The Study of Pre-School Teachers’ Practices for Preparation for Literacy

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Abstract

Literacy skills cover a long process that shows development for a lifetime. Like any other skills in children, literacy skills are gained based on environmental stimulants. The fact that literacy environment is equipped with rich stimulants from the early childhood period is fundamental to academic success of children in later school life. Therefore, in order for children to gain literacy skills from early childhood, it is vital that basic concept skills and language skills be improved through various activities and learning environment be created to foster these skills. With this point in mind, this study was carried out to study practices of pre-school teachers who teach at pre-school institutions where 4-6 aged children receive education to include literacy skills activities. Population of the study is composed of pre-school teachers who teach in public pre-school institutions in the city centers of Afyonkarahisar and Eskişehir. The sampling of the study includes 158 teachers who teach at pre-school institutions. ‘Language and Literacy Promotion Scale’ developed by Green, Peterson and Lewis (2006) were adapted and translated into Turkish. Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze whether teacher opinions varied depending on educational status, year of service and participation in in-service training. Results of the study showed that teachers do not include enough activities on written and phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. In addition, the results of the study revealed that while there is no statistically significant difference between teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities and their educational status and year of service, there is statistically significant difference between their use of literacy preparation activities and their participation in in-service training (p<.05).

Keywords: literacy preparation, pre-school teachers, pre-school education.

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills cover a long process showing lifelong development. Literacy skills appear in the development stage when simple skills are acquired before the complicated ones, and, similar to the other development areas, literacy skills develop depending on other stimulants in children’s environment. A majority of literacy skills are earned in pre-school ages and form the basis for further academic success in advanced stages. Literacy skills in pre-school ages imply gradual and staged self-development and self-maturity with the help of written reading materials, listening and speaking materials around the very vicinity of children. The development of literacy skills equips the children with the attributes to be the architects of their own literacy (Bingham, 2002; Kandır & Yazıcı, 2011). Green, Peterson and Lewis (2006) state that indicators for literacy development appear during pre-school ages.

Literacy skills include processes such as concept knowledge, oral language skills, world knowledge, alphabet knowledge, phonological process skills and writing awareness. According to Albrecht and Miller (2004), the first stage in literacy development is awareness and inquiry. Pointing out that children’s listening, speaking and writing skills develop as a whole, National Association for the Education of Young Children (2001) highlights that parents should encourage the participation of their children in linguistic interaction with peers and adults, and in literacy activities.

Literacy skills in children are shaped by educational programs prepared by their pre-school teachers considering children’s readiness and understanding level (Bloch, 2000). Pre-school education programs that include a variety of teaching methods and techniques suited to class foster quality learning experiences for children to develop literacy skills (Bodrova and Leong, 1996; Meier, 2000; Kandır, Özbey & Inal, 2010). Cunningham (2008), with the study in which he investigated the relationship between pre-school children’s attitude towards literacy and quality literacy environments, concluded that children with a rich literacy environment show higher motivational attitudes, and that children with higher positive attitudes show faster literacy skills development as well.

Literacy preparation activities to be prepared in the scope of pre-school education programs are of great importance in developing literacy skills. It is a vital requirement to determine what activities are to be included, and to be aware of and inter-relate literacy areas such as alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness and writing awareness in the scope of literacy preparation activities (Bay, 2008; Kostelnik, Sodermen & Whiren, 2004). Dickinson and Tabor (2001) revealed in their study that education programs that encourage children to think with teachers using rich vocabulary and arousing curiosity towards written language support the development of literacy skills.

The readiness of children for primary education and better success in further academic skills depend on education programs that include the development of audio visual perceptions and language skills with various activities and suitable classroom environment to develop literacy skills. With this respect, this study aims to explore the use of supplementary activities for literacy skills in education programs by teachers who are employed in pre-school education institutions where 4-6 year-old children attend.
METHOD

Research Design

General scanning model was used because this study aims to explore the use of supplementary activities for literacy skills in education programs by teachers who are employed in pre-school education institutions where 4-6 year-old children attend. Scanning models are approaches that aim to describe a past or present situation (Karasar, 2007).

Sampling

The population of the study is comprised of 126 teachers in Afyonkarahisar city and 332 teachers in Eskişehir city (a total of 458) who are employed in MEB pre-school education institutions.

Depending on 0.95 reliability rate, 0.15 population scope and 0.05 tolerance rate, 58 teachers employed in Afyonkarahisar city Ministry of National Education (MEB) pre-school institutions and 100 teachers employed in Eskişehir city Ministry of National Education (MEB) pre-school institutions, so a total of 158 teachers were included in study group of the research (Çıngı, 1994). The participation in the study was voluntary.

It was discovered that 73.4% had Bachelor’s Degree, 26.6% graduated with an undergraduate degree and 71.5% had service year of 1-10 and 28.5% had service year of 11 or more. Besides, it was found that 41.8% attended in-service training on education programs supporting literacy skills and 58.2% didn’t attend an in-service training related to the topic.

Data Collection

‘Language and Literacy Promotion Scale’ developed by Green, Peterson and Lewis (2006) were adapted and translated into Turkish. Language and Literacy Promotion Scale used in the study was comprised of 23 items. Each item in the evaluation form was assigned “Always”, “Sometimes” and “Never” on a 3 point Likert scale and numbered 1, 2 and 3. Items related to reading activities done with the children within the day, the interior and exterior features of the book, chance of book exploration, alphabet knowledge, phonology and writing awareness were included in the evaluation form.

Analysis of Data

Data gathered in the study with the data collection tool was decoded on computer. In data analysis descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to evaluate demographic information of teachers. Teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities in their programs were communicated using frequency, percentage, average and standard deviation. Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze whether teachers’ opinions varied depending on education status, service year and participation in in-service training. 0.05 was used significance difference and on condition that p<0.05, there is a significant difference, and p>0.05 there is no significant difference was pointed out (Büyüköztürk, 2009).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study which was carried out to explore the use of supplementary activities for literacy skills in education programs by teachers who are employed in pre-school education institutions where 4-6 year-old children attend were given in tables and then discussed later.

Teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities in their programs were given in Table 1.
| Literacy Preparation Activities Evaluation Form | Never | Sometimes | Always |  |  |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|  |  |
| I do reading aloud activities in groups to children | 2  | 1.3 | 21 | 13.3 | 135  | 85.4 | 2.841 | .399 |
| I do reading aloud activities one-on-one to children | 74 | 46.8 | 49 | 31.0 | 35 | 22.2 | 1.753 | .795 |
| I spare a special time for literacy skills within the day for children | - | - | 35 | 22.2 | 123 | 77.8 | 2.778 | .416 |
| I have various books (such as math, alphabet, stories, tongue twisters) in my book corner | - | - | 27 | 17.1 | 131 | 82.9 | 2.829 | .377 |
| I read children’s favorite books occasionally | - | - | 86 | 54.4 | 72 | 45.6 | 2.455 | .499 |
| I talk to children about book we read | 15 | 9.5 | 51 | 32.3 | 92 | 58.2 | 2.487 | .665 |
| I ask questions to children while or post-reading. | - | - | 24 | 15.2 | 134 | 84.8 | 2.848 | .360 |
| I do activities like completing a story, creating a story, finding a suitable title for the story with children | - | - | 61 | 38.6 | 97 | 61.4 | 2.613 | .488 |
| I create opportunities for children to have a look at books and other printed materials on their own | 44 | 27.8 | 48 | 30.4 | 66 | 41.8 | 2.139 | .825 |
| I give various information about books (writer, front and back cover, etc.). | 26 | 16.5 | 85 | 53.8 | 47 | 29.7 | 2.132 | .668 |
| I give information that written letters proceed from left to right and up to bottom. | 56 | 35.4 | 61 | 38.6 | 41 | 25.9 | 1.905 | .780 |
| I do activities for children to recognize the sounds in the alphabet | 46 | 29.1 | 63 | 39.9 | 49 | 31.0 | 2.019 | .777 |
| I use various visual materials for children to recognize capital and lower case. | 70 | 44.3 | 57 | 36.1 | 31 | 19.6 | 1.753 | .762 |
| I do activities such as straight, slanted, zigzag drawing activities and connecting lines. | - | - | 23 | 14.6 | 135 | 85.4 | 2.854 | .353 |
| I draw children’s attention to texts on materials such as books, magazines, notice boards, tags, TV, calendar etc. | 74 | 46.8 | 71 | 44.9 | 13 | 8.2 | 1.613 | .635 |
| I guide children to write their own names. | 53 | 33.5 | 45 | 28.5 | 60 | 38.0 | 2.044 | .847 |
| I help children to recognize different colors, shapes and sizes. | - | - | 9 | 5.7 | 149 | 94.3 | 2.943 | .232 |
| I help children to learn opposite concepts (e.g. up and down). | - | - | 6 | 3.8 | 152 | 96.2 | 2.962 | .191 |
| I help children to recognize numbers (1–20). | - | - | 4 | 2.5 | 154 | 97.5 | 2.974 | .157 |
| I do counting activities with children. | 6 | 3.8 | 80 | 50.6 | 72 | 45.6 | 1.949 | .982 |
| I do sound, rhyme and alliteration activities (recognizing the starting sounds of a number of words) | 71 | 44.9 | 79 | 50.0 | 8 | 5.1 | 1.601 | .585 |
| I do tongue twister, poem, song, finger game and puzzle activities with children | - | - | 9 | 5.7 | 149 | 94.3 | 2.943 | .232 |
| I encourage children to form new verses changing the starting sounds of known songs or tongue twisters | 82 | 51.9 | 66 | 41.8 | 10 | 6.3 | 1.544 | .614 |
When Table 1 is studied, it can be observed that teachers involved in the study often spare a special time for literacy skills, make eye-catching arrangements to draw attention to book corners, read books that children like again and again occasionally, ask questions to children about book while reading, and do activities such as story completion, story creation, finding a suitable title for the story, poem, tongue twisters, puzzle and finger games. In addition, it was noted that most of the teachers do activities for acquisition of basic concepts like color, shape and numbers to create a writing awareness. Therefore, it could be argued that teachers use activities for acquisition of concepts that will form the basis for interactive reading activities and literacy skills, and they also make suitable arrangements to their educational environments.

Linguistic, cognitive psycho-motor and socio-affective skills of children develop rapidly in pre-school ages. Therefore, the development of literacy skills of children in pre-school ages is important in school and family environments (Meier, 2000; Kandir & Yazıcı, 2011). The use of techniques like reading aloud to children, telling the story looking at the pictures in the book, completing and creating a story, asking question and chatting about the book (Bradley & Bryant, 1991; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Pierce, 2003; Albrecht & Miller, 2004), poem, tongue twisters, puzzle and finger games (Kandir et al., 2010) provide children with quality experiences to improve literacy skills (Bodrava & Leong, 1996). As a result of observations and interviews with teachers, Patterson (2002) noted that teachers have reading spaces to develop literacy skills in class, give importance to written environment and provide written environment, give importance to movement skills related to small muscles and do activities to develop small muscles. Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta and Howes (2002) conclude that it is important to provide early experiences on basic concepts like color, shape, number and writing awareness in order for children to develop literacy skills. These findings support the findings of this study.

When teachers’ use of oral language in their education programs it could be seen that while 85.4% always do read aloud activities in groups with children, 46.8% never do read aloud activities one-on-one with children. It has been emphasized that read aloud activities that engage children in active learning process are the most effective technique in supporting literacy skills in different areas such as word treasure, writing and phonological awareness (Reese & Cox, 1999; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001; Halle, Calkins, Berry, & Johnson, 2003). Albrecht and Miller (2004) argue that children whose teachers and parents read aloud for 30 minutes read easily than children whose teachers and parents don’t do these activities. There is a strong relationship between reading aloud and acquisition of literacy skills. Green, Peterson and Lewis (2006) found that 78% of pre-school teachers do read aloud activities in groups, 50% do read aloud activities one-on-one. As a result, it could be argues that teachers are insufficient in doing one-on-one read aloud activities.

When teachers’ use of writing awareness activities in their education program is investigated, it was seen that they don’t include activities such as various features of the book (%16.5 never, %53.8 sometimes), writing proceed from left to right up to bottom (%35.4 never, %38.6 sometimes), drawing attention to written materials (%46.8 never, %44.9 sometimes) and writing names (%33.5 never, 28.5 sometimes). Moreover, while 41.8% of the teachers always create opportunities for children to explore written materials on their own, it could be argued that most of the teachers do not involve these opportunities depending on the answers of 27.8% never and, 30.4% sometimes. Writing activity which appears as a result of being able to use fingers and development of eye-hand coordination is a complicated process that involves remembering, planning, and creating and editing texts (Bay, 2008). Writing
awareness activities like the purpose of use of writing and writing concepts (e.g. from left to right and up to bottom) affect children’s further reading skills positively (Vukelich, Christie & Enz, 2008). Reading and writing are processes that are related to and support each other. Literacy skills develop successively with oral language skills (Caplovitz, 2005; Ellis, 2007). As a result, the finding that teachers involved in this study do not include sufficient writing awareness activities suggests that they need support in this area.

When teachers’ use of phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge activities are investigated, it could be seen that they don’t include activities such as recognizing sounds in the alphabet (29.1% never, 39.9% sometimes), using visuals for children to recognize capital and lower case (44.3% never, 36.1% sometimes), forming new verses changing words or starting sounds of known songs or tongue twisters (51.9% never, 41.8% sometimes) and rhyme and alliteration (44.9% never, 50.0% sometimes) sufficiently. Phonological awareness is the ability to play with sounds and create sounds in oral language such as recognizing words with rhythm, combining sounds or syllables for a word and taking out sounds or syllables from a spoken word for a new word (Eppe, 2006; Carter, 2007). Activities to develop phonological awareness need to begin at early ages (Soderman, Gregory & McCarty, 2004). When acquisition order of phonological awareness is examined, it can be seen that children firstly develop rhyme skills (Turan & Gül, 2008). Phonological awareness could be improved with activities such as songs, tongue twisters, finger games, word-sound games, creating manes and words using words with rhythm, breaking words into syllables and syllables into sounds, recognizing sound similarities and matching sounds of letter and letters that correspond to these sounds (Brady, Fowler, Stone & Winbury, 1994; Carter, 2007, Cadigan, 2008). The ability to know the names of sounds in the alphabet and recognize letters is sign of success in reading early. Instead of learning the alphabet separately, children need to learn the alphabet through experiences on literacy and texts around them (Sandall, Schwartz, Joseph, Chou & Horn, 2008). Wilhjelm (2004) state that activities such as drawing, touching, writing and making letters out of play dough is important in developing alphabet knowledge in children. As a result, the finding that teachers involved in this study do not include sufficient phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge activities suggest that teachers lack knowledge and experience in this area.

The results of Mann Whitney U test on teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities and education status, service year and participation in in-service training is given in Table 2.
Table 2. The results of Mann Whitney U test on teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities and education status, service year and participation in in-service training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy Preparation Activities Evaluation Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate (2 years)</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s (4 years)</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10 years</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 years or more</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-service training</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t Attend</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05

When Table 2 is studied, it could be seen that there is no significant difference in teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities and education status (U= 2391.5, p>.05) and service year (U= 2236.0 p>.05).

In Table 2, it could be seen that there is statistically significant difference in teachers’ use of literacy preparation activities and participation in in-service training (U= 2363.5, p<.05). Green, Peterson and Lewis (2006) note that teachers who think that they have received sufficient education on how to support children’s literacy skills include language and literacy activities in their programs more often. This study supports the finding that there is significant difference in teachers’ use of literacy preparation activities and participation in in-service training. Therefore, it could be argued that providing teachers with more in-service training activities could be helpful.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

It is necessary to develop receptive and productive language skills and perception skills through various activities in order to develop literacy skills starting from pre-school ages, and children should be provided with suitable environment and opportunities so that they can develop these skills. Supporting literacy skills in pre-school ages rise readiness for primary school and help children do better in further academic skills. For this reason, this study aims to explore the use of supplementary activities for literacy skills in education programs by teachers who are employed in pre-school education institutions where 4-6 year-old children attend.

It was discovered that of all participant teachers, 73.4% had Bachelor’s Degree, 26.6% graduated with an undergraduate degree and 71.5% had service year of 1-10 and 28.5% had service year of 11 or more. Besides, it was found that 41.8% attended in-service training on education programs supporting literacy skills and 58.2% didn’t attend any in-service training related to the topic.

It was found out that teachers involved in the study often spare a special time for literacy skills, occasionally read books that children like again and again, ask questions to children about book while reading, and do activities such as story completion, story creation, finding a
suitable title for the story, poem, tongue twisters, puzzle and finger games. In addition, it was discovered that teachers do not include sufficient writing and phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge activities in their program.

It was discovered that while there is no statistically significant difference between teachers’ opinions on their use of literacy preparation activities and their educational status and year of service (p>.05), there is statistically significant difference between their use of literacy preparation activities and their participation in in-service training (p<.05).

Considering the results of this study, the following suggestions could be made to pre-school teachers and researchers in this area;

- Teachers could develop game, music, drama, painting and etc. activities and could create literacy preparation content suitable for pre-school children.
- Better grasp and practice of skills could be achieved if pre-school teachers are in cooperation with first grade teachers while planning literacy preparation activities.
- Pre-school education institutions which play a very important role in preparing for literacy skills might not be sufficiently effective alone. Teachers could plan activities that will directly or indirectly involve the family which has an important place in literacy preparation activities in a child’s life.
- The findings of the research were gathered depending solely on pre-school teachers’ point of view. However, future research could focus on observation of teachers’ practice of literacy preparation skills and these observations could be compared to the data depending on teachers’ point of view. This research could be supported by the evaluation of the point of view of the family.
- In-service training activities towards pre-school teachers’ planning, practice and evaluation of processes like concept knowledge, oral language skills, world knowledge, alphabet knowledge, phonological process skills and writing awareness which are among literacy preparation activities could be organized.

REFERENCES


