

Pre-School Educational Process of Turkey*

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How to cite this paper: Göksoy, S. (2017)
Pre-School Educational Process of Turkey.
Open Journal of Social Sciences, 5, 73-83.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.53008>

Received: January 16, 2017

Accepted: March 14, 2017

Published: March 17, 2017

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Abstract

Children make a rapid development physically, cognitively and affectively in preschool educational period (age 0 - 6). The cognitive dimension of a child at pre-school age is creative, independent and imaginary. The imagination unceasingly works. This period is regarded as the time that the children have high potential of learning and developing. Thus, the quality of preschool education affects the higher educational success and even the lifelong success of the child. Therefore the aims of the research are to emphasize the importance of preschool education on the development of the child, to make a comparison between the preschool education of Turkey and other developed countries and to support preschool education by explaining why and how the preschool education in Turkey should be improved. In this research, case study method from data collection methods was used; related written and electronic resources were collected, analyzed and interpreted in line with the research purpose. The following suggestions are developed in order to improve the preschool education in Turkey: Service delivery models that increase the participation to preschool education should be varied; the preschool educational facilities should be extended supporting the access of regions with limited financial means and regulations that decreasing the educational costs of families should be adopted. For all children, especially for families with low income, preschool educational institutions should be free like in more than half of European Union countries or preschool educational costs should be arranged in accordance with family incomes and other criterion, and families should be supported. The improvement and development priority should be given to preschool educational stage, accordingly physical resources (building, materials, substructure) and human resources (manager, educator, deputy manager and support staff) should be provided. Besides preschool teaching departments should be opened in faculties of education in universities and the quota of preschool teaching departments should be increased.

Keywords

Educational Policy, Preschool Education

*This article was presented at the EJER 2016 Congress.

1. Introduction

Internationally early childhood period, education and welfare cover the process between birth and primary school age (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014) [1]. Early childhood period passes immensely fast in scope of physical, cognitive and affective growth and development. Child in early childhood education period (age 0 - 6) learns to categorise items according to size, color, shape and immutableness and develops linguistically. The linguistic development and cognitive development are highly related (Bruner, 1966) [2]. A child acquires attainments about listening and gets ready to speak, however, the linguistic development of the child accelerates in the subsequent educational process. According to conducted researches, a child acquires the basic structural features of the spoken language until the age of 4 - 5 in a lifetime event (Topses, 2003) [3]. The cognitive dimension of a child at pre-school age is creative, independent and imaginary. The imagination unceasingly works. Therefore the child perceives the world better. Piaget describes the cognition of the child at this stage as “preoperational stage” where the stable concepts are formed, and abstract thinking evolves, and egocentricism once consolidates and then decreases. In preoperational stage, the child develops symbolical sense first and then improves intuitive sense. Freud defines this process as the oral, the anal, the phallic, the latent and the genital phases in his psychosexual development theory and regards the experiences at the ages of 0 - 6 which cover the first three phases as the determinants of personality development (Yeşilyaprak, 2007) [4].

Development psychologists believe that genetic and environmental factors cooperate in child’s cognitive development. Continuous development theories especially focus on the social environments of the child. Vygotsky considers the cognitive development as the output of social development which occurs as a result of interactions with others and environment. He emphasizes that in assisted learning, children are able to perform new things in their capacities with the help of their teachers and peers. Erikson describes the early childhood years as socioemotional development (initiative vs. guilt) and suggests that the children’ relationships with their friends support them. As mentioned previously, Piaget identifies the age range as preoperational stage (age 0 - 7). In this period, children have higher thinking ability about objects. They are able to use symbols to represent objects mentally. Linguistic and conceptual development occurs rapidly. For this reason, the word knowledge and the knowledge of spoken language of the children at preschool stage increase. Accordingly, they can understand a great deal of grammar rules and their vocabulary reaches up to thousands of words. Also the researches aimed at knowledge and competency of reading-writing in preschool stage prove that it is beneficial for children to start learning reading-writing with an advanced knowledge and that this knowledge contributes to the process of learning reading-writing (Slavin, 2013) [5]. In addition to all these, conducted researches demonstrate that high level preschool education increases the IQ level of the child and that the acquisitions are saved throughout the primary school stage. Therefore researches support that IQ is not

stable, and the individuals do not have unchangeable features and that the individuals may change according to alterations of the environment (Slavin, 2013) [5].

2. Purpose of Study

Nowadays, the importance of preschool education is accepted by almost everyone. This period is seen as the stage where the child has the highest learning potential by researchers. Children who grow up in convenient physical and social environment and in a healthy interaction environment demonstrates more rapid and more successful social and academic development. The quality of preschool education affects the higher educational success and even the lifelong success of the child. For this reason, the importance of preschool education and its quality is unignorable. The aim of the research is to draw attention on the importance of preschool education in child's development, to compare the levels of Turkey and developed countries, to explain how and why the preschool education can be improved and to support the development of preschool education. Accordingly, the success of preschool education in Turkey and in other countries will be compared and results will be evaluated to improve the quality.

3. Method

Case study from qualitative research methods was used in the research. The case study provides deeper examination of the research topic. It is commonly used in understanding various subjects of education asking the questions "what, how, why" (Çepni, 2012 [6]; Yin 2003 [7]; Yılmaz, 2015 [8]). In the research, the matter at hand is the application of preschool education in Turkey in historical process, its consequents and the current situation. The research data were collected using document review method. The historical development of childhood-preschool education and current applications in Turkey and European Union applications and PISA examination results were reviewed and evaluated. Documents are important data resources in qualitative researches. Document review is the analysis of materials (written or electronic) related to research topic. Written and electronic materials related to research topic were collected, analyzed and interpreted in accordance with the research topic.

4. Findings and Results

As mentioned in literature, it is an unquestionable fact that the early childhood education or preschool education is an indispensable educational step in cognitive, intellectual, social, emotional, physical, linguistical development of the child and is necessary for former education and lifelong success. However, considering the historical process of preschool education in Turkish educational system, it is seen that this crucial step of children's lives has not gained the importance that it deserves. Namely, before the constitutional period (1908), private preschools were established in some provinces. From this date, some private preschools were established in İstanbul. Official preschools were established and

became widespread after Balkan Wars. Since female teachers for preschools were not trained, Armenian and Jewish teachers worked in Turkish schools and they took care of all work in schools. Such that these teachers even wrote the songs and poems of the schools. In 1915, Preschools Regulations were published and as a result, the number of preschools increased in big cities. In the last period of Ottoman, an educator and manager of teacher school named Satı Bey gave importance and privilege to preschools. Satı Bey advocated that education needs to start from earlier stages for a country to develop and for a society to advance (Akyüz, 2014) [9].

The development of preschool education in Republic Period until the 90's (sixty years) is as follows. Between 1932-33 and 1991-92 academic years, the number of preschools increased to 4360 from 92; total student number increased to 131,023 from 3895; the teacher number increased to 7763 from 32. In proportion to the increase in country population, it can be inferred that preschool education performed slow development (Akyüz, 2014) [9].

Turkish educational system is organized according to Constitution, laws for education-learning, government programs, national education councils and other legal texts. The aim and tasks of preschool education were determined in accordance with the law no. 1739 in National Education Fundamental Law. According to this law, the aims and tasks of preschool education are to provide children to establish physical, logical and emotional developments; to bring good behaviours; to prepare them to primary education; to create suitable environment for the children of lower financial situation; to enable children to speak Turkish well and fluently (The National Education, 2015) [10]. The preschool education lasts in September at the age of 5. Children who are 37 - 66 months old take education in preschools or in application classes, ones who are 48 - 66 months old children take education in preschools and 60 - 66 months old children can take education in primary school only with the written request of their parents stating that the child is developmentally ready (The National Education, 2015) [10].

The National Education Council is the highest consultative committee and responsible for exploring necessary educational issues and taking advisory decisions if necessary. The first educational congress was held in Ankara in 1921 and The Chamber of Science was performed in 1921 for the first time and the following were in 1924 and in 1925 (Gülşen and Gökyer, 2014) [11]. From the first National Education Council to 2014, The National Education Council had gathered for 19 times. In Fifth National Education Council, the preschools became the main topic of conversation for the first time and it was decided that preschool educational institutions would be structured discretionary. Thereafter, the preparation of "Preschool and Nursery Class Regulations" was determined in Seventh National Education Council. In Ninth National Education Council, regulations about extent, aim and tasks of preschool education were made. The most important decisions taken in Tenth National Education Council were necessitating and popularizing the preschool education and increasing the school-

ing rate. In Eleventh National Education Council, teacher and educator training, situation and problems were entreated. In Twelfth National Education Council, it was decided that preschool educational programs needed to be suitable for circumstances, social and cultural structures and values of Turkey; that the higher education of preschool teacher training programs (preschool and nursery class) needed to stay two years long. In Fourteenth National Education Council, the terms “preschool” and “nursery class” were defined and establishment of “Educational Act of Preschool Education” was determined. Also it was decided that National Education and universities needed to cooperate in this process. In Fifteenth National Education Council, two years preschool education was necessitated. In Seventeenth National Education Council, necessary physical conditions needed for compulsory preschool education were determined to be provided and it was decided that educated personnel needed to be assigned. In this council, it was stated that in hundredth anniversary of republic, the schooling rate was aimed to increase to 80%. Nearly 600 people including academicians, school managers, teachers, students, ministry bureaucrats attended to The Nineteenth National Education Council which was organized in the coordination of National Education in 2014 and 179 advisory jurisdictions were made. Unfortunately the issue of increasing the schooling rate of preschool education was not decently mentioned in the advisory jurisdictions. Within this framework, a shift to singulative education was determined (National Education, 2015) [10]. In this context, the main point is not that advisory jurisdictions were taken in The National Education Council dated 2014, but that decisions about extending preschool education and increasing the schooling rate were not even mentioned in The National Education Council dated 2014 (Akyüz, 2014 [9], Altay, İra, Bozcan, Yenal, 2011 [12], Koşar, 2013 [13], Ministry of National Education, 2015 [10]).

Some of the responsibilities of Ministry of National Education stated in The Law No. 657 Delegated Legislation About Organization and Functions of Ministry of National Education (Ministry of National Education, 2014) [14] are; developing children at the years of preschool, primary and secondary school in terms of physical, logical, moral, immaterial, social and cultural features; designing, applying, updating educational programs equipped for necessary knowledge and skills needed for globally competitive economical system and society based upon civil liberties; carrying out and supervising educational responsibilities of teachers and students within this scope; Determining, implementing, following, supervising the national policies and strategies for each stage of education and developing them according to new service models; developing, implementing, following, coordinating policies and strategies that ensure each citizen to benefit from educational advantages and facilities. Strategies that Ministry of National Education determined about early childhood education in 2015-2019 Strategic Plan are; varying service models that increase participation to preschool education, extending the access of families and provinces with low income to preschool education, decreasing the cost of preschool education (Minis-

try of National Education, 2015) [10].

Since the early childhood period is regarded as the stage where the education affects the child development the most, European Union desires all children to get high quality of education and care. In European Union countries, 93% of children attend early childhood education before primary school. Moreover, the last year or two years of preschool education are compulsory in some European countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxemburg, Hungary, Austria, Poland and Switzerland). Similarly in Czech Republic and Liechtenstein, one or two years of education were entitled to early childhood education of children. All European countries stated the learning objectives for older children as personal, affective, social developments and linguistic and communicative skills. In some European countries, criteria for primary school are being ready for school, maturity and linguistic skills. Children who do not provide these criteria may not be permitted to start primary school even though they are at the age of starting school (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014) [1].

According to 2012 data of European countries, children have started formal education at gradually earlier ages. Between 2000-2009, according to EU-27, participation rates of children at the ages of 3, 4 and 5 increased respectively 15.3%, 7% and 6.3%. In 2009, the rates reached up to 77%, 90% and 94%. Participation of 3 year old children to preschool education came up to more than 95%. Also in Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France and Iceland, it reached up to nearly 100% in 2009. Education in preschool local institution is free in one-half of the countries. This situation facilitates the access of children, especially families with low income, to preschool education. Moreover countries adjust the noncompulsory education fees according to family incomes and other criteria (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2012) [15]. Many European countries endeavor to take the whole preschool education or even the last year of it into the scope of compulsory early childhood education. One of the five countries that do not make any regulations either about one year of preschool education or about compulsory participation to early childhood education is Turkey. (The rest of the countries are Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia, Iceland) (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014) [1].

Although indicators related to educational access, learning process and environment have been formed, widespread and reliable indicators about the consequences of these indicators, namely the findings of the education have not been determined yet. Therefore the effect of currently applied educational policies have not been detected (cited from ERG, 2011 [16], Koşar, 2013 [13]). Also the least participation to early childhood education among European countries is in Turkey. Ministry of National Education in Turkey remarked that schooling rate of preschool education was 44.04% in 2012, 37.36% in 2013 and 37.46% in 2014 (Ministry of National Education, 2015) [10]. Cities that have the highest schooling rate of 51% - 65% of Turkey are Hatay, Tunceli, Antalya, Mersin, Burdur, Kırklareli, Amasya ve Nevşehir. And cities that have the lowest schooling rate of 20% - 30% are Gaziantep, Ağrı, Mardin, Hakkari ve Şırnak (ERG, 2013) [16].

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a survey research

applied once every three years on 15-year-old students about their scholastic knowledge and skills. Policy makers worldwide use PISA results in order to compare the knowledge and skills of the students in their country with the ones from the other participating countries, to form standards with the intent of increasing the educational levels and to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their educational systems. Countries that have positive atmosphere (environment), effective applications, sufficient resources and socio-economic development obtained higher results in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). In PISA, the time that students spare for learning was emphasized and it was inferred that the ones who spared more time for learning in their childhood obtained higher results. In PISA studies, an exciting relationship was detected between the time spent on learning and the performance. Students who attended preschool educational programs statistically perform better when they become 15. For instance, the difference ranks between a half level of competence and one level of competence (30 - 73 points) in terms of mathematics competency levels. It is assumed that the preschool education maintains its effect prominently and comprehensively (in some cases these effects may be higher in students from families with low income and from poor conditions) even after students get on 8 - 10 years in their education (Ministry of National Education, 2004) [17].

While the average educational costs per student in European Union countries are 4.000 USD, it is 390 USD in our country according to National-Ultimate Report of Ministry of National Education, 2003 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). PISA programme results of Turkey up to now as a summary are as follows:

- 1) Turkey is the 28th of the countries attended PISA 2003 (30 OECD and 11 OECD countries, 41 in total) in terms of mathematics, reading, physical sciences and problem solving success and fell behind the OECD countries. The results of Finland, Korea, Hong Kong were quite high (Ministry of National Education, 2004) [17].

- 2) 30 OECD countries, 27 countries and 400 thousand students attended to PISA 2006 research. Among the 57 countries, Turkey is 47th in the field of physical sciences with 424 points, 43rd in the field of mathematics with 424 points and 37th in the field of reading skills with 447 points (Ministry of National Education, 2006) [18].

- 3) 475,460 students from 65 participant countries on behalf of 26 million students attended to PISA 2009. Among all countries, Turkey is 39th in the field of reading skills, 42nd in the field of physical sciences and 41st in the field of mathematics (Ministry of National Education, 2009) [19].

- 4) 34 OECD countries and 31 countries, 65 in total, attended to PISA 2012. Among all participated countries, Turkey is 44th in the field of mathematics skills, 31st in the field of reading skills and 43rd in the field of physical sciences (Ministry of National Education, 2012) [20].

Considering the educational costs per student, the time period students spare

for learning, the limited preschool education and the inaccessibility to preschool education (Percentages of Ministry of National Education: 44.04% in 2012, 37.36% in 2013 and 37.46% in 2014), it is not surprising that Turkey is in the last quarter of PISA examination results.

5. Discussion

1) Early childhood education or preschool education (ages of 0 - 6) that improves the linguistic and intellectual development in terms of physical, cognitive and effective aspects; prospers the listening and speaking skills, creativity, independency and imagination; develops symbolical and sensual skills, structures the personality development; improves the thinking skills about objects; accelerates the linguistic and conceptual developments; increases the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; prepares for school and literacy; increases the IQ of the child to a considerable extent does not obtain the value both qualitative and quantitative aspects despite its historical place throughout more than a decade in Turkish educational system (with the schooling rate of 37.46% according to Ministry of National Education, 2015) [10].

2) In Turkey, The Constitution, regulations about education, government programs, National Education Councils and other juridical texts, especially the strategies that Ministry of National Education determined in 2015-2019 Strategic Plan about early childhood education stating that “service models that increase participation to preschool education should be varied extending the access of families and provinces with low income to preschool education and decreasing the cost of preschool education (Ministry of National Education, 2015) [10] and preschool educational objectives of preparing children physically, mentally and sensationally, creating a common environment for students from all economical levels, enabling children to speak Turkish well and fluently (Ministry of National Education, 2015) were not followed and necessary responsibilities were not accomplished. The fact that cities that have the lowest schooling rate of 20% - 30% in Turkey are still Gaziantep, Ağrı, Hakkari and Şırnak (ERG, 2013 [16]; Ministry of National Education, 2015 [10]) can be interpreted that public safety problems in that cities are the biggest reason behind the failure of Ministry of National Education to reach out the educational objectives.

3) It is obtained that in PISA programs, countries that have sufficient resources and socio-economic development got higher results, that students who spared more time on learning performed better, that there is a connection between time spent on learning and performance, that students who attended preschool education statistically performed better when they became 15, that the preschool education maintains its effect prominently and comprehensively even after students get on 8 - 10 years in their education, that in some cases these effects may be higher in students from families with low income and from poor conditions (Ministry of National Education, 2004; Ministry of National Education, 2015 [10]). Also 93% of students in European Union countries attend to early childhood education before primary school. Education in preschool local

institution is free in one-half of the countries. This situation facilitates the access of children, especially families with low income, to preschool education. Moreover countries adjust the noncompulsory education fees according to family incomes and other criteria (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2012 [15]). This rate is 37.46% in 2014 in Turkey (Ministry of National Education, 2015 [10]). Although many European countries endeavor to take the whole preschool education or even the last year of it into the scope of compulsory early childhood education, Turkey's qualitative and quantitative insufficiencies in preschool education can be inferred from last PISA results. In the last PISA examination in which 65 countries participated, Turkey was 44th in the field of mathematics, 31st in the field of reading skills and 43rd in the field of physical sciences (Ministry of National Education, 2012 [21]).

6. Suggestions

1) Primarily and immediately, strategies that Ministry of National Education determined about early childhood education in 2015-2019 Strategic Plan; "varying service models that increase participation to preschool education, extending the access of families and provinces with low income to preschool education, decreasing the cost of preschool education" should be put into practice.

2) Like in more than half of the European Union countries, preschool public institutions should be free or educational fees should be adjusted according to family incomes and other criteria and families should be supported in Turkey especially for students from families with low income.

3) The priority of improvement and development in educational stages should be given to preschool educational stage. In this way, needs of physical resources (building, materials, substructure) and human resources (manager, educator, deputy principal and support staff) should be provided.

4) Preschool teaching departments should be opened in faculties of education in universities and the quota of preschool teaching departments should be increased.

7. Conclusions

The aims of the research were to emphasize the importance of preschool education on the development of the child, to make a comparison between the preschool education of Turkey and other developed countries and to support preschool education by explaining why and how the preschool education in Turkey should be improved. In accordance with these aims, the historical development of childhood-preschool education and current applications in Turkey and European Union applications and PISA examination results were reviewed and evaluated. Also the success of preschool education in Turkey and in other countries was compared and results were evaluated to improve the quality in Turkish preschools.

As a conclusion, suggestions were developed based on research findings. Varying service models should be put into practice while decreasing the cost of

education according to 2015-2019 Strategic Plan of Turkish Ministry of Education. Low income families were considered and it was suggested that public preschool institutions should be free and that the fees should be reasonable for families. Also it was suggested in the research that priority of providing physical and human resources to education should be given to preschool educational stage. Besides, the importance of academic education was handled and it was suggested that the number of preschool teaching departments in universities should be increased.

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