
Reviewing the data/Are there differences between what we aim and what we get?/Which changes shall we initiate? /	Making decisions with the monitoring committee about other plans that would create solutions to overcome student deficiencies
III. Observing the change phase	Recording student development in observation forms/Sharing the observations with the monitoring committee and listening to their suggestions
Analysis of the Data	Analyzing the student development and results of activities
IV. Reviewing the change and making decisions for the future phase	
Has the change been useful? Should it continue in the future? What else can be done later? Is the change sufficient? What can we share with whom about the results of the study?	Implementing the school admission test again as post test/ Making decisions regarding whether students have displayed positive changes to overcome deficits as a result of implemented activities/ Announcing whether change was sufficient or not/ Informing the teachers/Providing comments and suggestions about what can be done for these students

* Process of Action Research was prepared by Bassey (1998).

as an important tool which fills the gap between theory and implementation (Johnson, 2002). Action research is situational- it is related to the identification of a problem in a specific environment and solving the problem in the same environment (Köklü, 1993). Action research is used as a strong tool for changing and developing the current situation (Yin, 2003) in various fields of education to collect systematic and scientific information and to develop implementations (Ekiz, 2003).

The research process of this study is presented in Table 1 in association with Bassey's (1998) action research process:

Working Group

The working group of the study consisted of a total of 10 students, three of whom were females and seven were males between the ages of 70-76 months attending the first grade of a primary school in Bolu randomly selected from Bolu central primary schools. The students with the most significant deficits in linguistic, physical, cognitive, affective and social skills identified through purposeful sampling method were taken in the working group. These students belonged to lower and middle socio-economic status. Students were called through code names (such as *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Tulip*, *Poppy*, *Violet*, *Daisy*, *Mimosa* and *Camellia*) in the presentation of the data and their own names were not used.

The Role of Researchers

The first researcher participated in the research process both as a participant observer and an implementer teacher. The first researcher has a B.A from Classroom Teaching Department, an M.A. from Classroom Teaching Master's Program and a doctorate degree from Educational Programs and Teaching Doctorate Program. The educational background has provided the researcher with the opportunity to know the field and acquire the necessary implementation process skills so that the researcher could personally carry out program development and implementation phases. In addition, in order to gain experience in school admission tests the researcher went to Germany for a year where the test is implemented and participated in school admission test implementations there as an observer.

The second researcher participated in school games and individual activities of Kiel School Admission Test implementation phase as an observer and provided expert views on activity plans as a graduate of Classroom Teaching and an expert in program development.

Environment

The primary school in which the research was implemented is situated in a neighborhood where families of middle or lower socio-economic status live and the neighborhood receives continuous migration. The location for research was the school library since it was regarded a suitable place for individual work by the school administration.

Phase II: Training Phase:

***Identifying Readiness for Learning: Data Collection Tool and Adaptation Process*:** The data regarding the learning readiness of students were collected through Kiel School Admission Test (Fröse, Mölders, & Walldrodt, 1996; Kutluca Canbulat & Canbulat, 2012), a test implemented in Germany for school admission. The test was adapted to Turkish by the researcher. In addition to collecting information on the students' cognitive skills, Kiel School Admission Test approaches the students form many angles by providing a resource base on linguistic, physical, affective and social development of the students and includes parental views, views of the preschool teacher and group and individual activities. Kiel school implementation contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards school and it does not create exam anxiety. One of the different aspects of this test is the fact that the teacher can make use of data from various resources (child's home environment, pre-school etc) in order to decide on the child's school competence based on pedagogic experiences (Füssenich, 2005; Langer, Langer, Mang, & Walter, 2002; Lippert, 2008). Therefore, Kiel School Admission Test which approaches students from many angles and provides detailed information on students was selected as an assessment tool. Kiel School Admission Test is an inventory consisting of School Game, Individual Examination and Parental Views (Kutluca Canbulat & Canbulat). Data obtained from applications, after the reliability and validity tests were implemented, were used to finalize the test for the real application process and the implementations started with the help of the observations in and prior applications.

Data Collection Process

The data on students were collected through, 1) *systematic observation*, realized by checking on the

form according to student behaviors, which includes aspects of individual recognition techniques and includes "prior planning of what to observe, where, when and how it is observed, determining the purpose and the specific rules to follow" in the framework of the school admission test; 2) *participatory observation*, realized by the participation of the researcher in the activities in the same the environment with the individual or the group under observation *and interviews*. Video recordings of observations and interviews were taped. In addition "*anecdotes*", a technique used with a "specific form developed to record results of observations" (Kepçeoğlu, 1985) permanently, objectively and in detail, were utilized by experts, teachers and administrators regarding students behaviors that are found important in negative or positive contexts (Özgüven, 1998).

Reliability and Validity of Observations: Validity in qualitative research means the proximity between "what is believed to be evaluated and what is designed to be evaluated" (Roberts & Priest, 2006). In order to satisfy the descriptive validity used in the research as the reporting of everything the researcher hears or sees regarding the observed case (Maxwell, 1992), the researcher prepared a report of the whole research process in all its details and could validate the observation reports by the video camera records as well. Observational reliability, defined as the assessment of a concept or event in the same manner by more than one researcher in the same period of time to test the reliability of observations through assessment tools, was used as an indicator of internal reliability.

Phase III. Observing the Change:

***Preparation and Implementation of Individualized Support Training and Changes*:** A 12-week individualized support training was prepared for the students. Views of the experts in the monitoring committee (two experts from planning and evaluation in teaching, one expert in Turkish language, one expert doing field research in assessment and evaluation, sound and diction and experts in physical education and game teaching) were taken into consideration regarding the teaching program and necessary modifications were undertaken in order to provide relevancy of the teaching program prepared through expert views to the working group. Implementations began after the required adjustments and modifications were in place.

Procedural reliability is a concept used to assess whether the implementers realize the implementation according to the teaching plan and evaluates the extent of applications (Billingsley, White, & Munson, 1980; Tekin, 2000a; citied in Erbaş & Yücesoy, 2002). The study provided procedural reliability by assigning the planning and implementation expert to watch the video recordings of three different teaching environments and by comparing the results with the implementation plans. The consistency among the independent assessors was evaluated. The images that are evaluated were 15-minute images from two teaching plans randomly selected from among plans prepared for each student.

Support activities provided to develop students' linguistic, psycho-motor, social, affective and cognitive skills are given below:

***Activities Designed to Develop Language Skills*:**

Activities Designed To Develop Listening and Comprehension Skills: *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Violet*, *Daisy*, *Mimosa* and *Camelia* were supported during the study weeks with activities such as reading short stories, telling stories and riddles in addition to activities that develop attention and memory skills such as classification, sorting, matching and comparing (Kutluca Canbulat, 2010).

Activities Designed to Develop Speaking and Expression Skills: Activities were undertaken with *Begonia* regarding the vocabulary that were mispronounced or not pronounced at all, with *Geranium* regarding the vocabulary that were mispronounced, with *Magnolia* regarding speaking more intelligibly and with a more appropriate tone of voice, with *Daffodil* regarding voice and intonation, with *Tulip* regarding voice studies for pronunciation defects (Kutluca Canbulat, 2010), with *Poppy* regarding misused vocabulary, with *Violet* regarding mispronounced words and with *Daisy* regarding speaking more intelligibly with a well modulated tone of voice.

Activities Designed to Develop Reading Skills: Student text books and worksheets prepared by the researchers were used for reading skills. During the support training, letters, words and sentences that the students learned in their class levels were taken as a starting point to be developed in activities. Students were expected to read syllables, words and sentences that included the e-l-a-t; i-n-o-r-m and u-k-i-y-d-s sounds during the semester. Therefore at first students needed to know these sounds, vocalize them by associating letters with sounds and later read syllables, words and sentences. Each of the students in the working group participated in reading activities during the process regarding each new letter they learned. It was seen in pre-implementation phase that *Tulip* started school

having already learned some letters. Other students started their reading and writing activities at the school. The process aimed to support reading skills by allowing students reviewing the letters in the classroom and by making new syllables and words with other letters. The development of students was followed during the implementations. It was targeted for students to learn all letters in the order of letter groups and the next letter was not provided before learning the previous letter by heart. *7 students* excluding *Begonia* and *Violet* showed developments according to their own learning pace regarding associating letters with sounds, vocalizing the letters, forming and reading syllables, forming and reading words and reading sentences. It was seen at the end of the semester that acquisitions planned for each student with the Individualized Support Training Program were obtained. In other words, although the speed with which *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Tulip*, *Poppy*, *Daisy*, *Mimosa* and *Camellia* learned and read new letters was slower; they could read at the end of the semester. Since action research allowed the research process to run concurrently with the implementations (Köklü, 1993), mixed method was tried for *Begonia* instead of sound based sentence approach and the development of Begonia's reading skills was observed. Although one hour was sufficient for other students to study one letter, *Violet* needed repetitions of studies letter in the other class hours. *Violet* learned all the vowels at the end of the semester form the letters "e, l, a, t, i, n, o, r, m, u, k, y, s, d" and could answer correctly about the consonants when asked about them individually. *Violet* had a tendency to mix "n and m" sounds when they are in a word and needed reminders about "y, s and d" sounds.

Activities Designed to Develop Writing Skills: Activities such as folding, kneading, cutting and painting were undertaken to develop fine motor skills of students to contribute to better writing skills in addition to teaching about using connected and slanted handwriting in their notebooks, writing intelligibly, writing by leaving space between words and without breaking the words, writing without skipping/adding letters, syllables and words and taking care of writing tools was emphasized. Each student was provided opportunities to work on writing. Writing activities were more comprehensive and intensive for *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Violet* and *Mimosa* in terms of writing in a suitable and intelligible manner according to connected and slanted rules of writing.

***Activities Designed to Develop Psycho-Motor Skills*:**

Activities Designed to Develop General Psycho-Motor Skills: Activities regarding balance were provided for *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Tulip*, *Violet* and *Mimosa* (with parental cooperation), parental cooperation was provided for *Poppy* in overcoming the deficiencies in general motor skills and parental cooperation and activities to ensure careful and organized undertaking of tasks were provided for *Daisy* and *Camellia*.

Activities Designed to Develop Fine Psycho-Motor Skills: Begonia was provided with line drawing, painting and cutting activities, *Geranium* and *Daffodil* were provided with line drawing and painting activities, *Magnolia* was provided with activities to develop hand and finger muscles such as cutting, pasting, play dough and painting pictures, *Violet* was provided with play dough, cutting, pasting, line drawing and writing and *Mimosa* and *Camellia* were provided with line drawing, folding, cutting and kneading to support the development of their hand muscles.

***Activities Designed to Develop Social Skills*:** Parental cooperation was sought regarding domestic violence for *Geranium* and *Poppy*. Also parental cooperation was sought in areas such as *Poppy*'s sibling rivalry (Oktay, 1982), interaction in peer groups (Aydın, 2004) and socialization through communication with friends (Özen, 2001 cited in Kaya, 2009). *Camellia* needed support in social domains and learn social rules for behavior.

***Activities Designed to Develop Students in Affective Domains*:** Activities were provided for *Begonia* that would contribute to the feeling of comfort and self confidence, for *Geranium* to the feeling of relaxation, for *Magnolia* who is a quiet and shy student to the feeling of self confidence and for *Daffodil* to the feeling of self confidence after taking care of eye and vision related problems. For *Tulip*, activities were designed to overcome the feelings of hurt resulting from the student's broken family, for *Poppy* activities targeted behaviors such as bedwetting, encopresis and aggressive behaviors. Activities designed to provide affective development with the help of parental support were provided also for *Violet*, a lonely and timid student; for *Daisy* who has a tendency to fight due to family problems and jealousy, for *Mimosa*, who comes from a broken family and for *Camellia* who tends to feel bored easily and has a problem of not completing tasks.

***Activities Designed to Develop Students in the Cognitive Domain*:** Concept information, logical thinking skills and visual perception skills were targeted to develop students in the cognitive domain.

Activities Designed to Develop Knowledge and Skills:

Chromatics: It was found during the reimplementation phase that only *Begonia* was confusing the colors. Activities designed to teach colors and shapes were provided for the student.

Arithmetic: Pre-implementation phase showed that all students other than *Tulip* and *Camellia* had deficits in this domain and students were taught cardinal numbers and activities such as matching numbers to elements and matching decreasing and increasing numbers to elements

Geometric Shapes: Pre-implementation phase showed that all students other than *Tulip* and *Poppy* had problems in this field. Activities designed to teach geometric shapes according to individual learning paces and characteristics of students were undertaken and repeated during other activities.

Activities Designed to Develop Logical Thinking Skills: Activities were provided to develop *Begonia*'s logical thinking skills for 12 weeks**.** *Geranium* was provided with activities that centered on focusing and the need for listening to what was said/asked. *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Violet* and *Mimosa* were provided with activities that centered on visual perception, reasoning (through riddles) and cause and effect relationships in events.

Activities to Develop Visual Perception and Visual Memory: Activities such as completion, matching, comparing and contrasting according to differences/similarities were provided for *Begonia*, *Geranium* and *Magnolia*; activities such as completion, matching and comparing in terms of differences and similarities were provided for *Daffodil***,** completion activities that focus on whole/part relationships were provided for *Poppy***;** activities to develop attention, visual perception and logical thinking skills such comparisons, completion, finding similarities and differences were provided for *Violet*; activities to develop visual perception and logical thinking skills that require attention and concentration such as comparisons, matching, ordering, classifications were provided for *Daisy* and activities such as comparisons, differences-similarities and completion were provided for *Mimosa*.

School Admission Test was repeated again at the end of the semester as the last implementation. As a result of this implementation, comments/interpretations are provided regarding the effect of individualized support training program on the linguistic, psycho-motor, social, affective and cognitive skill development of students.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis, a common method in qualitative research, was used in the analysis of the research data. Descriptive analysis is a method used in research where conceptual and theoretical structure of the research is clearly identified beforehand. In this type of analysis data are summarized and interpreted according to previously identified themes or categories (Anagün, 2008).The descriptive analysis of research data was undertaken by following the stages:

1. Writing down the data
2. Creating coding keys for interviews/observation
3. Coding the interviews/observation data
4. Comparing the codes and reliability
5. Describing the findings
6. Interpreting the findings

Findings

Phase IV: Effect of Support Training on Student Development

Research findings related to listening, comprehension, speaking and self expression, reading and writing skills were given below in the context of the question *"Does individualized support training develop students' language skills?"*

Findings Related to Language Skills Development:

***Findings Related to Listening and Comprehension Skills*:** In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training develop students' language skills?"* comprehension of language and directives in the classroom games; comprehension items in the directions given to group; focusing on what is being listened to and concentration, attention and memory skills in the individuals were observed and differences between pre and post implementations were examined. Students were expected to understand what to do from the general directives and perform appropriately in the "Introduction Game" and in the Group Activity presented in the framework of the Classroom game. Students were expected to draw a house with the required

characteristics in the second activity and they were expected to draw a triangle, circle and plus signs at the end of the lines in the same order in the third activity. The first activity in Individual Observation required students to throw the dice until they got 5 while saying the numbers aloud each time the dice was thrown. The fourth activity required that the students listened to the number series such as (5,3) (7,1) (4,2,9) (8,6,3) carefully and repeated them. If the students did not comprehend the directives and could not start the activity, they were given (-). The pre implementation stage showed that *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Violet*, *Daisy* and *Camellia* lacked listening and comprehension skills whereas *Tulip* and *Poppy* were competent in them. Last implementations however showed that all students became competent in these skills.

***Findings Related to Speaking and Self Expression*:** In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training develop students' speaking and self expression skills*?" findings for pre and post implementation findings were compared for classroom game and individual observation activities. Students' speaking and language attitudes were examined in activities that investigated the skills for speaking and self expression. In terms of attitude towards speaking, points such as vocalizing all sounds distinctively, intonation and use of grammar rules were observed. In terms of attitude towards language, the ability of expressing experiences in sentences was observed. The pre implementation stage showed that *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Tulip*, *Poppy*, *Daisy* and *Mimosa* lacked speaking and self expression skills. Since there was no clear idea formed for *Mimosa* during classroom game pre implementation, individual observations were required for her. Individual observations for *Mimosa* showed her to be competent in speaking skills. Although *Tulip* was found to be competent in language attitudes, the problems she had with attitudes towards speaking and problems she had while talking necessitated language support. Last implementations showed that all students except *Violet* showed developments in these skills.

***Findings Related to Reading Skills*:** In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students' reading skills*?", students were supported to learn in the classroom environment and their developments were interpreted. Reading skill is a skill which is acquired in the first grade hence the development of students in the process was observed and supported. It was seen at the end of the semester that all students except *Violet* could correctly and clearly read words and sentences that included e-l-a-t; i-n-o-r-m and u-k-y-s-d letters but *Violet* could not move on to reading with letters u-k-y-s-d.

***Findings Related to Writing Skills*:** In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students' writing skills*?" students were supported by teacher initiated classroom experiences. Since writing skill is also one of the skills that can be acquired in the first grade, development of the skill in the process was observed and provided as research findings. Using connected and slanted handwriting in their notebooks, writing intelligibly, writing by leaving space between words and without breaking the words, writing without skipping/adding letters, syllables and words and taking care of writing tools was emphasized. It was observed that all students could write what they saw however differences were observed among students in suitability of connected and slanted handwriting, writing intelligibly, writing by leaving space between words and without breaking the words, writing without skipping/adding letters, syllables and words and taking care of writing tools.

Findings Related to Psycho-Motor Skills Development: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students' psycho-motor skills*?", developments of general and fine motor skills were observed.

***Findings Related to General Motor Skills*:** In the Classroom Game where general motor skills were observed, students were expected to jump forward from the start of the line while zigzagging. In individual observation phase the students were expected to walk on the thread forward and backwards while keeping their balance, to walk on one foot on the line and to jump forward in three trials. In "pack-the-suitcase" game the diligence shown by students was additionally observed. Here, hand-eye coordination and diligence for a given task was considered. *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Poppy*, *Daisy*, *Mimosa* and *Camellia* were found competent in general motor skills. Findings displayed that *Daffodil* who had problems in motor skills in pre implementation phase showed improvements but *Magnolia*, *Tulip* and *Violet* still had deficits in the general motor skills.

***Findings Related to Fine Motor Skills*:** In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students' fine motor skills*?" students were asked to draw a house with a door, windows and roof and cut it out and they were asked to draw roads staying in the lines. In the

individual observation "three roads activity" they were asked to draw road lines without touching the sides. Through these activities development of hand muscles in students were observed. *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Mimosa* and *Camellia* who had deficits in pre implementation phase were found to meet the requirements of the tasks in the last implementations. Only *Violet* was found to be incompetent in the skills development.

Findings Related to Social Skills Development: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students in the social domain*?", parent and teacher views were considered along with Classroom Game activities. Students were observed in understanding the binding nature of the directives, participating in group activities and in relationships with teachers and peers.

The pre-implementation stage showed that *Geranium*, *Poppy*, *Violet*, *Daisy*, *Mimosa* and *Camellia* were found incompetent in terms of social development. All students other than *Violet* displayed improvements in the last implementations.

Findings Related to Affective Development: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students in the affective domain*?", parent interviews were used in addition to observations regarding student efforts towards completing a task in the framework of Classroom Games, student sentimentality, students behaviors to display emotions, degree of assertiveness-reserve, willingness to speak and ability to speak comfortably and audibly about a picture without being asked. The general observations obtained during individual observations were given as pre and post implementation findings. It was thought during the pre implementation phase that all students needed to be supported in the affective domain. According to the last implementations, all students except *Violet* showed improvements. For instance; according to Daisy's mother he is jealous of his step brother and his own brother. Lealousy is someting that makes a person unhuppy and hinders a person's building up possitive and balance relationships between himself and others (MEGEP, 2007). In order to solve the affective problemsupportive education practices were organized in coordination with the family.

Findings Related to Cognitive Skills Development: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students in the cognitive domain*?", findings were provided for knowledge levels of students, mathematical knowledge and skills, developments in logical thinking and visual perception skills.

Findings for Development in Knowledge and Skills: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop knowledge and skills*?" students were examined in areas such as Chromatics, Arithmetic, cluster comparisons, simultaneous cluster perception, organizing clusters, memory and task readiness.

Chromatics: Students except *Begonia* displayed no deficits in chromatics. Last implementations showed that Begonia's lack of knowledge was also eliminated.

Mathematical Knowledge and Skills: Classroom Game and Individual Observations were used in addition to other observations. Knowledge regarding numbers and clusters and the developments of skill use in these domains were observed. Findings for pre and post implementation were provided.

Arithmetic: Skills such as number recognition, numbers and matching decreasing and increasing numbers to elements were observed in Classroom Game and Individual Observation activities. *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Poppy*, *Violet*, *Daisy* and *Mimosa* who had deficits in terms of numbers and clusters in pre implementation phase were found to show improvements.

Knowledge of Geometric Shapes: Pre and post implementation findings were given in classroom game and individual observation activities regarding knowledge of geometric shapes. *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Poppy*, *Daisy* and *Mimosa* who had deficits in pre implementation phase were found to show improvements however *Violet* was found to continue her deficits in the area.

Findings Regarding Logical Thinking Skills: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students' logical thinking skills*?", students were expected to comprehend the story and to be able to tell it in its entirety in Classroom Game and Individual Observation activities. *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil*, *Violet* and *Mimosa* who had deficits in pre implementation phase were found to show improvements in logical thinking skills.

Visual Perception Skills: In the context of the question *"Does individualized support training program develop students' visual perception and visual memory skills*?", students were observed regarding their concentration and organizational skills in Classroom Game activities and they were observed regarding completion, comparison, ordering and classification skills in individual observation activities. *Begonia*, *Geranium*, *Magnolia*, *Daffodil* and

Mimosa who had deficits in pre implementation phase were found to show improvements however *Violet* was found to continue her deficits in the area.

Discussion

The most important purpose of the education system is to help in solving the possible problems in children's developmental processes and to provide them with the educational services that they need. In other terms, it strives to provide an education that meets the physical, cognitive, affective and social needs of the children. As we know, there are many individuals who have never tried again once they were unsuccessful in areas such as mathematics, sports and social skills (Bacanlı, 2002).

Each individual's physical structure, level of intelligence, interests, emotions and thoughts are different. The need for organizing education according to these individual differences has been accepted centuries ago. Today, it is accepted that the differences in one individual's skills are as important and crucial as the differences among individuals (Akçamete & Kargın, 1992). Therefore, it is known that knowledge and skills that the students need to acquire has to be shaped according to time, space, conditions and most of all, to individual differences of the students (Cemaloğlu, 2000).

The statistics about students who leave school without graduation show that these students were unsuccessful although they were normal students because individual differences were not taken into consideration in their education (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Differences in the learning needs for these students were not identified and they were not presented with appropriate teaching implementations (Pugach & Warger, 1996). These students probably fail due to the fact that they are mostly left to their own devices since they cannot learn like the other students and they try to accommodate for themselves. Individualization in learning provides students with opportunities to learn in their own paces and with their own means and therefore contributes to success to a great extent (Schargel & Smink, 2001 cited in Güven & Sözer, 2007).

With the changes in the concept of education, expectations have expanded to include not only learning information but also acquiring skills, developing one's self based on interests and abilities and adapting to new environments and settings (Koç & Poyrazoğlu, 1987). In this context, teachers are expected in today's educational approaches to reach each student in their classes by taking individual differences into consideration during teaching (Küçükahmet, 1995). It is commonly accepted view that schools of today should be individualized, flexible and differentiated environments appropriate for personal pace (Aydın, 2002). It is thought that presenting suitable learning environments by combining and adapting well prepared teaching programs with individual characteristics will make educational endeavors more meaningful and successful (Akçamete & Kargın, 1992).

This problem has been solved abroad to a great extent with the implementation of school admission tests. Undertakings in Turkey are limited to "school maturity" tests implemented by a few private schools only for informative purposes. The present study aims to identify and develop students' current knowledge, interests and abilities and to know the students in order to prepare them for higher learning opportunities and to serve their personal development; and this aim is also specified in the purpose of primary school education. It is stated as one of the principles of primary school education that "Teaching and learning activities are organized and implemented by taking the teaching principles, level of students, conditions of the environment and the program principles into consideration". However, it is believed that the current educational system is insufficient in recognizing the individual and the environmental conditions. But it is only possible for this principle to reach its purpose through recognition of and support for the individual with all his/her attributes from the start of the educational experience.

In order for the children to be recognized individually, variables such as prior learning experiences, individual characteristics, family environments, socio-economic status and parental education levels need to be understood because it is thought that parents have an important effect in children's achievements in addition to the resources of the school and teaching skills of the teachers (Görmez, 2007). There are students in the framework of the study who have not been to preschool, have not experimented with reading and writing materials before, whose developments have not been purposefully supported and hence who are left alone to their own devices. It is not surprising for these children to experience varying levels of incompetency while starting school compared to other children. It is highly possible for a student who has never held a pencil in her hand to fail in drawing and writing activities as seen in the case of *Violet* and for a student to face difficulties in learning in the school environment when the child

comes from a broken family and has to live with an elderly grandfather in the village since her mother has to work, spending her days only by playing with the village children and tending the animals as seen in the case of *Mimosa*. Learning will be effective and lasting only when prior learning of the individual is associated with new learning, If the child has not acquired the concepts such as classification, ordering, comparing and matching or language skills needed to use these concepts in the preschool period, that may impede future learning and act as barriers. If the child starting primary school first grade to experience school learning for the first time has not attended preschool previously, has not been supported by parents and has no structured prior learning, the effect of future learning will decrease for him/her. Not being able to overcome these deficiencies or incompetencies in time may cause learning difficulties and failure. Children with learning difficulties are defined as "although having no physical or mental peculiarities, they face difficulties in comprehension, explanation, reading, writing, drawing, recognition and conceptualization due to the financial or cultural deficiencies in the environment, lack of interest and experience in education and to organic and functional reasons" (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 1990). As can be grasped form the definition, these children can show normal development when provided with appropriate conditions and supported and their school failures can be prevented. The fact that students who are not supported by parents and environment in the preschool period experience failure and cannot meet the demands of school during the school year or are not as successful as their peers causes material and moral losses both for their families and for the country. But more importantly, these children may have to carry the negative attitudes resulting from their first experiences at school for the rest of their lives (Gonca, 2004). The research shows that if children coming from inadequate socio-economic environments receive basic knowledge and skills in the preschool years and in the first grades in an appropriate manner, their chances to succeed in future learning will increase (Deutsch, 1966).

Polat Unutkan's study "Development and Standardization of Marmara Elementary School Readiness Scale" (2003) has developed and implemented a scale to identify the level of elementary school readiness. The most important finding of this study is that increase in preschool experiences positively affects primary school success. Bertkin's study results also confirm that preschool experiences increase achievements in the primary school (Bilecan, 1995). Another study undertaken in USA, Columbia also identified that children attending developmentally appropriate preschool programs are more successful than other children (cited in Polat Unutkan, 2003).

The level of support for children is also very important in addition to preschool experiences highly emphasized in school success. The teacher should communicate and cooperate with the parents in addition to providing students with appropriate learning experiences. Differences of students in Turkish classrooms resulting from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds are the most important factor that affect students while assigning meaning to new learning experiences at school. Güven's (1990) study on "difficulties in teaching mathematics and factors that cause student failure" found that student success levels in primary schools belonging to upper socio-economic environments are higher than those students attending primary schools in lower socio-economic environments. Epstein's (1983) study showed that the higher the teachers place value on cooperating with parents, the higher the parents show an interest in their children in the home environment, the better they understand what is going on at school, the better are the relationships they develop with the teacher and the more interested they are in volunteering to support the teachers. Even the parents with low socio-economic status and with low competence levels to support their children are affected from this cooperation. Çelenk' (2003) study examining the role of the family factor on students' school achievement showed that students coming from families who had supportive attitudes in terms of education are more successful; that family care, compassion and protection are important factors in the increase of school achievement; that students staying with foster parents are more successful when appropriate compassion and protection are provided and that the children of parents who are in a regular contact with school by reaching a common ground in terms of school program and who provide educational support for their children have higher levels of school achievement. Fletcher (1997) also mentioned the importance of cooperation of students and adults in teaching, planning and school development activities to increase school success and raise more efficient students. In Aslanargun et al. (2004) study that investigated the reasons for lack of interest towards school, parents cited the incompetencies and lack of knowledge resulting from their educational levels as the first factor. However, according to Özdayı (2004) although many parents

are in communication with the teachers, they do not know how to help their students. In this context, the suggestions of teachers and school administration are also deemed very important, therefore parents were included in the framework of the present study and interviews were undertaken with the parents regarding the development of the children. Research shows that children of parents who expect and desire school achievement are more successful (Epstein, 1992). The participation of parents to children's school activities at home such as following the school activities and encouraging the children to learn are closely related to school achievement (Henderson, 1987). Hence, parents in the present study were informed of their children2s current levels, their support was sought and they were informed about what they could do to help. As a result, improvements in students who received parental support were observed.

The present study is the first in its field. The study required a high amount of time since the researcher is not working in the National Education System and had to spend extra time to work with the students as a participant but teachers are luckier in this respect. A support training program through which teachers can spend more time with their students and make use of parental support more efficiently will be more productive since it will facilitate future learning.

Results

i. In terms of language/linguistic development;

It can be stated that the study is effective on the language development of the students since positive improvements were seen;

- In all students that had problems in listening and comprehension skills,
- In 6 out of 7 students who had problems in speaking and self expression,
- In 4 students out of 5 who had problems in reading skills
- In 5 students out of 6 who had problems in writing skills

ii. When psycho-motor skills development is evaluated, it can be stated that the study had positive effect on the development of psycho-motor skills of students since improvements were seen in 3 students out of 4 who had problems in general motor skills and improvements were seen in 6 students out of 7 who had problems in fine motor skills

iii. The study is found effective on the social development of the students since positive developments were seen in 5 students out of 6 who were thought to have problems in the social skills domain

iv. The study is found effective on the affective development of the students since positive developments were seen in 9 students out of 10 who were thought to have problems in the affective domain

v. In terms of cognitive skills;

It can be stated that the study is effective on the cognitive development of the students since positive improvements were seen;

- In the development of knowledge and skills,
- In one student who was found deficient in chromatics,
- In 7 students out of 8 who had problems in arithmetic
- In 7 students out of 8 who had problems in geometric shapes
- In all of the 6 students who had problems in logical thinking skills
- In 6 students out of 7 who had problems in visual perception and memory skills

Suggestions

i. Schools can provide better services if they make use of school admission tests in order to know the students better, to prevent learning barriers resulting from individual differences to have effect in education and to provide equal opportunities in education

ii. School admission test can be implemented before the school year starts when the students are being registered or during seminar periods

iii. If the first grade teacher does not have opportunities before the school year starts to provide applications to know the students better, he/she can get hold of preschool records of students (if they attended preschool) to get more information about the students

iv. To know the students at the beginning instead of during the teaching process will already contribute to provision of sufficient support by the teachers however if the crowded classrooms create a handicap, separate units for support training can be formed to provide additional support to students who had no prior learning

experiences but otherwise have normal capacity and normal levels

v. Activities geared towards knowing the individual and providing support services in needed areas can be done at all class levels

vi. Work towards increasing parent-school cooperation should not be limited to parent-teacher meetings. When parents are uncommunicative, teachers and administrators should reach the parents.

vii. If the teachers are informed that identification of individual differences of students prior to start of the school will increase the efficiency and quality of educational process and the importance of the concept can be communicated to them, their support may increase.

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