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Preschool Teachers' Views on Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services in Early Childhood Education*

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the opinions of preschool teachers on guidance and psychological counseling services. The method of the study is qualitative research design. The research data were collected via the interviews with the preschool teachers. The study group of the research consists of 24 preschool teachers working in Yozgat city in Turkey. Content analysis was made use of while forming the finding part. The results of the study display that the preschool teachers perceive guidance and psychological counseling services as "guiding," "informing," "assistance" and "cooperation" services. Also, parents and teachers also need the guidance teacher mostly in situations related to behavioral problems, special needs students, adaptation problems, and family-related problems. It was observed that preschool teachers perceived that guidance and psychological counseling services should be in preschool education institutions but that the guidance services they received were not sufficient.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Guidance Services, Psychological Counselor and Guidance Teacher

1. Introduction

The education that will be given to the children being between 0-8 ages is extremely important to support their cognitive, physical, social and emotional development (Altınkaynak & Yanıklar, 2014). The education given at early age provides certain opportunities for the individuals to have qualified lives in the future (Tan, 1992). The academic skills of the children are also supported by preschool education (Güler & Çapri, 2019). It is extremely important for individuals to recognize their talents at an early age and reveal their potential (Altınkaynak & Yanıklar, 2014). Education in the early childhood years is recognized as one of the important factors behind academic success (Lee & Burka, 2002). While the cognitive and social aspects of children develop during the preschool education period, their missing aspects are also supported (Budak, 2016). A healthy childhood period

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enables children to develop their life skills (Lamy, 2013). Some problems that develop during the pre-school education period can cause some problems in the lives of individuals in the future when support is not received. For this reason, the ability of children to receive help and support in the areas they need in this critical period has a very important effect on their being at peace with themselves, discovering their potential, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, and understanding themselves and their environment (Baş, 2019).

Guidance and psychological counseling services provide support services to children and families at schools in areas they may need. Guidance and psychological counseling services support individuals to make the right choices in their lives and adapt to the environment they live in (Binbaşıoğlu, 1986 cited in Hatunoğlu and Hatunoğlu, 2006). The basis of these services provided in schools is the self-realization of the individual (Yeşilyaprak, 2015). Guidance and psychological counseling services enable students to perform their developmental tasks successfully and help them in solving their problems (Yeşilyaprak, 2003). Guidance and psychological counseling services in the preschool education period are carried out within the scope of educational, vocational and personal/social guidance services, including the socialization of the child, preparation for primary school, self-expression, positive self-perception, positive attitudes towards professions and family guidance (MEB, 2017).

Preschool education period is a very important period in terms of affecting the future academic life of children and the first attitudes they will develop towards learning (Akgün, 2010). Preschool education also plays an important role as its effects are permanent (Dye, 1984). Guidance and psychological counseling services provided in this period also meet the educational needs of children, support their development and provide support for them to become individuals who develop positive attitudes and skills towards their education life in the future (Yeşilyaprak, 2015).

In order for the guidance and psychological counseling services in schools to be effective, the function and harmony of preschool teachers are important (Özgüven, 2001). Teachers can also play an important role in better understanding children with skills such as effective listening (Kottler 2007). Also, for the guidance and psychological counseling services in preschool education to be more qualified, preschool teachers should be informed about this field (Akgün, 2010). It is very important to increase the awareness of preschool teachers about guidance and psychological counseling services.

Considering that the education given at an early age is very important for the development of children, the guidance and psychological counseling services to be provided in this period have an important role in reaching the desired goal of the education offered at this level. When the researches in the literature regarding the guidance and psychological counseling services provided in the preschool education period are examined, it is thought that this research will contribute to the field in terms of determining the situation regarding the guidance and psychological counseling services in the preschool education and developing these services.

As a result, every study on the fields of guidance and psychological counseling services in the preschool education period contributes to the development of these fields. Due to the previously mentioned reasons above, it is possible to claim that examining the opinions of preschool teachers about guidance and psychological counseling services is significant and vital.

1.1. Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services

Guidance services and psychological counseling services in schools complement each other and are seen as integrated services (Taylı, 2016). Although these terms are often used interchangeably in the literature, they differ in meaning. However, these concepts are related to each other. According to Kepçeoğlu (2010), psychological counseling services are at the center of guidance services; however, guidance services include psychological counseling services. He also stresses guidance services as a broader field than psychological counseling and a more comprehensive field that also includes psychological counseling. When the relevant

literature is examined, it has been stated that guidance services cover psychological counseling services as well as being included (Kuzgun, 2000; Yeşilyaprak, 2015).

It is understood from these statements that guidance services and psychological counseling services evoke each other that the concepts of 'guidance' and 'psychological counseling' are interrelated and are carried out in schools as a whole. In the light of this information, guidance services and psychological counseling services were evaluated as a whole in this study. Persons responsible for planning and executing these services in schools are referred to as 'guidance teachers' or 'psychological counselors.' However, as it is more general and inclusive, it is expressed as 'guide teacher' in this research.

Specialists in schools have three duties as psychological counseling, consultation and coordination (Myrick, 1997). Other duties are expressed as group counseling, classroom guidance, and peer assistance. Guidance and psychological counseling services are the services offered to the student at the point of getting to know himself, being aware of the opportunities around him, making the right decisions for his life, improving himself, problem solving and adapting (Güven, 2009). With these services, it is aimed for the person to know and understand himself, to develop his capacity and as a result, to realize himself (Kepçeoğlu, 2010). For the realization of these services in schools, it is necessary to have guidance teachers (Gordon, 1957).

1.2. Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services in Preschool Education Period

The development and change of individuals continue throughout life. People need support and help at every stage of their lives as they continue to develop and change all the time. Psychological counseling services personally, educationally and professionally support individuals. Guidance and psychological counseling services with this specialty should be a service offered to individuals at every stage of life (Kuzgun, 1992).

The school life that children experience during the preschool education period and the attitudes they develop towards learning affect their academic lives (Tan, 1992). Hence, it is aimed that children develop positive attitudes towards learning, adapt to the school environment, reveal their talents, and develop in all aspects thanks to the guidance and psychological counseling services carried out during this education period (Özabacı, 2010).

With the guidance and psychological counseling services provided in preschool education institutions, it is ensured that children become individuals with advanced social and emotional skills in their later lives (Hoffman, 1991). This situation affects the development of individuals in their later lives and benefits them (Hoffman, 1991). In general, the personal, professional and educational needs of children are supported by the counseling services in this period (Dilekmen, 2014). As a result, it can be said that the guidance and psychological counseling services should start from the preschool education period and continue throughout life (Ilgar, 2010).

2. Method

The study aims at examining the preschool teacher's perspectives of the guidance and psychological counseling services in the preschool education period. The study is a qualitative interpretive investigation with human understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The reason why the preschool teachers are preferred is because of the fact that they particularly reflect to what extends the guidance and psychological counseling services are needed. Also they are the right people as they observe the need of these services impartially due to being the active actors of this educational period.

2.1. Participants

The study group of the research consists of preschool teachers working in Yozgat city in Turkey. The purposive sampling method is used to determine the study group. Purposeful sampling allows for in-depth study of situations that are thought to have rich information (Patton, 2015). 24 preschool teachers participated in the research. They are referred as P1, P2, etc. for the privacy of their personal information. They were randomly

coded with participant numbers. All of those who participated in the research were women. The age ranges of them are 24-40. The terms of their seniorities are in the range of 1-16 years. Their term of office at their school is at least one; at most 11 years. 23 out of 24 preschool teachers have undergraduate degrees; one person has a master's degree. There are guidance teachers in 12 teachers' schools; the other 12 teachers do not have a counselor in their school.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

The data of the research were obtained through interviews conducted using semi-structured interview questions. Interview questions were prepared by the researcher scanning the relevant literature. The prepared interview questions were presented to the opinion of two experts and their approvals were obtained. The interview form was finalized as a result of the preliminary interviews with the teachers. In addition, a personal information form was used to collect some personal information of the participants in the study. In this form, the researcher's age, gender, seniority, tenure in the institution and educational status were requested.

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2.4. Data Collection Process

At the beginning of the research, research permission was obtained from Yozgat Bozok University Ethics Committee and Yozgat Provincial Directorate of National Education in Turkey. During the period when education was suspended or distance education was started, teachers were contacted via telephone. Participants were determined to collect research data by informing the teachers about the study. In the preliminary interviews, pre-school teachers were informed about the subject of the study and the meeting schedule was created. As part of the Covid-19 measures, interviews with the participants were planned online. Interviews were held online with each participant in different time periods and on specified dates in May and October 2020. Questions were asked to the participants in order to learn their views on guidance and psychological counseling services, and the issues they wanted to point out about this field were discussed. The questions in the semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher were not given to the teachers beforehand. In this direction, the data of the research were collected through the interview questions prepared by the researcher during the interviews with the participants. Interviews with a total of 24 teachers were completed. A total of 390 minutes of interview recording was obtained. Then, the recorded interviews were transcribed. As a result of detailed reading of the interview notes, which were transcribed, themes related to the subject were formed. These themes were explained in the findings section of the research as a result of repeated and detailed examinations.

2.5. Analysis of Data

The data collected in this study were analyzed by descriptive analysis method. For this reason, direct quotations are frequently included in the analysis of the data of this study. In line with the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews with the participants, themes were created and these themes were explained. In the analysis process, concepts and themes were determined at the end of detailed readings. The main purpose of this type of analysis is to present the findings to the reader by summarizing and interpreting (Özdemir, 2010).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Meanings Attributed to Psychological Counseling and Guidance Services

According to the findings, teachers' PCG services are mostly "guidance" and "help"; it has been determined that some consider it as an "information" and "cooperation" service. Sample participant statements on the subject are as follows:

"It is guiding, helping in matters that you do not know, and getting ideas. I think that the guidance services help the teacher when he/she is insufficient with regard to students and parents, increases the relationship between parents and teachers, and communicates with students more easily" (P10).

"If the students, teachers and parents need help, the guidance service is the guidance service" (P1).

"The information given to people, families, children, is guiding and guiding" (P20).

When the relevant literature was examined, it was seen in Öztapak's (2018) study that guidance teachers were perceived as problem solvers, assistants, supporters and guides by preschool teachers. It was stated in Öztapak's research that school counselors are perceived as the first person to be contacted in case of any problem in schools, and that they have an important role in the creation of a safe school environment and in preventive studies. In the study of Aliyev et al. (2012), the responsibilities of guidance teachers were determined by pre-school teachers; guidance, being a source of information and collaborating. The role of counselors working in pre-school institutions in maintaining the balance and cooperation between parents, teachers and administrators in coping with the problems encountered in schools was emphasized in the study of Aliyev et al. (2012). PCG services are an aid process based on cooperation and common understanding (Siyez, 2019). According to the American School Psychological Counselors Association, the duties of guidance teachers are; psychological counseling, group guidance, consultation and coordination (Radd, 1998; Myrick, 2003; Montgomery Village Middle School Counseling Department cited in: Siyez., 2019, p.304). Counseling service counselors cooperate with teachers, administrators and parents about the student; coordination service should lead the guidance teacher in the planning and implementation of activities in order to carry out PCG services in schools; psychological counseling service provides students with psychological help to cope with their problems; Group guidance refers to the activities that guidance teachers do in small groups at schools to support the development of students (Siyez, 2019).

3.2. The Function of Guidance Teacher in Necessary Situations

Seven out of 12 pre-school teachers who have a guidance counselor in their school evaluated the guidance teacher as sufficient when they needed it. The other five teachers stated that the guidance teacher was insufficient. Sample participant statements on the subject are as follows:

"The guidance teacher looks at it from a different perspective and makes explanations about the source of the problems. It illuminates me and the parent at points that I cannot see." (P11)

"The opinions of the guidance teacher are effective for the parents. Therefore, I find it useful." (P12)

"When I want to get professional help, the guidance counselor usually cannot solve the problems, even if he is solution-oriented about the family and the child. The guidance counselor I work with treats the child like a baby. I think you missed that moment. Maybe he acts like that because he has no professional experience. The fact that there is a guidance service in our school does not comfort me." (P6)

When similar studies are examined, it was emphasized in Akgün's (2010) study that the participants were satisfied with the PDR service they received and they did not have any other expectations from PDR services. In the study of Aliyev et al. (2012), it was stated that school psychological counselors who will work in pre-school education institutions should receive more detailed training.

Nine out of 12 pre-school teachers who do not have a guidance teacher in their school stated that they try to cope with the situations they need a guidance teacher. 4 people stated that they consulted the guidance teachers in other schools or referred the parents to a specialist. Sample participant statements on the subject are as follows:

"I meet with students and parents. If my student has violent behavior, I apply techniques such as ignoring, taking breaks, speaking, and being warm. Then I contact his family" (P15).

"I consult guidance services in other institutions" (P21)

"If I cannot overcome and cope in any way, I want them to apply to a specialist" (P20)

In Tekin's (2012) study, it was seen that communicating with families is the most preferred method as a method of solving the problems faced by teachers. In Bilgin's (2017) study, it was stated that the problems remained unresolved because there were no guidance teachers in schools, and teachers who had the opportunity to work with counselors faced fewer problems.

3.3. The Situations of Parents Need Counseling Teachers According to Preschool Teachers

According to the pre-school teachers, it was seen that the situations that parents need guidance teachers are mostly behavioral problems, family-related problems, students with special needs and adaptation problems. Sexual identity development, general information activities, privacy education and health education are among the other conditions mentioned. Sample participant statements on the subject are as follows:

"They need issues such as behavioral disorder" (P20).

"They apply to the guidance service on issues related to parental attitudes and special education" (P1).

"Parents of my special education students need more" (P24)

"They go to school on issues such as adaptation problems and unwillingness to attend school" (P6).

"They need privacy education, family communication and child education" (P23).

In Bilgin's (2017) study, it was stated that families have expectations from schools for professional and personal guidance. In the study of Konca (2020), parents support the emotional, moral and social development of children from preschool education; develop skills such as speaking, learning, socializing and adapting to the environment; It was emphasized that they expected it to have a positive effect on peer interaction and preparation for primary school. In Akgün's (2010) study, it was stated that guidance teachers should organize parent trainings for parents in pre-school education period. In the related literature, it has been stated by studies that family education to be given in the preschool education period is extremely important within the scope of preventive studies (Aliyev et al., 2012; Gençoğlu et al., 2019). Families also need guidance and psychological counseling services in order to monitor the development of their children and to support them personally and emotionally. These services also include family trainings that provide information about the child's characteristics, disability, reasons and various development areas within the scope of family counseling service (Özgülven, 1999, as cited in Yüksel, 2019).

3.4. The Findings on Vocational Guidance

When the findings related to vocational guidance are examined, it is seen that the majority of the teachers do not need the work of the guidance teacher in the pre-school education period; and some of them have the perception that there is no need for vocational guidance in this period. An example participant statement is:

"Guidance service in the field of vocational guidance will be useful, but I think that the education we provide in the pre-school period is sufficient. Since they have more abstract ideas about vocational guidance, their thoughts in this period are in a way that comes and goes." (P13)

When the relevant literature was examined, it was stated in Kılıçoğlu's (2013) study that guidance teachers found pre-school teachers inadequate in the field of vocational guidance and that teachers should receive in-service training in the field of PCR. The rapidity of values, attitudes, perceptions and personality development, especially during childhood, affects the professional development of children and their choice of profession in the future (Yeşilyaprak, 2015).

3.5. The Findings on Educational Guidance

When the findings related to educational guidance were examined, it was concluded that the majority of preschool teachers needed guidance teachers for students with special needs. It was determined that some of the teachers stated that the development of social skills through activities such as games and drama was more important than school success in this period, except for students with special needs. The participant opinions on the subject are as follows:

“I have inclusion students. So, I need guidance on how to treat them and how to prepare individual training program documents” (P2).

“Since it is a small level in terms of age group, there is not much need in terms of education such as study programs. Students in this group are not preparing for an exam or their learning experiences are usually in the classroom. In addition, since the guidance teachers know the characteristics of this period to a certain extent, we handle such matters ourselves. If there is a lot of learning disability or giftedness, we share with the counselor in these areas” (P3)

In Bilgin's (2017) study, it was stated that pre-school education teachers needed support to provide necessary guidance to students and parents with special educational needs. In Türkeç's (2012) study, it was stated that preschool teachers consider themselves highly competent in taking into account the individual differences of children, supporting the effort of the child's academic development, and collaborating with relevant experts and families in order to determine the developmental level and learning style of children with learning needs are being done.

3.6. The Findings on Personal Guidance

When the findings related to personal guidance were examined, it was determined that preschool teachers needed guidance teachers for behavioral problems, adaptation problems, family-related problems, values education, sexual identity development, privacy education, addiction, abuse and health education. The majority of preschool teachers stated that they needed the support of the guidance teacher in the field of personal guidance. Sample statements of the participants are as follows:

“I need issues such as violence, slang, behavioral disorder” (P23).

“I also go to the guidance service for my students who have problems in adapting to school” (P6).

“I need help and developing empathy skills” (P20).

“I did not apply to the guidance service on any subject in the individual field. I didn't need much. I tried to fix the problems myself.” (P6).

When the relevant literature was examined, it was stated in Kılıçoğlu's (2013) study that guidance teachers found pre-school teachers inadequate in the fields of personal guidance, behavior management and child psychology and that preschool teachers should receive in-service training in the field of PCR. In Tekin's (2012) study, the situations in which a counselor is needed in the preschool education period include unauthorized use of objects, behavioral disorders, communication problems with children, distraction, reluctance, sexual behaviors and masturbation, sleep disorders, grief process, parental guidance and appropriate guidance. It has been seen that there are situations that fall within the scope of personal guidance, such as Preschool education period is a period when counseling services are important in terms of laying the foundations of children's personalities, shaping their behaviors, exhibiting many positive or negative behaviors, and adapting to a new environment (Baş, 2019).

3.7. The Necessity of PCG Services in Pre-school Education Period

When the findings regarding the necessity of PCG services in the pre-school education period are examined, it is seen that the preschool teachers say, *“I find the counseling service very necessary in the pre-school period. And they are enough for us. Working with the younger age group is very different. They cannot express everything verbally. Problems arise with more behavioral changes. I think that the guidance teacher can understand and solve these better.” (P5)*, it was seen that all of them found PCG services necessary. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that there are studies that PCG services are necessary in the pre-school education period in

terms of reaching the child, healthy development, and revealing the capacity and abilities of the student (Gençoğlu et al. 2019; Kanak et al. 2018; Yerlikaya et al., 2014).

4. Conclusion

As a result, when these research findings are evaluated, for possible future research; it can be suggested to expand the scope of the research by including parents and guidance teachers in research, and by observing the classroom environment or students. It can be considered to increase the norms of guidance counselors in pre-school education institutions for practice, to increase the equipment of guidance and psychological counselor candidates in the undergraduate education period, to inform pre-school teachers about special education and guidance areas and pre-school education guidance programs.

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