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Research Article

Children's participation from the perspective of teachers

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The perception of a teacher with regards to a child's participation and their practices affect his/her participation in educational institutions. To provide effective participation, teacher's awareness and attitudes towards participation must be examined. This research aims to determine the views of Turkish pre-school and elementary teachers on children's participation in educational institutions. The participants of the study were comprised of 16 teachers employed in public preschools and elementary schools in a province in Turkey's Inner Aegean Region. The teachers' interview form is used as the data collection tool in this study. As a result of the research, it was determined that teachers had a positive perspective on children's participation, they allow for certain conditions to enable participation coupled with decision-making processes in a limited fashion. Furthermore, it was concluded that teachers had methodical difficulties in decision-making and they thought that they needed to improve themselves in promoting participation. Teachers also thought that the teacher, peer relations, and family are effective on the participation.

1. Introduction

The current social and cultural changes influenced the perspectives on childhood to a large extent. It is noted that the perspectives of societies about childhood affect the services to be provided for children (Mayall, 2000; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014; Woodhead, 2006). According to new approaches in childhood studies, childhood does not only have a global feature but also entails a cultural and social process. Childhood is socially structured and children should be seen as independent individuals in social life and social processes (James & Prout, 1997). The emphasis on the social lives of children in these new paradigms increased the importance of children's rights (James & James, 2004).

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children, children's right to participate is defined as the rights that enable children to be an active individual in society such as freely expressing their views, assembling, forming an association, and asking for their views to be

considered in all matters affecting them (Akyüz, 2000; Lansdown, 2011). The right to participate is guaranteed as a right in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Children. In the Articles 13 and 15 of the Convention, participation right includes such as free expression of children's thoughts, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly (United Nation Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2007). It is emphasized that the participation right and the comprehensive feature of participation is related to Article 2, the best interests of the child is related to Article 3, the right to appropriate direction and guidance by parents in a manner that is consistent with the evolving capacities of the child which is related to Article 5, the right to survival and development is related to Article 6, and the right to access to information is related to Article 17 (Lansdown, 2001; UNICEF, 2006). To put the right to participate into practice, it is necessary to listen to the children and give due importance to the views of the children (Penn, 2008). Participation is associated with the listening culture and ethics of listening to children (Clark et al., 2005). Participation includes children's views and decision-making processes. Besides, the way adults react to children's opinions and the way they ask the opinions of children are also related to participation (Alderson, 2008). Participation offers children opportunities to develop their social and learning skills (Willow, 2002). Kılıç and Durmuş (2016) explain participation as an approach, experience, and learning process. It is stated that the qualifications of participation which are the features of the learning process are transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child-friendly, inclusive, safe, risk-sensitive, accountable, and supported by education (UNICEF, 2009).

The children's participation rights include all actions that take place in all environments related to children's lives; such as family, school, healthcare, local communities (Lansdown, 2001). According to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, children also have the right to participate in educational environments (Erbay, 2013). Children participation is associated with every stage of the educational process from the establishment of school rules to the development of educational policies (Tüzün & Sarıışık, 2015). It is very important to carry out the right to participate in school since children spend most of their time in school after their home environment and they are part of social conditions (Urfalıoğlu, 2019). To provide children participation in schools, it is necessary to ensure child-centered learning turns schools into democratic centers, develops opportunities to inform children, and makes decisions on education with children (Lansdown, 2011). How the teachers perceive children's participation coupled with their practices in this context influences children's participation at school (Dunphy, 2012; Lansdown et al., 2014). The professional roles of teachers are related to the way they support the learning processes as well as the participation of children (Salminen, 2013). In this study, we examine the views of Turkish pre-school and elementary teachers toward children participation, the participation of children in Turkey, and the role of teachers in this regard will be discussed.

To ensure children's participation, it is essential to establish efficient systems in Turkish educational institutions (Şahin & Polat, 2012). Although there are structural limitations in terms of providing the participation of children in Turkey, some regulations have also been performed by the Ministry of Education (Beyazova et al., 2016). In the National Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan, there is an article that stated that: "*providing all children to participate in decision making related to children's rights*". Also, this strategy has another aim as "*providing the participation of all children in the decision-making related to children's rights*" (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, 2013, p.45). Activities are performed by the Provincial Child Rights Committees, which were founded via the Provincial Directorates under the Ministry.

Concerning children's participation, it is stated in the Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (2010-2014) that the implementations aiming to generate a culture of democracy among students should be increased in primary education programs. The involvement of children in the formation of Preschool Education and Elementary Education Standards is an example of the consideration of children's participation. Among these standards and within the "*child participation in school management*", which is a sub-standard of "*educational management*", there is a statement that certain opportunities are provided for children to express their opinions with their active participation in

school management (Preschool Education & Elementary Education Standards, 2015). In these standards, it is aimed to determine children's participation in schools and to ascertain that each school cares about the children's participation right and ultimately to establish a country-wide standard on the right to participate (Kılıç, 2017). Beyazova et al. (2015) emphasize that these standards are a crucial initiative, however, they have not been effectively carried out and could be developed in terms of the right to participate.

Psychological Counseling and Guidance Services Executive Committee, Social Activities Board, and School Student Council provide services in elementary schools to achieve children's participation (Kılıç, 2017). The Democracy Education and School Councils Project, which was initiated by the Ministry of Education in 2004, is one of the important steps that are taken to establish a democratic school culture (Kılıç & Durmuş, 2016). Democracy Generation: Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) Project, which was jointly conducted by the Head Council of Education and Morality, the Central Finance and Contracts Unit, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe, was carried out between 2011-2014. This project is aimed to train both the teachers and the school staff, improve the education programs and materials, and increase awareness through in-service training (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Children's participation in educational institutions is not a process that occurs alone. It takes place in a safe environment where children are aware that their needs are taken into account (Venninen & Leinonen, 2013). One of the duties of teachers to ensure participation is to guide the children in practicing and defending their rights (Koran, 2015). Teachers must see children as active citizens and individuals with their own opinions and right to participate. Whether or not teachers ask children's opinions in all processes from establishing classroom rules to the planning of activities and their perspectives on children affects participation (Moss, 2011).

It is observed that the previous studies in the literature mainly focused on perceptions of preschool and elementary school children on children's participation (Akyol, 2017; Ejieh & Akinola, 2009; Maconochie, 2013; Şallı İdare, 2018), and opinions of preschool and elementary teachers on children's participation (Genç & Güner 2012; Horgan et al., 2017; Venninen et al., 2012). Kılıç and Öztürk (2018) analyzed the implementation level of children's right to participate in an elementary school in terms of legal and other regulations. It was concluded that the children were not involved in decision-making while ensuring their participation in the student council, which is one of the legal regulations. In a study conducted by Coşkun (2015) to determine the beliefs of preschool teachers on children's participation rights, it was observed that pre-school teachers' views were neither positive nor negative in terms of involving children in all matters concerning themselves. In some studies, it was described that when teachers listen to children effectively and take into account children's opinions, participation takes place (Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Hännikäinen, 2005; Johansson & Sandberg, 2010).

In the basic education level where academic and life skills that are critical for later education levels are acquired, children's participation right has to be supported. During this period, the teachers' perspectives on participation shape the participation process, which is an indicator of the common decisions and their choices offered to the children. Ensuring participation in educational institutions is related to the views of preschool and elementary teachers on children's participation. To provide effective participation, teachers' awareness and attitudes towards participation must be examined (Polat, 2018; Pramling-Samuelson & Sheridan, 2003). Teacher's internalization of child participation will also shape their behavior towards improving participation (Križ & Skivenes, 2017). Participation, an indicator of the learning process quality (Goldspink & Foster, 2013), is important in preventing dropout and ensuring academic success (Bierman et al., 2009; Li et al., 2010). Teacher-student relationships and teacher support affect children's participation (Pianta et al., 2012). Encouraging children's participation supports democratic processes in the learning environment (Lansdown, 2005). This study aims to determine the opinions of Turkish preschool and elementary teachers on children's participation in educational institutions. It is considered that examining the opinions of preschool and elementary

teachers about participation is important in terms of identifying the deficiencies in implementations related to children's participation and developing subsequent practices. Also, it is estimated that presenting the opinions of preschool and elementary teachers as a whole will contribute to the attempts to realize the children's right to participate in Turkish educational institutions and international comparative studies regarding this topic.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The phenomenological approach which is one of the qualitative research methods was used in this research. The phenomenological approach presents the general sense of several people's experiences about a phenomenon or a concept (Creswell, 2013). Studies aiming to examine facts and are familiar to individuals, whose meaning should be fully understood using this approach. The phenomenological approach allows examining the cases and experiences in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). At the same time, this approach aims to determine and interpret the essence of cases and experiences and develop a deep understanding of such phenomena (Husserl, 2012; Merriam, 2013). In this context, the approach used in this study aims to determine how preschool and elementary teachers interpret their experiences and views about "children's participation".

2.2. Participants

In this research, ctirerion sampling as one of the purposeful sampling methods criterion sampling was adopted. It was decided as a criterion that the teachers had at least five years of professional experience and had no previous training on children's participation. The participants in this study were 16 teachers (8 of them are working in pre-schools and 8 in elementary schools) that are employed in public preschools and elementary schools in a province in Turkey's Inner Aegean Region.

2.2. Instruments

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview form regarding the related literature. The opinions of three field experts about this interview were taken into account to ensure internal validity. In line with the opinions and suggestions of the field experts, one question was removed from 11 questions and one question was changed. Then, as part of the pilot study, interviews were carried out with two elementary teachers and two preschool teachers, and probes were used to enrich the answers of these interviews. For example, if the answer to the question "*Do you make decisions with children in the classroom?*" is negative, then a follow-up question: "Why?", for the cases with affirmative answers, another question like "*What decisions do you make together, what methods do you apply, etc.?*" was added. The teachers' interview form comprised of 10 open-ended questions that address the following topics; "factors affecting child participation, practices to provide participation in the classroom, and experienced problems". There are certain questions in the teacher interview form such as: "*What do you think of children's participation in educational institutions? "Can you give an example of a situation where children's participation is provided based on your teaching experiences and observations in the classroom?*".

2.3. Procedure

The required permissions for the research were obtained from the Directorate of National Education of a province in the inner Aegean region of Turkey and teachers were informed about the research before the interview. Interviews were conducted with teachers who volunteered to participate in the research and signed the approval form. Meetings were held in the teachers' room with the teachers on the specified dates. The interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes and all interviews were recorded because the teachers allowed audio recording.

2.4. Data Analysis

The content analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained from the research. Fraenkel and Wallen (2005) indicated that content analysis is a method that reveals the beliefs, attitudes, and ideas of the individuals involved in the research. The data of this research were analyzed by the data analysis steps, which were put forward by Creswell (2013) namely; (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) making general sense of information, (c) coding, (d) describing, (e) representing and (f) interpreting.

In the first step, all the recorded interviews were transformed into written texts. The interview transcripts were separately read and coded by the researcher and another independent researcher. In the second step, themes were created by the researchers based on the codes, and a consensus was reached about the themes. In the third step, the data obtained from the research were arranged according to the codes and themes and it was agreed that there was no need for an additional theme apart from the previously determined themes. At the last step, the findings that emerged through the examination of the themes were reported by direct quotations from the views of the participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

2.5. Validity and Reliability

The data collected for the validity of the research were reported in detail, and in-depth explanations were made under the titles of the data collection process and data analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). To enhance the validity of the research, teachers' views were supported by direct quotations. In the quotations, the names of the participants were not used based on ethical issues and the preschool teachers were coded as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8, while the elementary teachers were coded as E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, and E8.

Using in-depth descriptions, experiences were included in the transfer of findings (Creswell, 2013). Also, researchers engaged in a long-term interaction with data sources. The interview texts were read one by one and coded individually by the two researchers to ensure the reliability of the research. During the coding processes, the codes and the data were constantly compared to each other to see if there was a change in the meanings of the codes (Gibbs, 2007). To calculate reliability among coders, the reliability formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used. The inter-coder reliability was calculated as .81. Researchers have come to a consensus on the arguable parts of the coding. For example, the independent coding performed by the researchers in the theme of the expressing view and method sub-theme has been reviewed. The codes which were indicated by the teachers' statements that they used drama as a method were discussed, and it was decided that some codes should be included in the method's sub-theme.

3. Results

The research data were categorized under four main themes as *participation, decision-making, expressing views,* and *classroom practices.* Themes were presented with an interpretive approach and quotations. Figure 1 shows the obtained themes and sub-themes.

Figure 1.

Themes and sub-themes
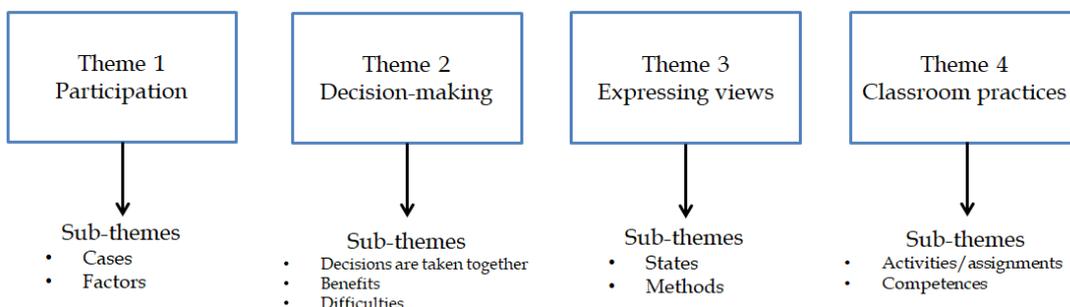
3.1. Participation

The participation theme is addressed under two sub-themes as cases and factors.

3.1.1. Cases

A large part of pre-school teachers defined children's participation as participation in activities that were conducted in the classroom emphasizing that children should voluntarily participate in the activities they want. For instance, one of teachers, P2 stated that "To me, a child's participation in the free participation of the child in the activity or education process without any intervention." Similarly, P6 asserted that, "In my opinion, it's about ensuring the equal participation of children. In preschool education, you can't force any children to participate in the activity." In addition, some of the elementary teachers expressed participation as listening to the opinions of children in other processes as well as participating in educational processes. For instance, E3 underlined "... I would define participation as getting the children's opinions on every issue…". Another teacher, E4 stated that "…Asking the child's opinions when making a decision…" As a final remark, one of the elementary teachers explained participation by giving an example of the practices carried out to ensure children's participation in Turkish educational institutions, and asserted that "Practices such as student council, class president and on-duty students are among the important practices that we provide for the participation of children."

Some of the pre-school teachers emphasized the establishment of classroom rules and the election of the class president. Besides these examples, elementary teachers stated exchange of ideas during the course activities about "*type of the homework*" and "*course method*".

3.1.2. Factors

Pre-school teachers indicated that the adaptation process to school and the readiness of the child affects the participation, besides factors such as teacher, environment, educational institution, peer relations, and family. One of the teachers stated that the readiness of the child and having a previous pre-school education experience influenced the participation of children in the classroom activities by stating that, ""The higher the child's readiness level, the more eagerly the child participates in the activities. If the child's readiness level is low, it will be hard for us to perform the activity."

Most elementary teachers stated that teachers' attitudes, peer relationships, and developmental characteristics of children influence participation. Also, some teachers emphasized that "*family attitude*" and "*environment*" affect the participation of the child.

When the views of pre-school and elementary teachers about the participation theme were examined, it was found that pre-school teachers limited the participation as participation in the activities, whereas elementary teachers assessed the implementation of the children's participation right in a broader sense. Both pre-school and elementary teachers emphasized that active participation is provided in the establishment of class rules and the election of the classroom president and also, family attitudes affect the participation.

3.2. Decision-making

The decision-making theme was examined under three sub-themes as decisions taken by together, benefits, and difficulties.

3.2.1. Decisions are taken by together

When the sub-theme of decisions that are taken by together was examined, the majority of pre-school teachers stated that they decided the classroom rules together with the children. Besides, some of the teachers expressed that they exchanged ideas with the children in determining the activities performed in the classroom. In this sense, P8 stated that, "I try to give them a choice. In general, I include their views even in the education plan that I carry out in the classroom." In a similar manner, P1 pointed out:

> For example, I ask them 'do you want to go out into the garden?' Apart from my plan, I give them the right to speak during the day. Choosing events, making decisions motivates them a lot.

One of the pre-school teachers stated the decision-making during the establishment of classroom rules. Elementary teachers noted that they made a decision together with the children especially in determining the methods used in the lesson and other issues that directly concern children.

One of the teachers explained that the lesson plans limit children's decision-making as follows:

> I cannot provide the direct participation of children about the lessons, because there is a certain lesson plan. I encourage them to participate in increasing varieties, but the topics are pre-determined, I cannot do anything about it.

When the opinions regarding the sub-theme of decisions that are taken by together were examined, it was determined that pre-school and elementary teachers have awareness of the fact that children-centered practices are effective in decision-making and they try to include the opinions of children in decision-making though with limited methods.

3.2.2. Benefits

Pre-school teachers responses regarding the benefits sub-theme revaled evidents how decision-making supports social-emotional development. In this regard, P5 stated that, "Children learn to make decisions. Their self-confidence is improving. They are preparing for the future as individuals." Another teacher, P6 underlined that, "The child's self-confidence improves. She/he can make decisions on her/his own. The child learns justice."

The teachers on the other hand stated that children are willing to make decisions and the decisions taken with children positively affect classroom management. Similar to preschool teachers, elementary teachers stated that decision-making positively affects classroom management and children's social-emotional development as well as that decision-making is effective in preparing for social life and learning processes. E5's examples of their contribution to social-emotional development and social skills of the children are as:

> Their self-confidence increases since they think that what they say will be done. They become more interested in activities seeing that the teacher gets their opinion on an issue and may get again.

Some of the teachers emphasized the impact on the learning process. For instance, E4 pointed out:

> Decision-making with students brings success as a result of processing the course with their ideas, feelings, and thoughts. Situations that occur as a result of ensuring students' participation, making them attending the lectures, taking their feelings and thoughts...

When benefits sub-theme were examined, it was determined that both pre-school and elementary teachers argue that the decision-making contributes to the social-emotional development of children and that they think that the decisions taken together motivate children about the processes in the classroom.

3.2.3. Difficulties

When the difficulties sub-theme was examined; preschool teachers, in particular, pointed out that children's developmental characteristics and family attitudes cause some difficulties in the decision-making. For example, P1 asserted that, "Children are egocentric as a condition of their age. They want to have everything. I'm trying to make them feel how much fun it can be to choose." In a similar manner, P7 pointed out that, "Families do not know the rights of children. Our biggest mistake as parents is that we make the kids' decisions." (P7)

Two teachers emphasized that they don't have difficulty in the decision-making process. Elementary teachers stated that they have difficulty in implementing the decisions taken with children. For instance, E3 stated, "For example, when a game is selected, the other children have a little trouble accepting it…They're having a bit of a hard time complying with the majority's

decision….” In addition, E8 indicated that, “While deciding on small classes, the opinions are not expressed in an order. Everyone wants her/his idea to be accepted.”

The opinions of the teachers about the difficulties sub-theme revealed that teachers think that they experience difficulties arising from developmental characteristics and family attitudes during the decision-making and implementation phase.

3.3. Expressing Views

The results of the analysis provided to classify expressing views theme into the states and the methods sub-themes.

3.3.1. States

When the sub-theme of the states was examined; the majority of pre-school teachers stated that children can express themselves easily. One preschool teacher, P5, explained that they support the children in the regard that, “They can express to us what they experienced in every way, their family life, what they experienced in the past, ….. in a very comfortable way...” The vast majority of elementary teachers likewise stated that children express their views on all matters about “*teaching method, materials, social activities*”.

Some of the pre-school teachers stated that it is necessary to support children to express their views. For instance, P2 asserted that, “It is necessary to let children speak. If we keep saying shut up, wrong, false, then, the kids will be quiet. If the children keep quiet, they can't actively participate in anything.” Similarly, P3 stated that, “When we make them feel that we understand them, they can convey their views to us clearly.” As a final remark, one of the elementary teachers, E3, drew attention to the role of the teacher by stating that, “The teacher should not be suppressive... The more the teacher takes into account student participation, the more the child will participate.” (E3)

3.3.2. Methods

When the methods sub-theme was examined, P6 and P8 pre-school teachers stated that they use methods such as question/answer, drama and they try to listen to the children’s views without criticizing them. P6 stated that, “I listen to them effectively. I listen to them without criticizing or creating fear..” P8 pointed out that “We apply methods of question-answer, drama, pantomime, and group discussion.” Similarly, elementary teachers stated that they use the question-answer and drama method while taking the opinions of the children and that they think that the written opinion statement is effective. In this sense, E2 asserted that, “First of all, we give children confidence. We state that this is a democratic situation and they should express their thoughts...”

3.4. Classroom Practices

The theme of classroom applications was examined, it is classified into two sub-themes: activities/assignments and competencies.

3.4.1. Activities/assignments

The teacher responses coded under the activities/assignments sub-theme showed that only a small part of the preschool teachers took into account the opinions of the children while planning the activities in the classroom. In addition, it was observed that these opinions, which were taken into consideration, were not effective in planning the activities. For instance, P1 pointed out:

> I have a plan for whatever I need to include in the daily schedule that day. I decide on the order of these events with them. …I do not completely leave my daily education flow and assignment to them…

Similarly, P4 asserted that:

> Sometimes I get, but most of the time I don't get. Because most activities are based on specific days and weeks. Since the children can't think about this situation, most of the time I can't get them involved in activities.

Elementary teachers, on the other hand, stated that they ask the opinions of children especially while giving homework:

> While giving homework, we get their opinions on the following topics and act accordingly: What kind of homework do they want from our studies? Should the homework be checked when it is finished?"

It is seen that preschool and elementary teachers try to include the students in the decisions regarding the educational processes, though limited.

3.4.2. Competences

The analysis results regarding the competencies sub-theme revealed that, most of the preschool and elementary teachers explained that they consider themselves sufficient in ensuring child participation and they should improve themselves while some of that say otherwise. For example, P5 stated that, "I see myself qualified because I'm open to their ideas. I listen to them all the way. When the children feel heard, they feel valued as well." In the same manner, E2 stated that, ""I think I'm qualified. Because I can feel that children are taking me as a role model in every aspect." P1, who did not describe himself as sufficient, stated that, "I'm not qualified. I have to improve myself in many fields." Similarly, E6 asserted that, "I don't think I am quite qualified. I may be even more knowledgeable. I try to make equal promises to everyone in the class in every way."

4. Discussion

The data obtained from this study, which aimed to determine the views of Turkish pre-school and elementary teachers on child participation in educational institutions, were interpreted under four main themes: participation, decision making, expressing views, and classroom practices. To ensure child participation in educational institutions, teachers should be aware of children's rights (Woodhead, 2006). Therefore, it is considered important to determine teacher's understanding of children's participation.

When the findings related to the participation theme were examined, it was determined that preschool teachers expressed the participation mostly in the form of participation in activities, whereas elementary teachers explained the processes regarding the implementation of children's right to participate. It was observed that only one of the preschool teachers emphasized the right to participate. Considering that pre-school education institutions are the first institution where children's participation rights are put into practice, democratic pre-school education institutions must be placed where children's right to express their views is considered and children are seen as talented and important individuals (Bae, 2009; Erbil, 2017). It was observed that pre-school teachers emphasized the participation of children as participation in activities, while elementary teachers gave examples of the implementation of the right to participate in educational institutions. It can be said that these differences between the opinions of pre-school and elementary teachers are due to the program contents they have implemented. Because the right to participate must be included in the programs to make it concrete and feasible, it is stated that there is no negative situation regarding the child's right to participate in the Preschool Education Program in Turkey and there is no content available for teachers regarding the importance of the child's right to participate (Gürkan & Koran, 2014). The more concrete examples of elementary teachers regarding the implementation of participation may have resulted from the establishment of some boards and school councils in elementary schools as a result of some arrangements made by the Ministry of Education.

As examples of situations in which participation in the classroom is provided; pre-school teachers considered the election of the class rules, the selection of the class president, and the choice of games and stories; whereas the elementary teachers considered the suggestions given by the children in the lesson. It is thought that the limited cases in which participation is achieved in line with teachers' opinions are directly related to children's participation perceptions. In the study carried out by Turnšek (2016) in Slovenia to identify the beliefs of pre-school teachers about children's participation, it was determined that there is no participatory children's understanding in the practices carried out by the majority of teachers and that the teachers who stated that the right to participate is important have limited practices of participation in classroom activities. Križ and Skivenes (2017) stated that most of the experts working on children in Norway, England, and the USA regard child participation as listening to children's views and gathering information, and some of the experts consider children's participation as a way of decision making, while some of them describe it as tokenism. On the other hand, Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen (2010) concluded that even though preschool and elementary teachers in Finland used different strategies to improve participation, continuing participation in both levels was achieved by taking into account the children's suggestions. The pre-school and elementary teachers involved in this study jointly stated that teacher, peer relationships, and family factors influence children's participation. Rutar (2013) stated that children's education, which includes features such as developmental characteristics, learning styles, and family structure, does not fully cover the processes of expressing children's views while emphasizing the active participation of children in the learning process. Therefore, participation should include the involvement of children in decision-making, from the daily schedule to educational institutions, based on the process of listening to children (Kjørholt, 2002).

Within the scope of this research, pre-school teachers stated that they make decisions together with the children in determining the classroom rules and some activities in the class. In the study, Koran and Avcı (2017) examined the role of preschool teachers in implementing the right to participate in classroom practices and concluded that teachers who exhibited child-centered and democratic behaviors make decisions with children in the classroom, while teachers who were teacher-centered and authoritarian exhibit negative behaviors in terms of the qualifications of participation. In the study conducted by Danner and Jonynienė (2013), it was determined that pre-school teachers discuss with the children to find solutions to the problems, children can decide on the materials they will play and the activities they will do in their spare time. On the other hand, elementary teachers explained that they decide with children about the methods used in the lesson, class rules, and arrangement. Kılıç (2017) stated that elementary teachers make decisions together with the children in establishing the class rules and planning the free activities. It is seen that both pre-school and elementary teachers include children in the decision-making in a limited way while because children can make decisions about their daily experiences and their involvement in decision-making thereby affecting participation positively (Salminen, 2013; Theobald & Kultti 2012). All these limited processes are thought to be related to the attitudes and knowledge levels of teachers towards children's participation. It can be said that teachers control attitudes towards children which can also reduce their decision-making processes to a great extent (Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Shaik, 2016). Also, it is seen that pre-school and elementary teachers stated that decision-making contributes to the social-emotional development of children and motivates them in the classroom environment. It is emphasized that the involvement of children in decision-making contributes to peer relations, adaptation to social rules, and development of self-confidence and competence (Davis, 2007; Salminen et al., 2013). Although teachers state that decision-making has positive effects, it is seen that the difficulties they experience in the decision-making are mainly due to the methods they use. In the practices to eliminate these methodological problems, the qualifications of participation should be taken into account, and teachers should review their control over children and encourage them to become autonomous individuals (Erbil, 2016; UNICEF, 2009).

Some of the pre-school and elementary teachers stated that children can express their opinions on every subject and they try to support them in this regard. Considering that children's ability to express their views on the content of the program implemented is effective in supporting participation (Dunphy, 2012; Leinonen & Venninen, 2012), this can be considered as a positive result. It is seen that teachers use limited methods such as question-answer and group discussion while getting the opinions of children. It is said that the participation of children in educational institutions should not be limited to certain methods that are used to get opinions and activities that are held at certain times (Bae, 2010). In a study examining child participation in preschool education institutions in Turkey, Zorbay Varol (2019) concluded that teachers who support participation give importance to children's ideas, encourage children and offer them options in activities, while teachers who violate participation ignore children's suggestions, have an authoritarian attitude and decide their participation in activities alone. Elementary teachers who participated in this research stated that they generally consult the children about homework in classroom practices. In another research determining the implementation level of children's right to participate in elementary schools in Turkey, Urfalıoğlu (2019) concluded that teachers take into account the opinions of children when giving homework and making changes to the daily program in classrooms where democratic attitudes are high. Some of the pre-school teachers emphasized that they take the views of the children to an extent as regards the planning of the activities in the classroom because they think it will not be effective. The active participation of children is emphasized in the Preschool Education Program of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2013), which is being implemented in Turkey, and it is stated that children should be allowed to plan, implement and discuss. Shaik (2014) stated that teachers who adopt the constructivist approach care about the opinions and ideas of children, whereas teachers who prefer the traditional approach limit children's ability to interact with the environment and express themselves. Although Preschool Education Program (MoNE, 2013) and Primary Education Program (MoNE, 2018), which are being implemented in Turkey, are prepared regarding a constructivist approach, the limited practices of teachers about participation draw attention to the importance of teacher's understanding of participation.

In this study, it is seen that there are teachers who think that they should improve themselves as well as the teachers who consider themselves sufficient in ensuring children's participation. It is said that the implementation of a program that includes the right to participate in a classroom does not mean that participation in that classroom will be actualized precisely and important steps must be taken for teachers to have consciousness about the right to participate (Leinonen et al., 2014). In some studies conducted in Turkey, it is seen that the training of pre-school and elementary teachers about children's participation have positive effects on their understanding of participation and practices (Koran, 2017; Özdemir Doğan, 2017; Öztürk, 2019; Uçuş, 2014). Therefore, in order to enrich the participation of children, it is thought that teachers' perceptions about participation and application skills for ensuring participation are required to be developed. Moreover, studies about participation at school (Genç & Güner, 2012; Şallı İdare, 2018; Zorbay Varol, 2019) suggest implementing concrete steps to realize the participation's right in education. Teachers' activities in their classrooms which enable children to understand their rights, material preparation, and usage will support children's decision-making processes and support participation in educational settings.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

As a result of this research which aimed to determine the opinions of Turkish preschool and elementary teachers on child participation in educational institutions, it was determined that although teachers have a positive perspective on child participation, they give limited coverage to the decision-making and the situations that ensure participation and also they think that the teacher, peer relations and family are effective on the participation of the children. The teachers stated that decision-making positively affects the social and emotional development of the children

and they experience methodological difficulties in the decision-making. Also, teachers stated that they are trying to support children so that they can express their opinions and that they need to improve themselves in ensuring participation. In-service training can be organized so that pre-school and elementary teachers can have knowledge and experience about applications and procedures that will support children's participation. Besides, mentoring programs can be developed to support teacher's classroom practices related to participation. The small size of the study and not taking the views of children and families apart from teachers are the limitations of this study.

Further research studies can be conducted to examine the participation in educational institutions by taking the opinions of children and administrators as well as teachers and using observational assessment tools. Moreover, international comparative research studies can be planned to address teacher's opinions on participation in educational institutions. It is required for pre-school and elementary teachers to plan classroom activities and raise children's awareness of their right to participate. The inclusion of topics regarding how to support child participation in the classroom and sample classroom practices in educational programs should guide teachers to support participation processes in education.

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