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Examining Preschool Children's Perceptions on Parental Involvement

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Abstract

Parental involvement (PI) is a process in which mothers, fathers and other family members participate in the education program to contribute to the education and development of children. It cannot be ignored the cooperation of the school and family for the healthy development and successful learning life of the child. PI in preschool has positive effects on both the child and the parent in many respects. Although there are studies revealing the opinions of many adults such as parents, teachers, and school administrators on PI activities, studies revealing the child's perspective are quite limited. Aim of this study is to determine the perception of school-based PI of preschool children. The study group of this qualitative research, planned with the phenomenological research method, one of the participatory research methods, consists of 20 children (5-year-old) who attend pre-school education. Data were collected using a personal information form, structured interview form and drawing method based on the mosaic approach. The data were analyzed with descriptive analysis and content analysis method. The findings obtained are presented under 3 themes and results show that children have very positive feelings on PI but also have different expectations from existing PI activities. Based on results, it can be said that PI studies should be prepared by taking into consideration the opinions of children too.

Keywords: family participation, parental engagement, mosaic approach, child participation, child perspective.

Okul Öncesi Dönem Çocuklarının Aile Katılım Algılarının İncelenmesi

Öz

Aile katılımı; anne, baba ve diğer aile üyelerinin, çocukların eğitimi ve gelişimine katkıda bulunmaları için eğitim programında yer aldıkları bir süreçtir. Çocuğun sağlıklı gelişimi ve başarılı bir öğrenim hayatı için okul ve ailenin iş birliği içinde çalışması göz ardı edilemez. Okul öncesi dönemdeki aile katılımının hem çocuğun hem de ebeveynlerin üzerinde olumlu birçok etkisi bulunmaktadır. Ebeveynler, öğretmenler, okul yöneticileri gibi birçok yetişkinin aile katılım etkinliklerine ilişkin görüşlerini ortaya koyan çalışmalar olmasına rağmen çocuğun bakış açısını ortaya koyan çalışmalar oldukça sınırlıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı okul öncesi dönemdeki çocukların okul temelli aile katılım algılarını ortaya koymaktır. Katılımcı araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenolojik araştırma yöntemi ile planlanan bu nitel araştırmanın çalışma grubunu okul öncesi eğitime devam eden, 5 yaşındaki 20 çocuk oluşturmaktadır. Veriler mozaik yaklaşım temel alınarak kişisel bilgi formu, görüşme formu ve resim çizdirme yöntemi ile toplanmıştır. Veriler betimsel analiz ve içerik analizi yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular üç tema altında sunulmuştur ve bulgular, çocukların aile katılımına ilişkin olumlu duygulara sahip olduklarını ancak var olan aile katılım etkinliklerinden daha farklı beklentilerinin olduğunu göstermektedir. Bulgulara dayanarak aile katılım çalışmalarının çocukların da görüşleri dikkate alınarak hazırlanması gerektiği söylenebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: aile katılımı, ebeveyn katılımı, mozaik yaklaşım, çocuk katılımı, çocuk bakış açısı.

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INTRODUCTION

When studies on parental participation are examined, many concepts such as 'family participation, parental engagement, home-school partnership, parental partnership' that express this process confront researchers. Although various expressions are used in the literature, this study employs the concept of Parental Involvement (PI), one of the most frequently used terms, to describe the process. Although the meaning of PI has been revealed in different dimensions by many educators and researchers, in general, It is a process in which mothers, fathers, and other family members take part in the education program to contribute to the education and development of children (Morrison, Storey & Zhang, 2015). Furthermore, PI has multi-dimensional activities such as providing families with skills on certain subjects, teachers sharing information with parents, guiding families to their needs, such as ensuring that they are involved in school activities and establishing positive parent-child communication, supporting parents in accessing social resources, parent helping their child, and providing social and emotional support (Abbak, 2008; Gürşimşek, Kefi & Girgin, 2007). Epstein's Parental Involvement Model, which explains this process theoretically, presents the PI process in 6 categories (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with community) (Epstein, 1995). This model put forward by Epstein shows that education is not just about teaching, program and environment, but that the family has a very important role in a quality education (1995). Epstein's PI model includes the concept of "overlapping spheres" as a theoretical concept that explains the partnership and shared responsibilities between home and school. While this concept draws attention to the importance of home, school and society, which are the environments in which the student lives and where her/his development is most supported, it also makes it possible to associate all factors related to teaching, management and learning with each other (Epstein, 2001). Epstein emphasizes that PI cannot be limited to a certain period, duration, or activity; on the contrary, PI should be throughout the student's entire educational life and should be in different forms and levels depending on the student's educational level (Epstein, 2001).

Another PI theory is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995;1997) theoretical Model of the Parental Involvement Process. This model, which has a psychological perspective, reveals why parents are involved in their children's education and the positive aspects of their involvement for the child. The steps of the model consisting of five sequential levels are shown in figure 1.

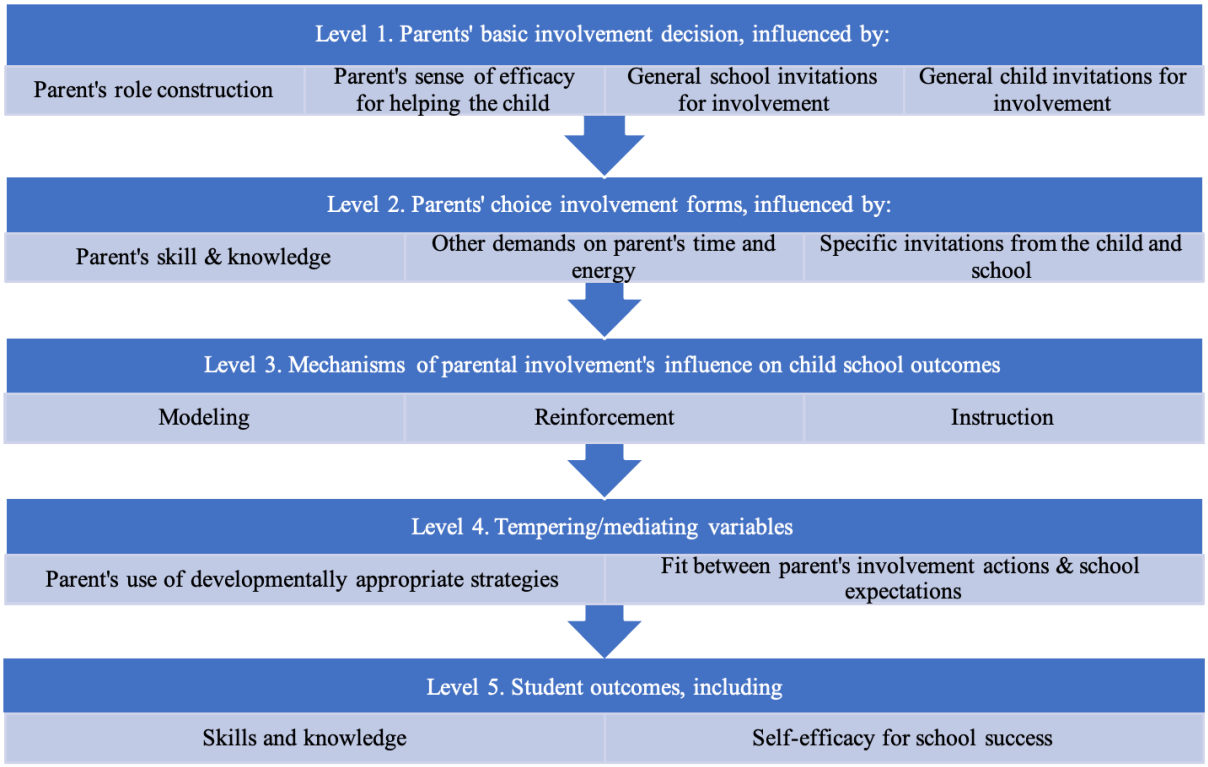


Figure 1. *Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995; 1997) Theoretical Model of the Parental Involvement Process*

In addition to explaining the PI process and the educational and parental factors affecting it, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model also supports increasing the participation of parents (Walker et al., 2005). Many studies on PI, such as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, show that PI can have a positive effect on the child's

learning (Lamb-Parker et al., 1999). PI studies reduce school absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), increase academic success (Jeynes, 2003; Evans &Shaw, 2008; Sheldon, 2003), reduce disciplinary incidents (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), and increase success in reading, writing and mathematics (Evans & Shaw, 2008; Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000; Gest et al., 2004). Other academic benefits include lower school dropout rates (Rumberger, 1995), lower special education placement rates (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), and more positive attitudes towards school (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). The benefits of PI are not just for children; parents also benefit from this involvement. First, PI offers parents an opportunity to develop their educational and training roles, allowing them to better understand and support their children's education (Decker & Decker, 2005).

In addition to theories and studies explaining PI and its importance, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory also emphasizes the importance of PI. Bronfenbrenner, who puts the child at the center of the ecological approach, reveals the five systems (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono) surrounding her/his and the importance of the relationships between these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem, which reveals the home-school connection in the child's microsystem and the relationship between these two, shows how PI directly affects the child's life and development. Although Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is one of the most important theories that reveal the importance of PI, when PI studies are examined, it is seen that the child is not involved as an active participant in PI studies. However, Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the child's opinion should be sought on all matters concerning the child. The Child's Perspective approach also emphasizes the importance of taking the child's opinions and wishes on all issues that directly or indirectly concern the child and the importance of the child's active participation (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). It is very important for children's development that they be perceived as individuals and that they have a say in matters that concern them. Children should cease to be objects of research and become subjects. Studies that include the child's perspective not only make the child's voice heard, but also reveal the child's perspective (James, 2007) and show that children have different perspectives from adults (Prout, 2002). Taking children's opinions and discourses into consideration will provide parallel developments in organizations serving children (Hill et al., 2004).

Purpose and Importance of the Study

When the studies in the literature were examined, many studies on parent and teacher opinions on PI were found, but limited studies have been found on the child's perspective on PI (Batuchina, 2014; Goodman & James, 2017; Lindberg & Demircan, 2013). These studies are not aimed at preschool children. In this regard, the aim of this study, planned based on the child perspective approach and ecological theory, is to examine the school-based parental involvement perceptions of five-year-old children attending pre-school education.

It is thought that the findings of this study, which aims to reveal the child's perspective on PI, will constitute a resource for child-centered activities in PI programs to be prepared, will increase the quality of child participation in the process, and may guide in terms of including the child's perspective in studies in this field.

METHOD

Research Design

In this research, the phenomenology research method was used to examine preschool children's perceptions of PI. Phenomenology is a research method that uses individuals' experiences to obtain information about the phenomenon (Onat Kocabıyık, 2016). Phenomenological research with children, also known as one of the participatory research methods, is a qualitative method that aims to understand the world of children from their perspective (Tuncer, 2024).

The study group of the research was determined by an easily accessible sampling method. 20 children in the 5-year-old group of the kindergarten located on the Kastamonu University campus formed the study group. The demographic information of the children in the study group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information

		N	%			N	%
Sex of child	Girl	11	55	Age of father	31-35	8	40
	Boy	9	45		36 and above	12	60
Year in preschool education	1	1	5	Education level of mother	High school	1	5
	2	4	20		Bachelor's degree	16	80
	3	15	75		Master's degree	2	10
Number of children	1	10	50		PhD degree	1	5
	2	7	35	Education level of father	High school	1	5
	3	3	15		Bachelor's degree	14	70
Age of mother	31-35	11	55		Master's degree	2	10
	36 and above	9	45		PhD degree	3	15

Data Collection Tools and Data Collection

In this study, the mosaic approach, which is the method in which data is collected by taking into account child-specific ways when researching with children, is used (Gündoğdu Ayar &Avcı, 2024). Within the framework of this approach, interview and drawing methods were used to collect data.

For the interview, the "Preschool Children's Perspectives on Parental Involvement Interview Form" developed by the researchers was used. This form: "Have your parents ever been to your class before? Who came?" "What do your parents do when they come to your class?" "What would you like your parents to do when they come to your class?" "Do you want to help when your parents do something in the classroom?", "Do you want your teacher to participate when your parents do something in the classroom?" "How do you feel when your mother or father comes to your class?" "Who else do you want to come to your class?" consists of open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted one-on-one with the children, and a conversation was held with each child to create a warm atmosphere before the interview. As a result of these interviews, which lasted about ten minutes, the child's answers were recorded.

Drawing pictures, which is another data collection tool, was done collectively in the classroom environment. Drawing paper and dry paints were distributed to the children, and the children were left free to choose colors. "What would you like to do with your parents at school?", "Who else would you like to come to school besides your parents?" Children were drawn in accordance with their instructions. Children were asked one by one what they drew in the pictures drawn and notes were taken on the picture. A one-week period was left in order to ensure permanence between the interview form and the drawing applications.

Analysis of Data

The content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data. In content analysis, similar data are brought together within the framework of certain concepts and themes, and the findings are organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). In this direction, key concepts were determined for each question in the interview form. Children's perceptions of PI were coded within the framework of these concepts, and in the next step, the codes were brought together and classified. The analysis of the data collected by drawing pictures was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the items in the picture were examined, taking into account the explanations provided by the children about the pictures they drew. Various codes were created based on the symbols drawn by the children in their drawings and the relevant literature. In order to ensure coding reliability, the pictures were analyzed semantically by two researchers separately, and the symbols in the pictures were coded using the prepared code list. The coding made by the researchers was compared and a common point of view was tried to be developed in the analysis. Symbols that could not be adapted were revised and a common understanding was developed for analysis. In this way, the coding was completed, and an attempt was made to interpret the findings. In the second stage, these items were grouped, and categories were created. The findings were arranged and interpreted using descriptive tables.

Research Ethics

Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the Kastamonu University, Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee under the number of decision 4/49. A consent form was distributed to parents before data was collected within the scope of the research. Children with parental consent were included in the study. Verbal consent was obtained from the children.

FINDINGS

In this study, the findings obtained with the mosaic approach were grouped under three themes as a result of the data analysis. Quantitative findings regarding the themes are presented with descriptive tables.

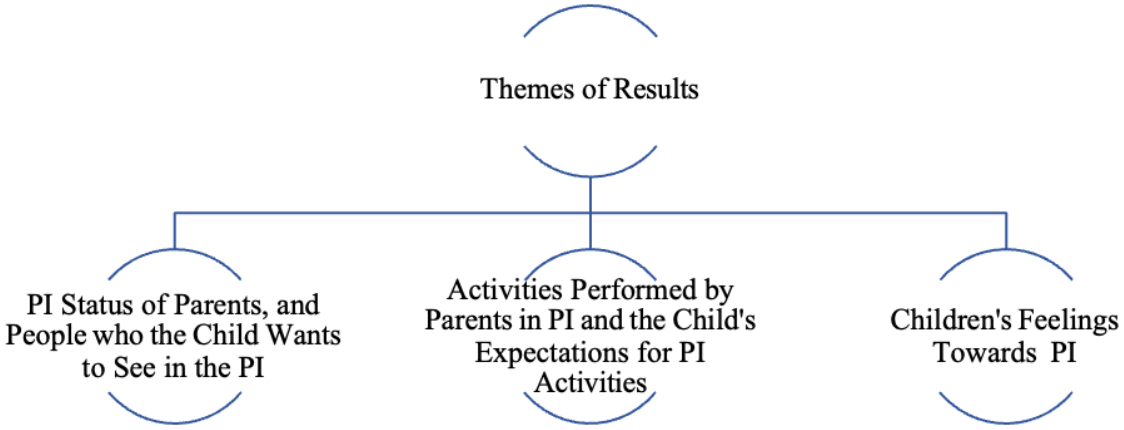


Figure 2. *Themes of Results*

Parental Involvement Status of Parents, and People whom the Child Wants to See in the Family Involvement

In the interview with the children, all children except one said that their parents came to school for PI. To question “Have your friends' parents been to your class before?”, 16 of the children answered "yes" and four answered "no". Although the children's answers to these two questions do not match exactly, the quantitative findings are close to each other. It is possible that children may have missed some PI activities due to their absenteeism. When the answers given by children to the question “Why do you think your parents come to school? are examined, 26.3% of the children answered, "I don't know", 15.8% said they wanted to do activities, 10.5% said they wanted to play games, and 5.3% said they wanted to teach. The answers of 42.1% of the children were collected in the other category. Some of the answers in the other category are as follows.

- "Because I love my mother so much" (P-13)
- "To tell about my childhood" (P-7)
- "Because I'm the star of the week" (P-8)

It is thought that factors such as past experiences and school practices may influence the answers of children.

Table 2. Parent Who Come PI, and Person(s) the Child Wants During the PI Process

Interview Forms	Children’s Drawings					
	Person coming to PI		Person the child wants in PI		Person(s) the Child wants in PI	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nobody	1	5	-	-	-	-
Mother	14	70	-	-	19	95
Father	5	25	5	25	17	85
Siblings	-	-	5	25	10	50
Friends	-	-	3	15	5	25
Grandmother/father	-	-	2	10	-	-
Relatives	-	-	4	20	2	10
Total	20	100	19	100	20	-

When the answers of 19 children whose parents had previously visited the school for PI were evaluated, it was observed that they wanted other family members who were not typically involved in PI activities and their close circle outside the family to attend school (Table 2). In the interview form section of Table 2, it is seen that there is no ‘mother’ answer among the people whom children want to have in their PI. The reason for this can be

explained by their mothers having previous PI experiences. When the children's drawings for PI were examined, the majority of the children drew their mothers and fathers as part of the involvement process.

All 10 children who had siblings included their siblings in this process. It can be seen in the children's drawings that when PI is mentioned, their mothers, fathers, and siblings come to life (Pictures 1 and 2). In addition to mother/father/sibling figures, 25% of the drawings include friends, and 10% include relatives (Pictures 3-4-5).

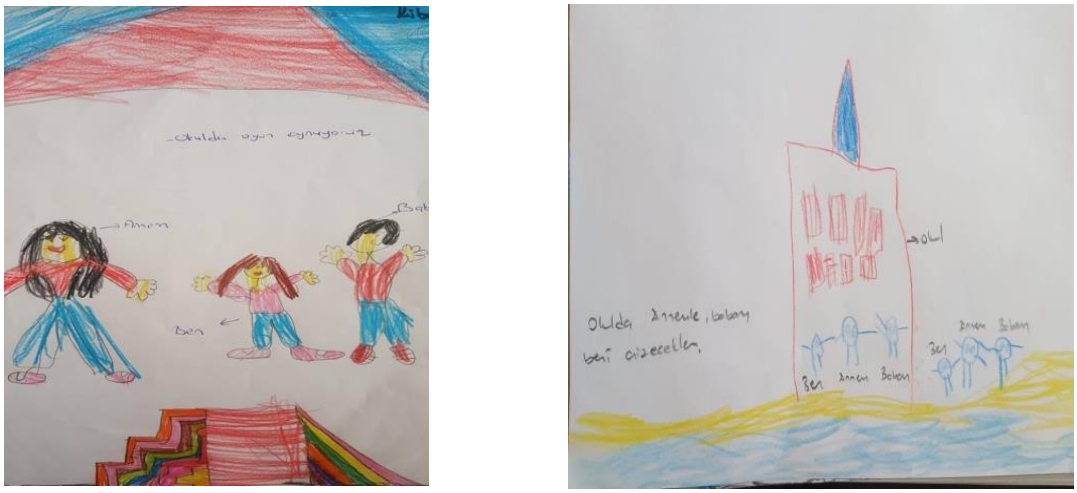


Figure 3. *Picture 1 and 2*

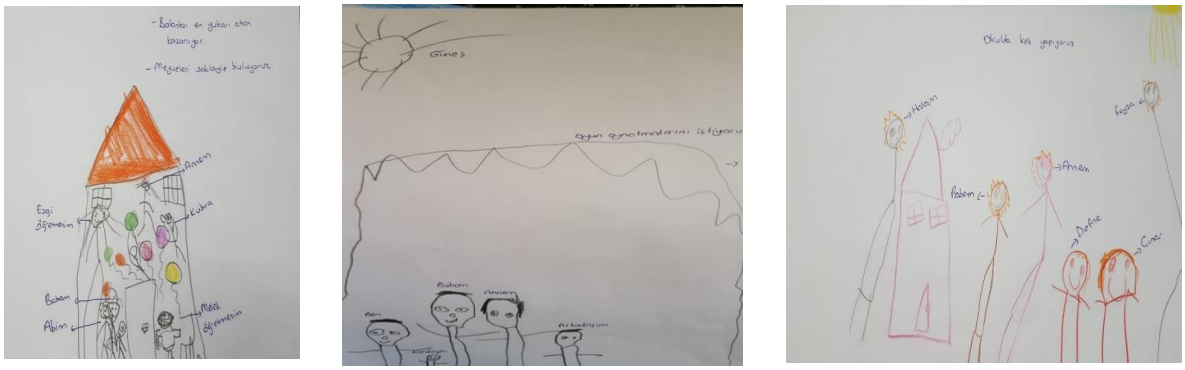


Figure 4. *Picture 3, 4 and 5*

Activities Performed by Parents in Parental Involvement and the Child's Expectation for Parental Involvement Activities

By evaluating the data obtained from the interview form and children's drawings, the activities carried out by parents, PI, and the children's expectations regarding these activities are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Activities Done by Parents in PI and Activities Requested by the Child in the Process

Interview Forms									Children's Drawings	
	Own parents' activities		Other Parents' Activities		Activity the child wants from his/her parents		Activity the child wants from other children's parents		Activity the child wants in PI	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I don't know/remember	4	21.1	7	43.7	-	-	1	5	-	-
Topic narration	2	10.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Experiment	2	10.5	1	6.3	1	5	-	-	1	5
Play	3	15.8	-	-	11	55	11	55	9	45
Art Activities	8	42.1	8	50	5	25	6	30	6	30
Other	-	-	-	-	3	15	2	10	4	20
Total	19	100	16	100	20	100	20	100	20	100

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that 21.1% of the children do not remember what their parents did in the classroom, while 43.8% do not remember what other parents did. Some examples of the answers given by children who remember the PI process are presented below.

- "We did an activity." (P-2)
- "My parents gave lectures." (P-4)
- "We played games with balloons." (P-17)

According to the answers given by the children in the study group in the interview, parents mostly have art activities done during PI. When asked what they wanted both their own parents and their friends' parents to do when they came to school, children answered "play" with a rate of 55%. In children's drawings, it is observed that 45% of the children want to play games, especially with their mothers and fathers, as a form of parental involvement (Picture 6). On the other hand, according to the children, only 15% of the parents had them play games in PI. When the interview form and children's drawings are evaluated together, the second most popular wish of the children was art activities (making a necklace, painting, making a toy computer, making a butterfly from cardboard) (Picture 7). In the other category, the answers are included: I want them to hold me in their arms, I want them to help me, I want them to give me a gift, and I want to cook. The drawings also include the desire to hug and kitchen activities (Picture 8). Similarly, these drawings have been categorized in a different way. Some examples of children's answers are given below.

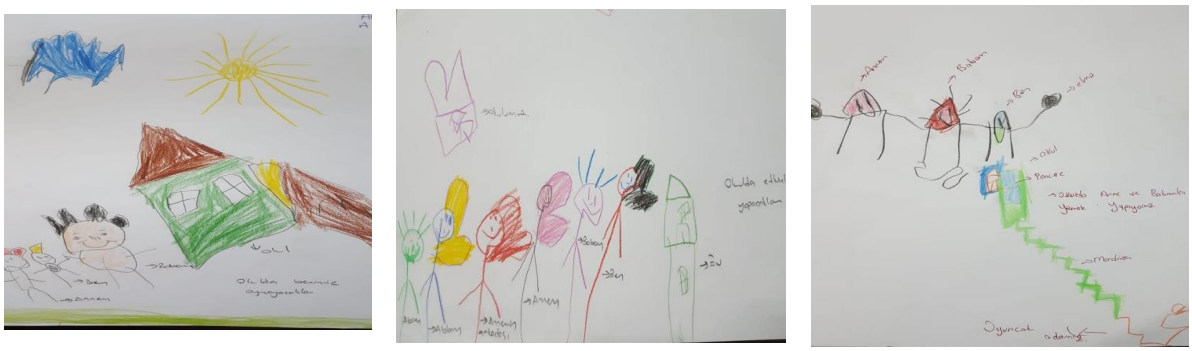


Figure 5. *Picture 6, 7 and 8*

- "I would like to cook together." (P-10)
- "I would like them to play games." (P-14/P-6)
- "I would like them to play games and bring gifts to my friends." (P-19)
- "I would like them to draw a picture." (P-15)

It can be seen that the data obtained from children's interview forms and drawings regarding PI activities are quantitatively similar. In addition to these data, 85% of the children drew PI activities in the classroom environment (Picture 9). 15% of the children drew symbols related to garden activities (Picture 10).



Figure 6. *Picture 9 and 10*

Children's Feelings Towards Parental Involvement

In the interview form for PI, the question "Would you like to help your parents when they come to class?" All of the children answered "yes" to the question. All the children who wanted to participate in PI asked, “How do you feel when your family comes to your classroom?” They gave positive answers to the question as "happiness, love, kindness, beautiful things". Based on these findings, it can be concluded that children have developed a positive perspective on PI and are eager to participate in the process. Here are some examples of children's answers:

- “Happy, very happy.” (P-11)
- “Good, very good. Happy and excited.” (P-12) “I feel good.” (P-13)

DISCUSSION

The research results show that the perceptions of 5-year-old children in this study about PI in school are 'mother and/or father doing activities in the classroom'. Although children perceived the PI process as just their parents coming to school, children with siblings wanted their siblings to take part in PI. Some children see this process as an activity in which their relatives or friends can participate. According to Morrison (2003), family involvement is the process in which family members are involved in the child's educational program, and the child's perspective in the research overlaps with theories explaining PI. Since PI supports not only the child's development but also everyone involved in this process (Zembat & Unutkan, 1999), it is essential for individuals in the child's immediate environment to participate in PI. When the child sees that her/his family members and teacher cooperate, her/his positive attitude towards school will increase (Decker & Decker, 2005). Preschool education in Türkiye has been carried out within the framework of a parental participation program since 2006 (MEB, 2006), and the activities carried out during the preschool education process are handled with an approach that receives support from families. Thus, parents whose children receive pre-school education also have the opportunity to be actively involved in the educational process and gain some benefits (Ekinci Vural & Kocabaş, 2016). However, this study shows that PI is limited to parents, and other family members are not included in the process. This finding provides guidance for school-based PI activities to be planned in the future.

Although the children in this study wanted to see other family members (siblings, relatives, and friends) in PI activities, the study findings show that mothers participated in PI activities to a large extent (73.7%), and father participation was limited. It is seen that mothers are more involved than fathers in PI studies conducted for the preschool period in Türkiye (Akkaya, 2007; Toran & Özgen, 2018; Varol et al., 2023). One of the reasons for this situation may be that Türkiye has a patriarchal cultural structure, and the roles of fathers and mothers are different in this culture (Belsky, 1979). In such societies, the father is responsible for disciplining the child and the economy, while the mother assumes responsibilities regarding childcare (Riley et al., 2000). Although nowadays the roles of fathers in children's lives are increasing, the person who is socially responsible for childcare is still seen as the mother (Craig, 2006; Lang et al., 2014). Studies conducted in the context of Türkiye show that mothers undertake

the parental role regarding their children's education (Gürşimşek et al., 2007; Ertan, 2017; Koçak, 2004). One reason mothers may be more involved in PI is that their motivation for participation (Ertan, 2017; Marsiglo, 2004) and self-efficacy beliefs (Ertan, 2017) are higher. Parents who feel effective and valued in their parenting roles are more actively involved in the care and education of their children (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Sheldon, 2002). Parents' working status and working hours can also be considered as factors affecting PI. It is observed that fathers generally work in jobs that require longer working hours (Fitzgerald, 2004), while mothers tend to work in more flexible jobs than fathers (Heymann & Earle, 2000). However, although fathers' working hours seem to be associated with spending less time with their children (Bonney, Kelley, & Levant, 1999), when both mothers and fathers work full time, mothers spend more time with their children than fathers (Aldous et al., 1998). Another reason why mothers are more involved in PI than fathers may be that female staff are more heavily involved in early childhood education. Female teachers and school staff may feel comfortable communicating with mothers or may be more inviting to mothers. Existing studies also show that schools and teachers connect more with mothers and invite mothers more (Pruett, 2001; Turbiville & Marquis, 2001). Although mothers take a more active role in PI, the father's involvement in this participation process will have positive effects for both the child and the parents. A striking finding of this study is that all children with siblings, in addition to their parents, included their siblings in PI. While family systems theory states that all individuals in the family have the capacity to influence each other (Kreppner & Lerner, 1989; Minuchin, 1988), Attachment theory states that normal attachment between siblings provides friendship, support, sincerity and sensitivity (Bowlby, 1969). These theories suggest that the children in the study group have a healthy attachment relationship with their siblings, and therefore, they may have wanted to take them to school, which is an important area for them. Children may want to show their proud siblings to their friends and teachers, or to show their siblings their school. When the older child of the family includes their younger sibling in this process, they can positively influence their sibling to enjoy school. When studies on PI are generally evaluated, it can be said that parents are often the focus, and siblings are often overlooked as important family members in this process. The fact that some children include their relatives and friends in their drawings is a clear indication that each child has individual differences, and their microsystems also change. Considering that each child's family dynamics and microsystems are different, the child's views on PI should be obtained. This finding of the study may be a solution for schools offering low PI rates. Based on the opinion taken from the child, when the parents or older brother/sister cannot take part in the PI event for any reason, the grandmother/grandfather or other relatives may be included in this process.

When the PI process is examined in terms of activity diversity, the findings obtained from the children show that parents are limited to experiment/play/art activities, and mostly have them do art activities. Although there are many types of activities that can be done in preschool (such as playing with puppets, reading books, and outdoor activities), there may be many reasons why parents are limited to only three types. The first of these may be that only the teacher decides on the PI activity. Some studies show that teachers establish one-way communication with parents during the PI process and convey to them the activity they will do (Ekinci Vural & Doğan-Altun, 2021). The reasons teachers may do this include the difficulty of communicating with parents (Jafarov, 2015; Marin & Bocoș, 2017), the desire to facilitate the process by determining easy activities for parents, and planning activities that are compatible with the curriculum (Akkaya, 2007). Another reason may be that the parent feels inadequate about PI and has low self-confidence. It is seen that as parents' education level decreases, their self-confidence in parental involvement also decreases (Swick & Broadway, 1997).). Considering that the education level of the parents in this study was mostly bachelor's degree or above, the level of education in this study cannot be considered a risk factor, but their lack of self-confidence in PI may have directed them to more well-known, easier activities. According to the study findings, parents mostly make art activities happen in the classroom. It can be thought that the art activity was preferred because the parents who participated in this study were mostly mothers. This finding of the study is very important and remarkable for educators planning PI. The PI that will be prepared in the future shows that the types of activities should be increased and a richer environment should be provided to the child.

Although the PI activities carried out by the parents in the study were limited to three groups, it was observed that the children's activity type requests (except for 3 children) did not go beyond this. This may be because the child's perception of classroom activities is limited to these types. The rich content that will be presented to the child will also trigger the child's imagination. Looking at the results of the study, it is seen that the majority of children want to play games at school with their families. In addition, children included symbols related to various art and culinary activities in their drawings. Although children mostly want games to be played in PI activities, it is seen that the activities are mostly art activities. There may be many reasons why the child's expectations and the activities do not proportionally match. The first of these is that the child's play needs may not

be adequately met at school and/or at home. Although the MEB 2006 curriculum is a play/game-based curriculum, according to teachers' opinions, there are some obstacles to outdoor games. School gardens are not suitable enough for outdoor games (Alat et al., 2013), school gardens do not contain different ground structures (Gönen & Saranlı, 2014), lack of teachers, lack of equipment for children (such as waterproof overalls and shoes), weather conditions, and health concerns (Alat et al., 2013; Maynard & Waters, 2007), parents' safety concerns (Brussoni et al., 2012; Wyver et al., 2010) are barriers to outdoor play. Since children cannot exercise their large muscle groups and relieve their energy with outdoor games, they may want games instead of tabletop activities. Study findings also show that children mostly imagine PI activities in the classroom environment and use outdoor space less. This shows that schools generally include in-class activities, and outdoor spaces are less preferred when planning activities. Due to parents' working hours, the time that today's children play games with their parents has also been shortened (Gülen & Barış, 2021). With after-school, dinner, and bedtime routines, there is limited time for games. Since this situation shortens parent-child play time, children may want to play with their parents at school. During PI, when the child's opinion is taken for in-class activities, the child can be asked 'why he/she wants this' and a small clue can be obtained about the origin of the child's interests and needs. This thematic finding, which reveals the activity process and child expectations in PI, is a remarkable key finding for teachers involved in the PI process. PI activities can be determined through teacher-parent-child interactions, and more diverse activities can be planned to support the child's development and social-emotional and physical needs.

One of the most important aspects of the PI process is that it has a positive impact on the psychological development of children (Çakmak, 2010). While all of the children participating in the research wanted to take an active part in this process, they also expressed their positive feelings about the process. This finding shows that in addition to taking the child's views during the PI process, the child should also be physically included in the activity process. Considering Roger Hart's participation ladder (1992), it can be said that the children in this study did not take part in any steps of the ladder and remained passive in PI. In Trilla and Novella's (2001) participation model, these children take part in 'simple participation', which is the subtype of participation. This type of participation means that the child participates in a project or activity as an audience (Koran, 2024). As Treseder (1997) stated, children can first be informed about the process so that they become active participants in the PI process, not just 'simple participants' or 'involvement'. With the support of adults, equal decision-making (between teacher-parent-child) can be initiated in the PI process first in the preschool period, and the degrees/levels of child participation can be increased day by day.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

Preschool education is of critical importance in terms of laying the foundation for children's future life and education. For this reason, starting PI activities in the pre-school education period is very important for both the child's development and the parent-child-school relationship. When the PI studies conducted for the preschool period in Türkiye are examined, it is seen that PI planning is made from an adult perspective and children's expectations are ignored when creating programs in participation studies. This situation in the national literature shows that in the participation model of Trilla and Novella (2001), the child is included as a simple participant in PI. This study differs from existing studies in that it reveals the child's perspective on PI. This study, which addresses the child's perspective with child-specific methods, shows that the reality of PI and child expectations are different. A striking finding in the study is that parents limited the variety of activities available to them, and games were not among the top priority activities, despite children wanting to play games with their families the most in the classroom. When it comes to PI, it is seen that not only the parent figure comes to life in children's perceptions, but they also want their siblings, friends, and relatives to come to school within the framework of PI. Study findings show that the child's perspective overlaps with the 'definition of parental involvement' of theories explaining PI. Since each child's expectations from their parents (or the person who comes to PI) in the classroom will be different, when planning a family participation activity, the teacher should plan a participation activity by taking the opinions of the child and the parent. It is thought that if children participate as active participants and planners, all family members and the school will benefit maximally from the process.

In the light of this study, the following suggestions are offered for PI studies to be planned:

for Families

1.Obtaining the child's opinions before coming to school for PI,

2.Active participation of the father in PI programs,

3.In PI programs, it is recommended that other loved ones of the child, other than the parents, are invited to the class.

for Teachers

1.When preparing PI programs, the interests and needs of both the family and the child should be considered, and two-way, effective communication methods should be employed for this purpose.

2.Providing a wider variety of activities to families,

3.It is recommended that families be informed about ways to communicate with the child.

for Researchers

1.Increasing the number of research samples,

2.Adding children from families in different socio-economic regions to the study sample,

3.It is recommended that different child-specific data collection tools be included in the research.

Limitations

This study is limited to 20 children living in Kastamonu province.

Researchers' Contribution Rate

Authors	Literature review	Method	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Results	Conclusion
Author 1	☒	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒
Author 2	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

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