

Full Length Research Paper

Analyzing parental involvement dimensions in early childhood education

Zeynep Kurtulmus

Division of Early Childhood Education 06500, Educational Faculty, Gazi University, Besevler, Ankara, Turkey.

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The importance of parental involvement in children's academic and social development has been widely accepted. For children's later school success, the first years are crucial. Majority of the research focuses on enhancing and supporting parental involvement in educational settings. The purpose of this study was to analyze dimensions of parental involvement in early childhood education. It was seen that parents have tendency to attend parent conferences at school. Study also indicated that parents' involvement level was moderate regarding to children's learnings at school. Parents reported low involvement level in terms of participating in classroom activities with their children and encouraging them. Study also showed that parents were in need of being supported in redirecting children's activities and attending classroom activities with them.

Key words: Parental involvement, early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in child education has been accepted as a crucial element of early childhood education. Studies concerning parental involvement not only proved its positive effect on child development, but also presented specific links among the structure of the involvement and children's academic achievement and social emotional outcomes (Gadsden, 2013; Aksoy, 2002; Fan and Chen, 2001).

Parental involvement is explained as parental participation in the educational processes of their children (Jeynes, 2005). Currently, evidence based researches suggest three family involvement dimensions in promoting healthy outcomes: parenting, home-school relationships and responsibility for learning outcomes (McWayne and Owsianik, 2004). Parenting is the parental involvement dimension that includes the

attitudes, values, and practices of parents in raising young children. Nurturing, warm, and responsive parent-child relationship in child-centered activities relate to positive learning outcomes in early childhood (Figure 1). Play is also important for children's social and emotional development. Children who play at home and whose parents give importance to play in their development are likely to demonstrate prosocial and independent behaviors in the classroom (Fantuzzo and McWayne, 2002). Parent participation with their children in arts and crafts activities has an influence on children's literacy development as well (Nord et al., 1999).

Home-school relationship refers to the formal and informal connections between parents and their young children's educational settings (Figure 1). Both participation in preschool-based activities and regular

E-mail: kzeynep@gazi.edu.tr. Tel: +90 (312)202-1864.

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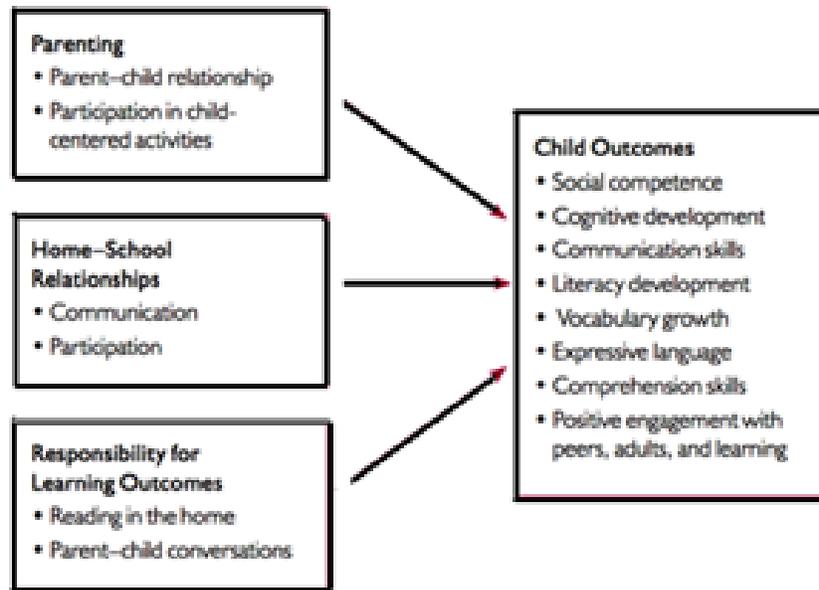


Figure 1. Processes of family involvement and young children's outcomes.

communication between parents and teachers have an impact on young children's outcomes (Marcon, 1999). Parent participation practices can include attending parent-teacher conferences, participating in extended class visits, and helping class activities. The frequency of parent-teacher contact in these activities affects the child's preschool performance. Parents who maintain direct and regular contact with the early educational setting and experience fewer barriers to involvement have children who demonstrate positive engagement with peers, adults, and learning (McWayne et al., 2004).

Responsibility for learning outcomes refers to an aspect of parenting that involves placing emphasis on educational activities that promote school success (Figure 1). During early years of children, learning outcomes tend to focus on how parents can support children's language and literacy. Reading with children is one of the most recommended activities for parents during early years. Children whose parents read to them at home recognize letters of the alphabet and write their names sooner than the others (Nord et al., 1999). Research also indicated that mothers who use more complex sentences and a wider range of different words in their everyday conversations have children with richer expressive language and higher scores on literacy-related tasks in kindergarten (Britto and Brooks-Gunn, 2001). In addition, children of parents who emphasize problem solving and curiosity for learning develop long-term individual interests and the ability to attend to tasks for longer periods of time (Fantuzzo et al., 2004).

Parent's first responsibility is to make children go to school and keep them safe. Parents are also required to help their children to increase their academic functioning

(Anderson and Minke, 2007). One of the early childhood education programs purpose is to build relationships with parents to develop equally beneficial learning environments for young children at home and at school (NRC, 2001). Home and school relationships include formal and informal connections between the family and educational setting. Parents' higher levels of involvement in their children's educational experiences at home have been associated with children's higher achievement scores in reading and writing (Epstein, 2001). Besides, parents' higher level of involvement at school activities and interaction with the teachers is associated with better achievement in mathematics and reading (Griffith, 1996). It is clear that parental involvement is a key factor for academic achievement and relatively self-competence of a child. Due to its importance on child development, research on parent involvement focuses on relationship between levels of parent behavior and children's outcomes.

Studies indicated that both parents and teachers have concerns regarding to the lack of parental involvement (Temel, 2001; Parker et al., 1999). For this reason, dimensions of parental involvement in early childhood education need to be analyzed. Understanding the distinct multidimensional character of parental involvement would allow researchers to increase level of parental involvement and its outcomes.

Parents' involvement behaviors in early childhood education settings are also analyzed as home-based involvement and school-based involvement (Deslandes and Bertrand, 2005). Home-based parent involvement includes practices related to children's education that take place outside school, usually within their homes.

These practices may be directly related to schoolwork, including assisting homework, responding to children's academic choices, and talking about academic issues (Eccles and Harold, 1993). School-based involvement occurs when parents actually make contact with the school and includes participating in general school meetings, communicating with teachers and administrators, attending school events, and volunteering at the school (Herrold and O'Donnell, 2008).

Parental involvement in Turkish early childhood program

Early childhood institutions are obligated to follow the Ministry of National Education guidelines. These guidelines are presented and standard forms are supplied in the National Early Childhood Education Program. This program considers two portions for parental involvement: Parental involvement and parent education. In terms of involvement, each play activity has a parental involvement extension. There are also home visits and school-based activities for parents. These activities are intended to establish relationships between teachers and parents. In terms of parent education, families are educated about child development, child education, affective communication and behavior modification. It is significant that researchers should focus on how to increase the level of parental involvement and its quality. For this, dimensions of involvement needs to be known, and parents' behavior in these dimensions needs to be analyzed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Dimensions of parent involvement in preschool programs have been distinguished in the literature by several researchers (Sanders and Epstein, 2000; Deitchma et al., 1977; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; McWayne and Owsianik, 2004). All the studies mainly follow three dimensions:

1. Contact with the school
2. Learning at home, and
3. Participation at school (Bakker and Denessen, 2007).

Most of the studies measuring dimensions of parental involvement report mean scores on scales to construct the level of involvement. Mean scores can be interpreted in terms of levels of involvement in general or in terms of distinct aspects, such as the frequency of contact that parents have with their child's school. High scores on items referring to the frequency of contact with the school can thus be interpreted as 'parents report to have frequent contact with their child's school' or 'parents are highly involved' (Bakker et al., 2007). Because there are contextual differences among educational settings and programs in different societies, this study attempted to stay close to the national preschool program. For this principle, while using current research knowledge, recent concepts from the national preschool program has been applied. Besides, semi-structured interviews with Turkish mothers were held to well distinct dimensional items.

Parental Involvement Survey for Early Childhood Education (PISEC) was given to participants to obtain their parental

involvement evaluation. PISEC was developed using a content analysis approach following guidelines presented by Yildirim and Simsek (2006). First, 10 female parents who have a child in kindergarten participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked the types of activities they accomplish with their children at home and at school. Two researchers independently identified each statement from the participants that indicated parental involvement. Inter observer reliability was 0.90 for the involvement types between two researcher. Researchers then compiled the list of involvements and categorized them among behaviors. It was categorized as five involvement behaviors under three dimensions: development based dimension, activity based dimension and involvement based dimension. These dimensions and their survey items were sent to three specialists. Necessary corrections were made and the survey was finalized. Five point Likert scale was employed (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-often, 5-always) for the data collection purposes.

Participants were 300 parents who have a five years old child. Father participants were excluded from the data due to their very small number of contribution. The participants were selected in an effort to equally represent a variety of preschool settings across the city of Ankara. These preschool settings were independent preschools and public kindergartens. Before completing the survey, the participants received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Answers were analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

Data was distributed in three dimensions: Development based dimension, activity based dimension and involvement based dimension. Each dimension consisted 5 items. Means and standard deviations of items are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Among five items of the development based dimension, parents scored the item 'they closely follow what their children learn at school' ($\bar{x}=3.96$) in the highest level. Parents illustrated the item 'they praise their children when they accomplish a good job' ($\bar{x}=3.85$) in the second highest level. It was also found that parents respond to the item 'talk to their children to understand their interest domain' ($\bar{x}=2.44$) in the third and the item 'talk to their children to correlate their interest domains with life experiences' ($\bar{x}=2.30$) in the fourth highest level. Results showed that parents' lowest involvement was to the item 'redirecting school based activities to do at home using different model and concepts' ($\bar{x}=1.74$). The overall mean score was found 2.86 for the development based dimension.

Among five items of the activity based dimension, parents scored the item 'they help their children to understand how to successfully complete their activities at home' ($\bar{x}=3.67$) in the highest level. Parents answered to the item 'they involve their children's activities to help them accomplishing a better job' ($\bar{x}=2.60$) in the second highest level. It was also observed that the item 'encourage their children to change the activity when they lost their interest to the current activity' ($\bar{x}=2.45$) in the third and the item 'they asked their children how they finished the activity when they bring it home' ($\bar{x}=2.40$) in the fourth highest level. Results showed that parents'

Table 1. Development based dimation.

Behavior	Mean	δ
Close follow up	3.96	0.36
Praising	3.85	0.14
Interest domain	2.44	0.22
Correlating with life experiences	2.30	0.30
Redirecting activity	1.74	0.31
Overall mean	2.86	-

5 points scale (1-the least consistent, 5-most consistent).

Table 2. Activity based dimension.

Behavior	Mean	δ
Helping to understand	3.67	0.38
Involving in activity	2.60	0.280
Encouraging when no interest	2.45	0.24
Asking about the activity	2.40	0.16
Encouraging when failed	2.35	0.20
Overall mean	2.70	-

5 point scale (1-the least consistent, 5-most consistent).

Table 3. Involvement based dimension.

Behavior	Mean	δ
Attending to parent conference	4.55	0.41
Reading books	3.77	0.24
Doing activity at home	3.65	0.32
Talking about expectations	2.42	0.17
Attending to classroom activities	1.25	0.30
Overall mean	3.13	-

5 point scale (1-the least consistent, 5-most consistent).

lowest involvement was to the item 'encouraging their children to accomplish a different activity when they are failed in an activity' (\bar{x} =2.35). The overall mean score was found 2.70 for the activity based dimension.

Among five items of the involvement based dimension, parents stated the item 'they attend parent conferences' (\bar{x} =4.55) in the highest level. Parents also reported the item 'they read books with their children' (\bar{x} =3.77) in the second highest level. It was also found that the item 'do activities with their children at home' (\bar{x} =3.65) in the third level and the item 'talk to their children about their expectations from their children' (\bar{x} =2.42) in the fourth level. Results showed that parents lowest involvement was to the item 'attending to classroom activities' (\bar{x} =1.25). The overall mean score was found 3.13 for involvement based dimension.

DISCUSSION

This study showed that parents moderately involve in their children's education during early childhood. It has been found that parents regularly attend parent conferences at school as an involvement based behavior. Parent conferences are usually hold once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end of the semester. These meetings are formal and mainly about child's progress and school policies. Attendance of these meetings are also considered to be compulsory.

It can be concluded that the reason for having higher level of involvement in parent meetings was its margin of formal responsibility. Study also indicated that parents were participating in reading books and home type of activities with their children frequently. On the other hand, they did not tend to participate in classroom activities with their children. Many early childhood education programs welcome parents in the classroom (Bohan-Baker and Little, 2002). Turkish national early childhood education program encourage parents involving in classroom activities as well. However, early childhood education teachers have difficulties complying with the idea of having parents in the classroom (Bayraktar et al., 2016). It can be suggested that policy makers should focus on the practice side of the in classroom activities to enhance parents' involvement with their children in classroom.

Study indicated that parents help their children to understand how to complete their activities successfully. On the other hand, parents reported lower level of involvement in the activities. It can be assumed that parents have difficulty with actively being in child games. Parents also stated that they closely monitor their children's learnings at school. It has also seen that they tend to praise their children's work. When the behaviors of the parents were analyzed in terms of encouraging their children in activities, their involvement decreased. Another result is that they praise their children during the play but their tendency to encourage their children when they fail decreases. It can be assumed that parents only give importance for their children to be engaged in activities or games. Parents have tendency to let their children only play and not encourage them in failure. Besides they find school based activities enough for their children to engage and they need guidance to understand their children's interest and how to correlate these interests with life experiences.

Study showed that while parental involvement was moderate for all three dimensions, the highest involvement was observed for the involvement based dimension. This dimension mainly regulates the school related tasks and responsibilities. When it comes to activity based behaviors, parents involvement decreases. It can be concluded that parents need assistance on why and how to effectively involve in their children's activities (Aral and Yurteri, 2012; Temel, 1998). This issue should also be a subject for the school based parent education meetings. It's expected that parental involvement in child

activities would positively affect development based dimension as well.

The study provided some preliminary information about parental involvement in early childhood education. Findings suggested that parental involvement in Turkish early childhood settings needs to be supported and improved. Parents are especially in need of being supported to be able to redirect children's activities and attend classroom activities. Further research is recommended on effective methods to develop better parental involvement in early childhood settings in Turkey. Researches should examine on parent-teacher interaction and the reasons why parents are not welcomed in classroom activities by the teachers.

Conflict of interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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