

# Investigation of Forest School Concept by Forest School Teachers' Viewpoints

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## **Abstract**

The study aims to reveal the opinions of teachers working in forest schools about education and students in forest schools. To this end, the study group was constructed with the participation of 5 teachers working in forest schools. The study employed a case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. The data collection tool of the study is an interview form consisted of 7 questions. The collected data were subjected to content analysis based on the case study design. In order to ensure the credibility of the study, the data were reported as they were and supported with direct quotations. As a result of the study, it was found that the teachers considered the forest school within the natural environment and the process of children's self-awareness. The general view attained is that the forest school presents a comprehensive learning environment, directs students to research, discovering and learning by doing, always keeps the sense of curiosity alive, presents a unique learning environment and that the students educated here as individuals who have self-confidence, are inquisitive, creative, solution-oriented, learning by doing and with a developed sense of responsibility. In light of these findings, it is thought that it is worth emphasizing the importance of studies conducted with different perspectives and that the forest school provides benefits for children in all the learning areas; therefore, it is worth researching.

**Keywords:** Forest school, educational perspective, teachers' opinion

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## **Introduction**

In a rapidly changing and developing world, the fact that learning should be constructed in such a way as to allow the internalization of knowledge through practices rather than rote-memorization of knowledge has come to the fore. This is seen as a process that starts from birth and continues throughout life. The early childhood period is a period when learning is the fastest, and children in this period are curious about what is happening around them, researching and trying to develop their own understanding (Kaya, 2019). For this reason, providing opportunities for children to practice in a way to support the desire to learn in the preschool period, which is accepted as the beginning of school age, will develop their creativity, problem-solving, exploring and coping skills, and will enable them to feel confident, free and develop multi-dimensional thinking (Hazar, 2005). As in every period, in the preschool period, the child is active in the learning process affects the development of their knowledge and skills positively. In this sense, play is a critical element in preparing both for the development required by childhood and for adulthood.

In the preschool period, which directs people's lives, play provides children with natural learning environments and contributes to their social, emotional, mental, and physical development (Ulutaş, 2011). Namely, play is the most efficient method that supports the child's multi-dimensional development enjoyably, provides them with the opportunity to experiment, practice, live and see and supports the full development of the child in a natural learning

environment (Akman and Güçhan Özgül, 2015). In addition to supporting this development so much, play is a world that prepares the child for real life from birth, contributes to the development of his/her communication skills, allows him/her to express his/her dreams without limiting his/her freedom and at the same time gives the child unlimited happiness while doing all these (Poyraz, 1999). In preschool education processes, it is seen that play is used for children to gain the skills mentioned above in and out-of-classroom educational environments. In the literature, it is often emphasized that classroom settings are arranged to be suitable for plays or plays suitable for classroom settings are preferred in general (e.g., Akman, Üstün & Güler, 2003; Khan & Islam, 2014). That is, at schools, the design of external settings is ignored, and the use of external settings as educational settings is neglected (Aktamış and Ergin, 2007; Arslan and Teremiz, 2004). This will lead to a restriction of children's freedom and prevent them from discovering themselves. Plays inside the classroom and the education process cause children to get distanced from natural areas and to be brought up in interaction process with technological tools in closed areas devoid of nature and naturalness (Palmer, 2018). Critics of this situation and advocates of open educational environment (e.g., Hammerman & Hammerman, 1973) emphasize that many areas of development will be supported by the active participation of the participants in the activities by providing them with a non-restrictive, free environment. In open-field education, which emphasizes the educational significance of outdoor learning, learning processes are carried out as a practical and natural activity of real-life rather than as structured activities in the classroom (Erentay and Erdoğan, 2009; Priest, 1986; Tsai, 2006).

Learning processes that take place in outside areas such as school playgrounds, meadows, and forests are included in the scope of outdoor education (Ford, 1986; Lappin, 1984). Outdoor education which is also called education outside the classroom, education out of doors, learning out of doors, outdoor learning, authentic learning in landscapes in the literature refers to an approach directed to learning based on concrete experiences (Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Okur Berberoğlu and Uygun, 2013; Öztürk, 2009). One of the out-of-class education models that are becoming increasingly popular in today's world is "Forest School." Forest school is defined as an open-air school where children and young people are engaged in activities in the forest and forest areas and develop their personal, social, and technical skills (FSA, 2002).

When play and nature come together, they offer the child an unlimited learning environment (Carter, 2016; Munoz, 2009). In this context, forest schools, which represent a new approach and are gaining popularity today, offer the environment where these two elements meet. Known as a child-centered and game-based alternative approach in early childhood, forest schools also offer children opportunities to experience learning outside the classroom (Knight, 2011). Forest schools, which are full of stimuli and have a flexible structure in terms of learning, make children ready for risks through direct learning in natural environments where their life skills are well nurtured.

Forest school is an inspiring model that provides an environment in which active learning methods are applied in the forest or woodland, where all students can develop confidence and self-esteem (Öztürk, 2018). The concept of the forest school was coined in the USA in 1927. Then first forest schools were established in Laona, Wabeno and Crandon (Marshall, 2013). In the 1950s, this concept started to appear in Europe, especially in the Scandinavian Peninsula. The first school established in this context in Europe is considered to be Flatau's Walking Kindergarten (Michek, Novakova and Menclova, 2015). By the 2000s, forest schools were quickly established in Scotland, Ireland and the UK (Dilek, 2019) while establishment of forest schools has gradually gained momentum recently in Turkey and as a result of some initiatives in this area, the philosophy of forest school has begun to spread (Kahriman-Pamuk and Ahi, 2019).

The most important feature that distinguishes the practices in the forest school from other outdoor activities is that it is a pedagogical approach in which the student initiates the participation in learning and the environment is discovered by the student like an explorer in line with his/her interests and curiosity (Knight 2009, Mackinder, 2017; Williams-Siegefredson 2012). Young children who can benefit from the forest school approach also have numerous

opportunities to develop their understanding of the natural environment in this discovery process; they can personally incorporate the development of the essential elements of life such as trees, plants, soil, animals, air, water into their learning processes (Kahrman-Pamuk, 2019). Learning that takes place with life itself will show its lifelong effect and prepare children for challenging conditions. Forest schools are seen as places where children can learn how they can cope with problems, what they can overcome and discover their talents, and can succeed as confident and decision-making individuals (Lindon, 1999). With these severe conditions they offer, these schools are thought to make children know how to cope with the life full of dangers. Forest schools have a structure suitable for raising harmonious, resilient, knowledgeable, skilled individuals by offering open-ended opportunities (Knight, 2012), and they aim to enable students to learn by doing and experiencing the activities they offer (O'Brien, 2009). Parents and educators of children attending these schools have observed that children are happier, participate in learning activities, are more interested in the school and have a broad vocabulary (Assadourian & Mastny, 2017). It is stated in the literature that essential changes are occurring in children attending forest schools. For example, O'Brien and Murray (2007) summarized the changes occurring in students attending forest schools in England as follows: increasing self-confidence, tendency to work in cooperation, increasing awareness of the actions they perform, higher motivation to engage in tasks, development in attention, development in physical endurance and respect for ecology and natural environment.

Forest schools, which have a significant impact on children's development, education and lives, also offer teachers a different educational environment. As much as children need innovation, change and development, discovery and nature, teachers need an environment that supports them in order to change themselves and to handle children and education from a different perspective because of forest schools, teachers are in a forest area at least a half-day or more extended in all weather conditions with children (Amus, 2013; Linde, 2010). The teacher who adopts this model can see the educational power of the natural environment and work with nature instead of interfering with it improves the interaction of the child with the environment and supports learning through discovery in this process (Sönmez, 2002). For these reasons, it is seen that educators in the forest school work in a structure that is quite different from the classroom environment, which includes the planning, adaptation and examination processes.

There are various studies conducted on issues related to forest schools such as the effects of forest school programs on children's endurance, confidence and welfare (Borradaile, 2006; Blackwell, 2015); the effects of forest schools on the elimination of negative behaviors and promotion of positive behaviors (Nawaz ve Blackwell, 2014); the effects of forest schools on the development of mixed age groups (Slade, Lowery and Bland, 2013); the effects of forest schools on children's creativity and imagination (Mckinnell, 2015; Kiewra and Veselack, 2016); health benefits of forest schools (Roe, Aspinall, and Thompson, 2009); the effects of forest schools on the development of children with growth retardation (Pavey, 2006). Louv (2017) examined the differences between the psychomotor skills of the children playing on flat grounds and those of the children playing among rocks and trees. Dilek (2019) investigated the contribution of forest schools to the development of preschool children and, as a result of emphasized that forest school practices positively affect children's development in some areas. Studies investigating the perceptions and opinions of the participants, such as teachers, students, parents, administrators and school workers, which constitute the forest school, were found to be very few. Kahrman-Pamuk and Ahi (2019) researched the school perception of children who received their preschool education in a forest school. As a result of their research, they revealed that there are substantial aspects of forest schools in terms of child-nature relationship, sense of discovery, friendship relations and the place of the play in school life. In another study in this area, Close (2012) investigated the perceptions of parents and their children. The results revealed that the children used words such as "happy," "excited," and "sincere" to explain how they feel when doing activities in the forest school. Families, on the other hand, emphasized that they were worried about their children's staying away from the technology in this environment but found it essential for their children to discover the environment outside the house. In their study, Assadourian & Mastny (2017) conducted interviews with the parents of the children in these schools and found that these children were

happier, involved in learning activities, more interested in the school and had a broad vocabulary. It has been determined that there are studies in many different fields in forest school literature. However, no study received opinions from teachers working in forest schools about education and students.

Considering the importance of the role and position of the teacher in education, the aim of the current study is to reveal the opinions of the teachers who are faced with a non-traditional educational model together with children and started to work in these schools the education and students. No studies in the literature have been found on the changing and developing opinions of teachers during their teaching life in forest schools about the education and students in these schools, which makes this study necessary, and thus this study is believed to make contributions to the literature.

It is thought that forest schools that are becoming more widespread and offering comprehensive learning in today's school and education system and the teachers working in these schools will guide other teachers and pre-service teachers and parents in some conditions, and the effects of the education on children here will have an impact on these individuals. In this context, the aim of the current study is to reveal the views of the teachers who are working in forest schools offering an alternative education model and becoming more widespread worldwide on education and students on the basis of their experiences in these schools.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of the current study is to reveal the opinions of teachers working in forest schools about education in forest schools and students in these schools. The study was carried out by using the case study design, which is one of the qualitative research approaches. Case studies involve the in-depth investigation of one or more than one case (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2013) describes the case study as an in-depth description of a case or multiple case and developing an analysis. In the current study, the forest school was taken as the case and to conduct an in-depth analysis of this case, the experiences and opinions of the teachers working in forest schools were used.

### *Working Group*

The study group of the current research is comprised of 5 teachers working in forest schools. In the construction of the study group, the purposive sampling technique was used. The purposive sampling refers to a limited number of purposefully selected people from whom the researcher can collect the best data about the research problem (Creswell, 2013). With the belief that the best data could be collected about the educational process and students in the forest school from the people who are working and directly experiencing the process, teachers were selected as the study group.

Detailed information is given about the participants to make interpretations about the collected data. At this stage, code names were given to hide the identity of the participants and to increase the readability of the data. The demographic features of the participating teachers called Tuğba, Mine, Yasemin, Hazal and Kenan are given below.

Tuğba is 26 years old and a graduate of visual arts. Tuğba has been a teacher for three years, and after she had worked in a state school for two years, she was transferred to a forest school. She is working in a forest school, and now she is in her second year. Tuğba teaching classes of arts in the forest school uses activities such as drawing, preparing paints, creating sculptures and models. There is a workshop used to conduct these activities in a forest school. Another teacher who teaches fine arts classes is Mine, who is 26 years old and graduated from the department of fine arts. She has been a teacher for three years. While she was working in a fine arts high school, she got into a quest for an educational institution offering alternative education and came across the forest school and started teaching there. Mine has been teaching fine arts for one year in the forest school.

Yasemin is 23 years old and a graduate of the department of pre-school teaching. She has been teaching for one year in this forest school, where she started her teaching career. She is working as a pre-school teacher in the forest school. Hazal is 35 years old and a graduate of the department of child development. At the same time, she is a Montessori and mind games chess instructor. After she had worked for one year in a state school, she was transferred to a forest school, and she has been working here for two years. Kenan is 32 years old and is a foreign language teacher. Kenan has been working as a teacher for three years, one of which has been spent in the forest school. Besides giving foreign language education to children, he also supports his teaching with various activities. The teachers were selected from different branches so that they could contribute to an understanding of the education and students in the forest school from different perspectives.

### *Gathering Data*

The data of the current study have consisted of the opinions of the participating teachers about the educational processes and students in the forest school. Thus, the interview technique was used to collect data. According to Briggs (1986), the interview technique is instrumental in obtaining information about individuals' experiences, attitudes, opinions, complaints, feelings, and beliefs. In the current study, a semi-structured interview form consisted of 7 questions that were developed. The questions in the form were put in an order in a way that was connected to each other, and they were prepared as open-ended. Before the interviews, the teachers were informed about the purpose and process of the study, and they were asked whether they would like to participate in the study. After the verbal consent of the participants for voluntary participation in the study was obtained, the interviews were conducted. Every teacher was given enough time to think about the questions and answer them in detail. At the same time, the participants were given the opportunity to answer the questions at the place and time they could feel comfortable. In this way, threatening factors such as teachers' stress, answering questions in a tense and hasty way were brought under control. In addition, the interviewer refrained from directing the participants, and his/her role was to encourage the participants to give answers serving the purpose of the study.

### *Analyzing Data*

The collected data were analyzed on the basis of the case study. Cases studies can be stratified or nested, as well as single case-oriented (Patton, 2002). The forest school determined to be the case in the current study has two sub-units, being education and student. In this connection, the collected data were subjected to content analysis under the single case nested design. In content analysis, the main goal is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). Çepni (2014) expressed the process of content analysis as interpreting similar data by gathering them within the framework of specific themes and organizing them clearly. In the current study, the data related to the sub-units were analyzed, and predictions were made about the actual case.

In order to increase the reliability of the conducted analyses, some selected interviews were also coded by another researcher. The inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated by using the Miles and Huberman (1994) formula and found to be 85%. The researchers discussed the items which caused disagreement and then came to an agreement. After conducting content analysis, essential places in the interview texts were determined, and themes were created within the framework of the meanings derived from them. With the themes created, the findings section of the current study was constructed.

### *Credibility*

The credibility of the findings obtained in qualitative research is vital in terms of the contribution to be made to literature by the research. In the current study, in order to ensure credibility, great care was taken to refrain from affecting the interviewees, and only guidance was provided to

obtain data serving the purpose of the study. During the description and interpretation of the data, subjective thoughts were avoided, and direct quotations were made from the participants' statements to support the interpretations.

The role of the researcher in the research was defined; the characteristics of the participants and the research environment were described. In order to ensure validity and reliability in the current study, credibility was supported with methods such as transferability, consistency and confirmability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Great care was taken to transfer the obtained data as it was, for the data to be useful in similar environments/studies, to present the research process consistently and systematically and to explain the selection of the study group, data collection and data analysis processes in a detailed manner.

## Findings

Within the context of the purpose of the study, the data obtained from the interviews with teachers working in forest schools were subjected to content analysis and formed the findings of the study. As a result of the analysis of the data, a total of 39 codes were obtained from 5 teachers. These codes were collected under the themes of the natural environment, the process of self-awareness, development, extraordinary education, and prosocial behaviors and emotions. The list of the themes and sub-themes created on the basis of the coding performed as a result of the content analysis are given in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Themes and sub-themes related to opinions about the forest school*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>f</i>
<b>Natural Environment</b>	• Outside/Open Areas	4
	• Forest	3
	• Extensive Stimuli	2
	• Nature	4
	• Animals	2
	• Limitlessness	2
	• Transformability	2
<b>Process of Self-Awareness</b>	• Regeneration	4
	• Freedom	4
	• Decision making	2
	• Responsibility	2
	• Problem-solving	2
	• Creativity	2
	• Self-expression	2
• Self-confidence	5	
<b>Development</b>	• Practicality	3
	• Skill development	5
	• Sociability	3



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<b>Extraordinary Education</b>	• Discovery	2
	• Active participation	2
	• Experience/Learning by doing	2
	• Questioning	2
	• Education without ring	1
	• Cooperation	2
	• Concreteness	2
<b>Prosocial Behavior and Emotions</b>	• Sensitivity	4
	• Happy child	4

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It was decided to investigate the frequencies to see how the obtained codes were distributed across the participants and to see the state of representation. From among the codes, outside/open areas (f4), nature (f4), regeneration (f4), freedom (f4), self-efficacy (f4), skill development (f5), sensitivity (f4), happy child (f4) were found to be the most frequently repeated concepts. The codes obtained from the teachers' opinions about the forest school were explained within the framework of the relevant themes. It was tried to exemplify the themes and support the credibility and integrity of the analysis by including quotations from the interview transcripts of the participants regarding these themes.

### *Natural Environment*

According to the findings, some of the codes that were frequently emphasized when the forest school was thought of were collected under the theme of the natural environment. While the teachers were talking about the differences between education in the school where they had worked and the education in the forest school, they expressed opinions on this theme. These opinions enabled us to reach the concepts of outdoor/open areas, forest, nature and limitlessness. In this context, in the excerpt taken from the interview conducted with Kenan, there are some statements explaining this theme.

*“Pieces of training planned to be carried out outside; the place of the concept of class is replaced by the open and forest lands. Children do not see the walls around them; rather, they see what is in the natural environment, including the sky.”*

In the excerpt given below from Mine, the unlimited education given in the forest is emphasized.

*“In the institution where I worked before coming to the forest school, there was no activity for students about the relationship between nature and people. In this institution (forest school), I can teach many of my lessons under a tree in the forest. The examples I can give are not limited by walls.”*

The forest is seen as an educational environment for all of the teachers and also as a preparation area for life, as indicated by Tuğba, *“It promotes adaptation to natural life.”* This is also supported by the statement of Yasemin *“I think that I have been able to overcome my fears after the forest school. I got used to the forest, insects; I fell I am really breathing”.*

### *Process of Self-Awareness*

In order to elicit the characteristics developing in the children attending the forest school, the teachers were asked, “What are the characteristics developed in the children attending the forest school?” and their responses to these questions were brought together under this theme. The teachers put particular emphasis on the concept of freedom from among the codes gathered under this theme, as stated by Yasemin, *“Children are in a free environment, not within four walls. They are in close interaction with nature and have an environment where they can express themselves more comfortably”* and by Hazal *“There is a space where children can*

*run and play more freely."* Another noteworthy thing is that the teachers emphasize the increase in children's self-confidence and self-expression. This is stated by Tuğba, Yasemin and Hazal. Tuğba expressed her opinions about the contributions of the forest school to children as follows *"There is a great increase in their courage and self-confidence"* while Yasemin expressed her opinions as follows *"We can observe increasing self-confidence in almost every child; they learn how to express themselves. Even introvert children tend to be more extravert with each day"*. Hazal, on the other hand, expressed her opinions as follows *"Children having more self-confidence, talkative, and expressing themselves better."*

In addition to this, the teachers stated that they observed an improvement in the productivity and creativity of children. Another finding that is considered necessary is that the teachers stated that the sense of responsibility developed in children. The below-given excerpt from Kenan clearly shows that children have recognized their responsibility in their learning.

*"It is about how a learning process can be rather than teaching. Here, there is an understanding of how children construct cognitive and social processes in creating information and how the learning environment should be determined accordingly. The child should be cognizant of his/her own development, makes his own decisions in the process and realizes his/her responsibilities in the results (Kenan)."*

In addition, another important finding is that the content of the process in the forest school is mostly shaped by children, and children are educated as individuals who make their own decisions, believe in themselves and are solution-oriented. This is expressed by Kenan as follows;

*"In the traditional approach, the figure of authority does not allow children to commit mistakes; however, in the forest school offering an alternative perspective, there is no figure of authority rather there are assistants and thus mistake turns out to be something that needs to be learned and helps the child prepare his/her own history of experience."*

### *Development*

Another theme emerging from the content analysis is the "development" theme. Here are the codings and the theme generated from these codings derived from the data obtained from the responses of the teachers to the question about the contribution of the forest school to children. The teachers stated that the forest school helps develop skills. In the responses given by Hazal and Yasemin, explanations of this theme can be seen and also the meaning of development in the forest school can be seen as well. For example, Hazal explained this by emphasizing the support given by the forest school to multi-dimensional development of the child as follows; *"It has many contributions to the development of children's fine and gross motor skills, flexibility and social skills. Their immune systems are stronger ... Problem-solving skills are developing..."*. Teacher Yasemin expressed her opinions about this issue by giving developmental characteristics specific to the forest school as follows.

*"I think its greatest contribution is to manual dexterity. I think our activities, such as chopping wood and gardening, are beneficial. We also support their body development as we start the day with sports."*

In addition, some teachers stated that the forest school adds practicality to children, helps them to socialize and behave naturally.

### *Extraordinary Education*

The points that distinguish the forest school from other schools, or that are considered to be completely different or more emphasized are brought together under the theme of an excellent education. The most remarkable code under this theme is education without a ring. Mine expressed her opinions on this issue as follows; *"We have education without ring here; this was impossible in the institution I worked before. I can see significant development in students'*



*time management skills.*" The teachers see the forest school as an area open to exploration and questioning.

Another critical point is that the forest school offers the opportunity to handle everything concretely. Hazal expressed her opinions on this issue as follows;

*"When we do not give children something concrete, we cannot expect them to learn. We have olive trees in our garden, we gathered them in the summer, we broke them, and now we eat them for breakfast, and our children are delighted as they eat the olives they have collected. We are learning by doing ... We have chickens in our forest school, and our children collect their eggs; we have orange and mandarin trees, and we collect their fruits and squeeze them ... They always have something to discover."*

### *Prosocial Behavior and Emotions*

In the last theme that emerged in the current study, it was observed that the forest school contributed to the development of children not only physically or cognitively but also emotionally and behaviorally. The data obtained from the participants in this theme are collected under the codes of children's happiness and sensitivity. Thus, from these codes, the theme of prosocial behaviors and emotions was constructed. In this regard, Hazal stated, *"Whatever the seasonal conditions, being outside calms them, they can empathize, they learn to help"*; thus, children learn empathy and helping and become more sensitive. Mine expressed her opinions on this issue as follows; *"It makes contributions such as encouraging students to think about nature-human relations and be sensitive to environmental problems. Their growing up as individuals who respect nature brings them academic success."*, Another finding is that the forest school contributes to the happiness of children. This is expressed by Hazal as follows: *"Children are happier and more excited."*

Another important thing is that when the teachers were asked to evaluate themselves before and after the forest school, Hazal stated that *"I am happier and peaceful. Four walls can even change me. We are members of a generation growing up playing outside. Here, we can witness the change of trees, the sound of the wind, the smell of rain in the soil, the birth of the rabbit, growing of the baby rabbit. Of course, all these make me very happy, give me energy and accordingly have positive impacts on children"*.

When all the findings obtained from the content analysis are analyzed, they can be summarized as follows: the teachers working in forest schools think that children attending the forest school can experience many feelings of discovery and inquiry within the limitlessness of the forest; these children can be trained as active, free, unique and creative and at the same time they can feel happy, excited and demonstrate positive behaviors.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study was carried out to reveal the opinions of the teachers, who work in forest schools, about the education and students in the forest school. Thus the study gave us a chance to see the forest school concept through their eyes. When the findings obtained from the interviews with the teachers are examined, it is seen that they generally evaluate education and students within the context of the natural environment and self-awareness process. Besides, it is also noteworthy that the teachers distinguish the forest school from the known school types because it is thoroughly based on concreteness and active participation and that children construct the process, and that it is education without a ring. During the interviews, they gave examples to explain these opinions of theirs. They generally associated the education in the forest school with the assets of nature. The concepts used by the teachers while describing the forest school include outside/open areas, forest, nature, limitlessness, discovery. While they were describing students, they used such concepts as regeneration, freedom, being active, uniqueness, skill development and generally regarded the forest school as the process

of students' self-awareness. They also emphasized that the forest school contributes to the training of sensitive and happy children. In this regard, the teachers evaluate the forest school as a productive educational environment and a process of developing the child in every respect.

According to the teachers, in the forest school, children's prosocial behaviors and behaviors sensitive to nature develop more compared to traditional classroom environments. This shows the difference in forest school and its students from other schools and students. According to Lovell (2009), this is because the primary mission of the forest school is to increase the interest in and respect for the natural environment and mainly the forest. This is also supported by Borradaile (2006) stating that the forest school has provable and multiple effects on children's physical, social and emotional development, on their relationships with the natural world, on their attitudes towards their health and learning, on their selection of living style and on outdoor activities.

The forest school, which allows learning with nature outside the walls, offers a concrete learning environment to children by offering real-life pieces through activities. The teachers emphasized that these situations bring academic success together. As emphasized in the works of Lovell (2009) and Kahrman-Pamuk (2019), the forest school contributes to personal, social and emotional development, to the development of the child's knowledge and understanding of the world, mathematical, physical and creative development and has positive effects on the child's communication, language, and literacy. Besides, children who learn to progress towards solutions to problems they may encounter outside have the opportunity to achieve this by experiencing them in the forest school. Lindon (1999) explains this situation with the fact that forest schools are places where children can learn how to cope with problems, what they can overcome and discover their talents, and become successful as confident, decision-making individuals.

Furthermore, children find a suitable area for their differences in an alternative learning environment by getting out of the laboratory environment. The forest school provides an alternative learning experience initiated by the child. As can be seen in the research findings, education in the forest school is based on the rules set by the children, what they want to do, and what they wonder. In the studies in the literature (e.g., Knight 2009, Mackinder, 2017), it is emphasized that the main feature of the forest school that distinguishes it from other open area activities is that participation in learning is initiated by the student and that it has a pedagogical approach shaped in line with the student's interest and curiosity. Here, the teacher can be said to be in the role of an assistant and a guide. In other words, the forest school is considered to be a model in which children of all age groups can demonstrate their potential. In their study investigating the effect of forest school on the development of mixed-age groups, Slade, Lowery and Bland (2013) emphasize that forest schools can be used to support students of all ages in their studies. Arts, music, science, real-life (making bread, gardening, wood chopping) combine with nature and thus enable children to reveal their talents in line with their interests, gain experience in different fields and contribute to all areas of development.

Another feature that stands out in the research results is that children receive free education in a free environment. Instead of a flow created by teachers by adhering to specific topics, there is a natural flow shaped by children in the forest school. Based on the opinions of the teachers, it is seen that this flow covers concepts such as discovering, trying and seeing, and questioning. Besides, as it gives children the freedom to explore and allows them to move and play in a rich, stimulating and flexible natural environment, it has a positive effect on children's self-confidence and sense of independence (Maynard, 2007). Another point that draws attention to the findings obtained from teachers' views is the emphasis they put on the development of students' self-confidence. The teachers stated that children who are educated in a natural environment are encouraged, believe in themselves and start to take responsibility for time. It has been found that children who learn to solve the problems they encounter themselves knowingly go over the problems over time. The fact that the teachers say that the children who had difficulties in expressing themselves and who were afraid to speak have overcome all these problems supports that their self-confidence has developed. In their study

conducted to investigate the effects of forest schools on children's negative behaviors, Nawaz and Blackwell (2014) stated that the children are developing towards showing positive behaviors and that the children express themselves better about their behaviors.

Another issue that is considered necessary within the scope of the findings obtained is that the forest school enables children to grow up as individuals who can regenerate and transform. The forest is an area where children can continuously see and experience new things and which allows change and innovation. The opinions of the teachers indicate that the forest school is open to an education that is conducive to generating knowledge, production, and creativity. In the literature, study results are showing positive correlations between forest schools and creativity (Kiewra and Veselack, 2016). In other words, it is seen that forest schools have a structure that supports the creativity of their children, and they provide children with environments where they can use this creativity.

The general impression obtained at the end of the study is that forest schools offer a highly extensive learning area, direct children to researching, discovering and learning by experiencing, keep the sense of curiosity alive, and train children educated here as individuals who have self-confidence, question, research, are creative, solution-oriented, learning by trial and have a developed sense of responsibility. Besides, it was concluded that education here progresses for the teachers within the framework of the concepts of natural environment such as forest and nature. Moreover, it was determined that the forest school enables children to discover themselves and nature and to be individuals who are sensitive and have positive emotions. In addition to all these, the research results draw attention to the importance of the forest school, which is an alternative approach outside the walls, for both children and teachers and the education system. Based on these results, it is thought that the forest school system adds a new dimension to the concept of a school that has been going on for years and directs students and teachers to change. It is thought that the research to be carried out in this context will contribute to the literature and related systems; therefore, it should be conducted to address different dimensions of the forest school. Considering the place where the concepts of school, education, and students have come with this approach within the framework of the opinions of the teachers, it is thought that this model should be applied and examined as much as possible.

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# Orman Okulu Kavramının Orman Okulu Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi

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## Özet

Bu araştırma orman okulunda görev yapmakta olan öğretmenlerin orman okulundaki eğitim ve öğrenci ile ilgili görüşlerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda orman okullarında görev yapmakta olan 5 öğretmen ile araştırmanın çalışma grubu oluşturulmuştur. Araştırma nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olan durum çalışması esas alınarak yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın veri toplama aracını 7 sorudan oluşan bir görüşme formu oluşturmaktadır. Elde edilen verilere durum çalışması temelinde içerik analizi uygulanmıştır. İnanırcılık açısından elde edilen veriler olduğu gibi aktarılmış, doğrudan alıntılar ile desteklenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda öğretmenlerin orman okulunu doğal çevre ve çocukların kendilerini fark etme süreci içinde ele aldıkları tespit edilmiştir. Ulaşılan genel kanı orman okulunun olabildiğince geniş bir öğrenme alanı sunduğu; araştırmaya, keşfetmeye ve yaşayarak öğrenmeye yönlendiren, merak duygusunu her zaman diri tutan, özgür bir eğitim sunduğu; burada öğrenim gören çocukların özgüven sahibi, sorgulayan, araştıran, yaratıcı, çözüm odaklı, deneyerek öğrenen, sorumluluk bilinci gelişmiş bireyler olarak yetiştikleri olmuştur. Bu sonuçlardan hareketle farklı perspektiflerle yürütülen çalışmaların ne kadar önemli olduğunu vurgulamanın yanında orman okulunun eğitim ve öğrenciye tüm alanlarda kalıcı faydalar sağladığı, bunun da araştırılmaya değer olduğu düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Orman okulu, eğitim, öğrenci, durum çalışması