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PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH EDUCATION FOR KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Learning a language is very important in our global world. People should know at least one foreign language to enter the global market place. English is the leading foreign language in many countries, including Turkey. Parents attitudes towards the language affect their children's success in learning the language. Many studies have indicated that parents play an important role in maintaining their children's language ability as well as in participating for the success of school and learning. The aim of this study was to investigate the parental attitudes towards English education for Kindergarten students. In this study a questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. To determine valid and reliable results the pilot administration was done to see the possible problems which might occur. The result of the pilot study indicates that the questionnaire has . 97 reliability. 46 parents who are sending their children to a Kindergarten which has English education were selected randomly for the main study. The main study was carried out at Neşeli Adımlar Kindergarten during the first term of the 2006–2007 Academic year. The results demonstrated that most parents strongly support immersion of English for their children in Kindergartens whereas; they have negative attitudes with respect to the qualifications of teachers.

Key Words; Parent involvement, very young learners, passive encouragement, active encouragement.

TÜRKİYEDEKİ KREŞ ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN İNGİLİZCE EĞİTİM ALMASINA AİLELERİN TUTUMU

Özet

Global dünyamızda yabancı dil öğrenmenin önemi çok büyük. İnsanların en az bir dil bilmeye ihtiyaçları var. İngilizce birçok ülkede yabancı dil öğreniminde lider konumdadır, buna Türkiye'de dâhildir. Ailelerin tutumu çocukların dil öğrenme başarılarında etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı kreşlerde İngilizce eğitim verilmesine ailelerin tutumlarını araştırmaktır. Bu çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak anket kullanılmıştır. Geçerli ve güvenilir sonuçlar almak ve çıkabilecek problemleri belirlemek üzere ana çalışmadan önce pilot çalışma uygulanmıştır. Pilot çalışma anketin .97 geçerliliğe sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Ana çalışma için çocuklarını İngilizce eğitim veren kreşlere gönderen 46 aile rastgele seçilmiştir. Uygulama 2006–2007 Akademik yılında Neşeli Adımlar kreşinde yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar göstermiştir ki çoğu aile kreşlerde İngilizce eğitime destek vermektedir, ancak öğretmenlerin kaliteleriyle ilgili olumsuz tutumları vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler; Aile katılımı, çok küçük çocuklar, pasif pekiştireç, aktif pekiştireç.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is at the core of human existence. Through language we express the hopes, dreams, or our states. The study of foreign languages prepares today's youth for tomorrow's opportunities by supporting basic skills instruction, developing cross cultural understanding and preparing our youth to enter the global market place.

English is the leading foreign language in many countries, including Turkey. It is not a national or an official language but it is the most widely taught foreign language at all stages of education system in Turkey. In state schools, Turkish learners start learning English at their fourth year at the Elementary School, whereas; most of the learners start learning English at private Kindergartens or Elementary Schools just from the very beginning of their education. The learner's positive attitudes towards the foreign language and the people who speak it has been noted to be significantly related to success in learning the language. (Gardner,1968;Gardner & Lambert,1972) It is also known that parents play a major role in shaping their children's attitudes. Parents attitudes toward the language and the people affect their children's success in learning the language.(Feenstra, 1969;Lambert & Klineberg, 1967)

Many studies have indicated that parents play an important role in maintaining their children's language ability as well as in participating for the success of school and learning. Wong (2000) found out that parents serve an important language model for shaping children's language behavior. Both how parents behave and feel influence their children's language learning development. Oskamp (1977) comments that " a child's attitudes are largely shaped by its own experience with the world, but this is usually accomplished by explicit teaching and implicit modelling of parental attitudes." He goes on explaining how parents affect their children's language development: " There are many other areas where the average child has no direct experience at all, and in these areas, parental influence on the child's attitudes may be very great. Examples include attitudes toward foreigners, towards other countries." Gardner (1975) even mentions the relationship between parental attitudes towards foreign language learning and the level of language proficiency achieved by the child as follows " Relationships between the parents' attitudes and the students' orientations suggest that the students' orientation grows out of a family-wide orientation and consequently… the degree of skill which the student attains in a second language will be dependent upon the attitudinal atmosphere in the home."

The influence the parent on the child can be active. They can play games, share video-cassettes and read books. Hayman, Johnson & Mayers (1964) stated that parents can be effective active supporters of their children's foreign language learning without themselves having skill in the foreign language.

To conclude the attitudes of the parents are very important for their children in order to improve their English. Positive encouragement to learning in any field will lead to statistially higher levels of achievement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Very young learners are the ones who are Kindergarten students, they have not started compulsory schooling and have not yet started to read and write, but they can still learn a second language. (3 to 6 year olds.) Chase (1997) mentions that learning ability decreases after ages eleven, twelve. He also adds that it is developmentally appropriate to teach languages during early childhood and early elementary years because of their natural ability to acquire language during this stage in life. Finney (1996) says that young children have advantages of second language learning such as better pronunciation less inhibitions and a love for mimicking through movement. Owing to this, in this global world learning a second language is a compulsory process and it will be easier and acquisition like if the learners start this process as early as possible. Positive parental attitudes help the learners to be successful in this difficult and tiring job.

Cotton and Wikelund (2007) state " programs which involve parents in reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers show impressive results" and also they added that the earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects will be.

The parents influence on the child can be both passive and active, and active encouragement means better language learning. Parents' attitudes has a great role for their children. They can reflect their positive attitudes towards language learning by actively participating in a variety of ways at home and at school but they should be very careful about not pushing their children, instead they should encourage and praise their effort. At school parents can establish a positive relationship with the teacher and staff volunteer to help and share their experiences with the teacher. (Rosenbuch, 1987) She suggests parents to support second language learning by becoming supportive at all times as their child's success in the program will be affected by their attitude, encouraging their child to speak the second language at home but should not force them, being supportive of the program and the teacher, trying to take advantage of situations that increase their child's exposure to the language and its culture, encouraging their child to read, to watch and to listen in the second language and being proud of their child's achievement.

Young (1994) refers to some of the many ways in which parents exert this attitudinal influence, such as " through discussion, by encouraging participation in foreign language, exchange programs and excursions, helping the child with homework, encouraging the child to read material written in the foreign language and by making the target language country the destination for a family holiday." Similarly, Gardner (1985) mentions the major intermediary between the cultural milieu and the student and categorizes parental influence on language attitudes on the basis of two roles, namely the active and the passive role. The active role concerns the parents interact with their children with regard to language learning. It can be positive and a negative according to Gardner positive one encourages the child while negative one may involve range of discouraging behaviors like belittling the importance of language learning. The passive role concerns parents' attitudes to the second language community and in Gardner's view, a positive one will increase the desire for social allignment with the language speakers which means the increase in the motivation of the child.

The aim of this study was to investigate the parental attitudes towards English education for Kindergarten students.

Research questions are as follows;

1.What are parents' attitudes towards their children's second language learning in Kindergarten?

2.What do parents think of the importance of starting language learning in Kindergarten for their children?

3.How do parents act or what they have done based on their attitudes to support their children's second language learning?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.The Data Collection Device In the Study

In this study a questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument.

The Pilot Study

To determine valid and reliable results the pilot administration was done to see the possible problems which might occur.

Setting

The pilot study was carried out at "Neşeli Adımlar Kindergarten" during the first term of 2006–2007 Academic Year.

Participants

The participants of the pilot study were chosen randomly and they didn't participate to the main study as it was not possible to administer the same questionnaire again to the participants of the pilot study. The participats were 20 parents who are sending their children to "Neşeli Adımlar Kindergarten"

Aims and Objectives

The aim in carrying out a pilot study was to find out whether the questionnaire is reliable or not.

Analysis

The questionnaire is prepared to determine the parental attitudes towards English education for Turkish Kindergarten students. In order to reach content reliability, the questions were discussed by both the professors of English language teaching and the professors of Turkish department as the questionnaire was prepared in Turkish.

The results of the pilot study were analyzed by the help of SPSS package programme. It is found that this questionnaire has .97 reliability so it can be said that the questionnaire has high reliability.

The Main Study

After the pilot study the questionnaire was used as an instrument in this study. This study will assume that the data collection devices reflect the sincere thoughts and opinions of the participants and the results of the data collection can be generalized

for the parents who are sending their children to Kindergartens which have English education. This study is limited to the parents whose children are at "Neşeli Adımlar Kindergarten"

Setting

The main data collection was carried out at "Neşeli Adımlar Kindergarten" during the first term of the 2006–2007 Academic year.

Participants

46 parents who are sending their children to a Kindergarten which has English education were selected in this study. All of these participants were the mothers or the fathers of the children. Table 1 demonstrates the ages and the careers of the participants.

Table 1. Participants' Ages and Careers

Participants 24	Age 30–35	Career Housewife, accountant, engineer, teacher, doctor, computer programmer, lecturer at a university, lawyer.
14	35–40	Housewife, doctor, nurse lecturer at a university, engineer, teacher, translator.
8	40–45	Accountant, doctor, engineer, lawyer.

Sampling strategy was used in this study and the participants were chosen randomly.

Previous to the questionnaire all participants were informed that each of them was under rigid protection from unveiling their identities. Participants were informed the research purpose and genus of questionnaire questions of being asked in advance. The participants were assured that their responses were strictly kept confidential and served a research purpose only.

Aims and Objectives

The aim in carrying out the main study is to determine the parental attitudes towards English education for Turkish Kindergarten students.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Here, the analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire will be done by frequecy-variance analysis.

Table 2. My child can be more competitive in the future job market with English immersion in Kindergarten.

	Frequency	/ Percent
Agree	46	100%
Disagree	0	0
Not sure	0	0

46 (100%) of the parents stated that their children can be more competitive in the potential job fields with the English immersion in Kindergarten so all the participants are aware of the importance of knowing English for their children's future career.

Table 3. I believe that my child's self-confidence can increase when he/she is educated in a kindergarten having English education.

	Frequency	/ Percent
Agree	37	80%
Disagree	4	8.5%
Not sure	5	11.5%

37 (80%) of the parents stated that their child's self-confidence can increase when he/she is educated in a Kindergarten having English education, whereas; 4 (8.5 %) of them mentioned that they don't believe that it can increase self-confidence of their children and 5 (11.5 %) of the participants pinpointed that they are not sure about it.

Table 4. I think that being a student of a Kindergarten having English education helps my child to develop his/her communication skills.

	Frequency/ Percent	
Agree	41	89.5%
Disagree	1	2%
Not sure	4	8.5%

41 (89,5%) of the parents stated that being educated in a Kindergarten having English education helps their children to develop his/her communication skills, on the other hand 1(2%) of the parents disagrees with this opinion and 4((8,5%) of them mentioned that they are not sure about that.

Table 5. I think that the English teachers in the Kindergartens are well-qualified.

	Frequency/ Percent	
Agree	7	15.2%
Disagree	27	58.6%
Not sure	12	26.2%

27 (58.6%) of the participants mentioned that the teachers in Kindergartens are unqualified; whereas, 7 (15.2%) of them mentioned just the opposite besides 12(26.2%) of the participants are not sure about it.

Table 6. I choose this Kindergarten just because of English education.

	Frequency/ Percent	
Agree	34	73.9%
Disagree	5	10.8%
Not sure	7	15.3%

34 (73,9%) of the participants mentioned that they choose this Kindergarten just because of English education; however, 5 (10,8%) of them stated that they have other reasons which are more important and 7 (15,3%) of them pinpointed that they are not sure about the reasons of choosing this Kindergarten.

Table 7. Before starting this school my child had initiated into English.(CD, cassettes, cartoons… etc.)

	Frequency/	Percent
Agree	12	27%
Disagree	34	73%
Not sure	0	0

34 (73%) of the participants mentioned that before starting this school their child didn't have the chance of any initiation to English, whereas; 12 (27%) of them stated that their children had this chance before school.

Table 8. My child sings the songs or repeats the vocabulary items outside the school that he /she has practiced at school.

	Frequency/	Percent
Agree	11	25%
Disagree	32	69%
Not sure	3	6%

32(69%) of the participants mentioned that their children do not sing the songs or repeat the vocabulary items outside the school that he/she has practiced at school, however; 11(25%) of them stated that their children produce the things outside the school that they have practiced at school and 3 (6%) of them marked that they are not sure about it as they don't have enough time to be with their children.

Table 9. I don't think that the children need the immersion of English in Kindergartens at that age. (3 to 6 year olds.)

	Frequency/	Percent
Agree	8	17%
Disagree	35	76%
Not sure	3	7%

35(76%) of the participants stated that the children need the immersion of English in Kindergartens; however, 8(17%) of them mentioned that the children do not need it and 3 (7%) of them pinpointed that they are not sure about it.

Table 10. I surely think that the English teachers should have certificates or should be specialists on that field.

	Frequency/ Percent	
Agree	46	100%
Disagree	0	0%
Not sure	0	0%

46(100%) of the participants stated that the English teachers should have certificates or should be specialists on that field. All of the participants agree on the importance of qualified teachers.

Table 11. I will send my child to a primary school having English education.

	Frequency/ Percent	
Agree	33	72%
Disagree	7	15%
Not sure	6	13%

33(72%) of the participants stated that they will send their child to a primary school having English education, whereas; 7(15%) of the mentioned that they will not send their child to a primary school having English education and 6 (13%) of them are not sure about what to do.

5. Conclusion

It is no wonder that parent involvement with the schools gains importance each year. This is an era of increasing concern about the quality of education and parents want assurance that their children will receive adequate preparation to lead rewarding adult lives.

It is known that parents' positive attitudes toward English education increase not only their child's motivation but also their success on language learning. This study aims to determine what attitudes parents held in regards to children's foreign language learning in Kindergartens and the results of the questionnaire are as follows;

1. All of the participants (100%) are aware of the importance of knowing English for their child's future career so, they think that their child can be more competitive in the future job market with English immersion in English.
2. Most of the parents (80%) think that their children's self-confidence can increase when they are educated in a Kindergarten having English education.
3. Most of the parents (89%) mentioned that being a student of a Kindergarten having English education helps their child to develop his/her communication skills.
4. Majority of the parents (58.6%) pinpointed that the English teachers at the Kindergartens are not well-qualified.

5. Most of the parents (73.9%) stated that they are sending their child to this Kindergarten because of English education.
6. Majority of the parents (71%) stated that their children had no chance to initiate into English before starting this Kindergarten so, the children did not have the chance of immersion of any English at home before school.
7. Majority of the parents (69%) mentioned that their children generally don't produce the songs or vocabulary items outside the school that they have practiced at school.
8. Most of the parents (76%) stated that the children need the immersion of English as early as possible.
9. All of the parents (100%) pinpointed that the English teachers at schools should be well-qualified.
10. Majority of the parents (72%) stated that they will send their child to a primary school having English education.

The results of this study provide evidence that most parents strongly support immersion of English for their children in Kindergartens because they believe it can productively promote career opportunities. It is undeniable that foreign language proficiency (especially English) play an important role in our global world and not only do companies require English proficiency as criteria for employment, but also individuals need English as a tool to receive or transmit messages. No wonder most parents believe that equipped with English ability one will gain more opportunuties in job fields. Most parents also stated that their child's communication skills and self-confidence also develops by early immersion to English. It is also proven that teachers' disqualifications create hesitation to enrolling their children to Kindergartens having English education. In other words, the parents in this study keep negative attitudes with respect to the qualifications of teachers.

From parents' perspectives, the English teachers should be well-qualified. According to them, teachers should have passed exams to be certified as a teacher and undertaken a series of practical training to gain teacher certificates, thus; parents feel securer and trustworthy sending their children to start learning English in Kindergartens. In Turkey we do not live in an English speaking environment, therefore; only few parents can talk English or help their children to develop their English at home. As a result children lack chances to practice English outside the classroom. Cotton and Wikelund (2007) suggested that to solve this problem, parents should try to increase their involvement in their children's English learning and enhance their communication with their children by discussing meaningful topics and sharing their experiences, instead of placing great value on teachers' schooling only and added that "schools need to work in concert with parents to establish more effective home-school partnerships to meet the different language needs and expectations of the parents and students and to provide students with the necessary language and literacy experiences in a meaningful way."

According to the research findings; it should be noted that the results are based on

a sample of 46 parents who enrolled their children in a Kindergarten having English education. In brief, it has been a controversial issue whether Kindergarten students should learn English, despite the government policy stipulation that children are not allowed to learn English until the fourth grade of primary school. To conclude, the study reflects that parents have positive attitudes toward English education for Turkish Kindergarten students; whereas, they have doubts about the qualifications of the English teachers.

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