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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARENTS TO ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS FOR CHILDREN IN THE PRESCHOOL AGE OF 5-6 YEARS *

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Abstract

The child's positive relationship with the environment, the right attitude towards the environment, the development of behavior and skills, awareness and sensitivity towards the environment begins with the attitude of parents. The child, who has gained awareness by observing his or her parents, is also seen as a successful and compatible individual who can express himself / herself in the social environment he lives in (Yavuzer, 2001). In the study prepared for this purpose, it examines the contribution of parents to their children's environmental awareness in preschool period. The sample of the study consists of the independent preschools attached to the Ministry of National Education in Ağrı center and the parents of 5-6-year old children who attend preschool. As a data collection tool a questionnaire developed by the researcher was applied and the obtained data were analyzed according to frequency and percentage values. As a result of the research, it was seen that the parents' positive contribution to their children's environmental awareness. While parents are involved in environmental activities, they encounter some problems; the lack of time to actively participate in environmental education, the lack of economic support and resources, and the need for appropriate channels of communication for adults.

Keywords: Parent, child, environment.

EBEVEYNLERİN 5-6 YAŞ OKUL ÖNCESİ DÖNEMDEKİ ÇOCUKLARINA ÇEVRESEL FARKINDALIĞINA OLAN KATKISININ İNCELENMESİ

Özet

Çocuğun çevre ile olumlu ilişki kurması, çevreyle ilgili doğru tutum, davranış ve becerileri geliştirmesi, çevreye karşı farkındalığı ve duyarlılığı anne ve babanın sergilediği tutumundan başlar. Ebeveynini gözlem yaparak farkındalık kazanan çocuğun, aynı zamanda içinde bulunduğu sosyal çevrede kendisini ifade edebilen, akran ilişkilerinde başarılı, uyumlu bireyler olduğu görülmektedir (Yavuzer, 2001). Bu amaç doğrultusunda hazırlanan bu çalışma, okul öncesi dönemde ebeveynlerin çocuklarına çevresel farkındalığına olan katkısını incelemektir. Çalışmanın örneklemini Ağrı il merkezinde Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'na bağlı bağımsız anaokullarına ve anasınıflarına devam eden 5-6 yaş çocukların ebeveynleri oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak; araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bir anket uygulanmış ve elde edilen veriler frekans ve yüzdelik değerlere göre analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda; ebeveynlerin çocuklarına çevresel farkındalığına olan katkısı olduğu görülmüştür. Ebeveynlerin çevre etkinliklerine katılmada problemler yaşamaktadır bunlardan bazıları ; çevre eğitime aktif katılmak için yeterli vakitlerinin olmaması, ekonomik desteğin ve kaynakların kıtlığı, yetişkinlerle uygun iletişim kanallarının geliştirilmesine gereksinim duyulmasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ebeveyn, çocuk, çevre.

1.INTRODUCTION

The environment, together with all living beings, is a combination of elements of nature and human structure. Human interaction with nature is in constant change and sharing. These interactions are

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the result of the fact that the whole circle has become a problem, often the human-caused factors distorting the nature and experience of nature (Buhan, 2006). Environmental education for the first years; mainly, guidance and caregivers with nature to be accompanied by adults enjoy discovering the world is focused on generating small children should be founded on a sense of wonder and joy of discovery (Wilson, 1996).

The role and effect of education is quite high in the perception of the environment consciousness in children and in the transformation of the love of nature and environmental protection into persistent behaviors and life style (Atasoy, 2008). This educational model, which is crucial to Karataş (2013), is designed to support people and make them compatible with who are receptive to the problems of the environment, who can present ideas for solving environmental problems, who are actively involved, thinking, arguing, questioning, understanding sustainable life and sustainable development. According to Okur Akçay (2015), in order for our country to progress scientifically, we need brains that are able to bring about the questioning, searching, suggesting solutions for the problems we face. It is also possible to provide these qualities to children since young ages.

For those trained in the environment, cultural tolerance as well as environmental tolerance should be developed. This is because the education given for the environment has both individual and social as well as national and global objectives and prospects (Atasoy and Ertürk, 2008). The attitudes and behaviors of parents on this issue are taken during the pre-school period. Therefore, the positive attitude and behavior towards the environment is an important process which aims to increase the environmental sensitivity of the people and the education for environment should be lifelong starting from early ages (Akçay, 2006). In this case, education for the environment is an important element in creating citizens who have a high awareness of environmental sensitivity and environment, adopting environmental philosophy and lifestyle by changing children's behavior in society, their social relations, their lives and their attitudes towards the world (Atasoy, 2005). According to Legault (1999), pre-school children are strongly emotionally responsive to nature. In this age, children show the ability to understand the elements of the natural world more carefully and in detail.

Being aware of environmental problems, believing in the necessity of struggle with them and also making efforts in this direction is a situation that every individual should have. Cognitive awareness, defined as being aware of what you know and how you learn, is very important in educating individuals who are sensitive to environmental problems and have environmental awareness.

According to researches, years of pre-school learning is a fundamental process for the development of attitudes towards the environment. If children do not develop respect and concern for the environment in the pre-school period, they have stated that these attitudes will never develop in later life (Tilbury, 1994, Wilson, 1996). According to the study by Futer (2005), it has been seen that models that children take as role models can change children's environmental attitudes and personality. It was determined that children who talked with their parents about the environment at home have a higher level of environmental behavior than those who do not. Horwitz (1996) notes that the interest towards the environment and the attitude towards nature have begun to occur at an early age. Positive attitudes towards the environment are formed by formal education, especially during early childhood education is very important to this shape (Taşkın, 2004). Loughland et al. (2003) found that the reasons underlying the perception of high school and junior high school children from another dimension are socio-economic level, family, education, and place of living. In a study conducted with high school students in Turkey, the environmental awareness of the students was not related to the socio-economic level, and the environmental awareness in the students was dependent on the education, the effectiveness of the educators and the parents (Uzun and Sağlam, 2005).

Children need adult people who are teachers, parents, and other community members to be involved in individual and community decisions, to spend more time, to be informed about their current behavior and expectations about the future. Environmentally trained teachers and adults are very important in protecting the balance of the environment in the differentiation of attitudes, values, and behaviors that positively affect sustainable social and environmental relationships, both within and between generations (Davis, 1998, Laing, 2004). Researchers also pointed out that environmental education is an informal aspect as well as a formal educational process. Hence, it is emphasized that an educational approach that works with school and community cooperation plays an important role in reaching environmental goals (Tali Tal, 2004).

Young children learn by interacting with the environment, educators and adults, the frequency of child-environment interaction in the first year, should participate on the nature and quality. Parents should be good examples of their interest and behavior towards nature, loving and protecting nature for their children. The parental role model with behaviors such as planting seedlings, trees, or flowers with children, separating for recycling, and showing love for animals improves the child's environmental love and increases the interest in the environment (Wilson, 1993).

In addition, there are some factors that negatively affect the ability of children to sustain their behavior in their homes through environmental education (Uzzell, 1999):

- Inadequacy of communication between children and their parents.
- Parents should say that their children have a say in relation to environmental issues, whereas children should not regard themselves as having a say in relation to environmental issues.
- Parents assume the school is a source of information about environmental problems.
- The child declares that the parent is influenced to them, but the parent does not think effect of the child. This can be seen as a traditional model in which the family takes on an expert role, whereas the children have very little role.

Possible advantages of stimulating intergenerational interaction and communicating about environmental issues include:

- Strengthen connections between student environmental learning and action;
- Exposing adults to environmental information and actions stemming from school education programs;
- Strengthening students in their homes and communities with regard to environmental decision-making and action; and
- Supporting families and communities with an emphasis on active participation (Ballantyne et al., 1998).

In this respect, it is necessary for parents and school to be in the process of bringing the program to the square, in order to increase the quality of environmental education and to reach its goals (Tali Tal 2004, Ballantyne et al 1998, Uzzell 1999).

Being aware of environmental problems, believing in the necessity of struggle with them and also making efforts in this direction is a situation that every individual should have. Cognitive awareness, defined as being aware of what you know and how you learn, is very important in educating individuals who are sensitive to environmental problems and have environmental awareness. The aim of this research is to determine the contribution of parents to environmental awareness of pre-school children aged 5-6 years.

2. METHOD

Research is a descriptive study using the screening model. The subject of the investigation is trying to be defined as if the individual or object is within his / her own circumstances. No attempt is made to alter or influence them in any way (Karasar, 2002). The screening model is a research approach aimed at describing in the past or as it exists. In the descriptive screening model, an analysis of the data obtained from a large number of subjects and objects within a given time frame is sought to answer the research problem or problems (Arseven, 2001). The sample of the study consists of independent preschools attached to the Ministry of National Education in Ağrı province center parents (43 people) of children aged 5-6 who attend preschools of primary schools.

2.1. Sample of Research

The sample of the study consists of independent preschools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Ağrı province center and parents of children aged 5-6 who attend preschools of primary schools. The sample group consists of 25 mothers and 18 fathers.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

As a means of collecting data in the survey, a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions was used to identify parents' environmental information and the activities their parents did with their children in order to identify parents' personal characteristics. Survey questions used in the research were created by the original adaptation of the authors by blending them with the existing environmental awareness questionnaires in the literature (Tunik, 1997, Luk, 2001). The survey consisting of 13 open ended questions such as having knowledge about environmental activities, participating in school activities, parental knowledge about the environment, environmental problems, parental attitudes towards animals, parental responsibility towards children, parental attitudes towards plants and children's responsibility for planting at home and environmental activities with children at home and abroad

3. FINDINGS

The sample technique which can be reached in this research was used and the sample of the researcher is the parents of the students who go to kindergartens in Ağrı province center in the spring 2016-2017 period in Agri province center. The information about the parents in the survey is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentages of Data Obtained From The Personal Information Form

		f	%
Sex	Female	25	58
	Male	18	42
Education Status	First Grade	20	46
	High School	6	14
	License	14	33
	Master Degree	3	7
Total salary	Minimum wage and less	23	53
	Between 1400-2500 TL	7	17
	Between 2500-3500 TL	2	5
	Between 3500-4500 TL	1	2
	4500 TL and higher	10	23

The sample of this study is the parents of the students who go to preschools in the city center of Agri in the spring term of 2016-2017. %58 of the parents participating in the study are women, and %42 are male parents. At the same time, %46 of the parents are primary school graduates, %14 are high school graduates, %33 are undergraduate and %7 are graduate graduates. While %53 of the parents received a minimum salary (1400 TL) and a salary below %17 1400-2500 TL, %5 2500-3500 TL, %2 3500-4500 TL and %23 salary of 4500 TL and above.

In the analysis of the data obtained from the study, how parents describe the environment is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Answers Given By Parents About Their Views of The Environment

Given answers	f	%
It is a physiological, biological, economic and cultural environment in which living and non-living beings live together.	39	91
It is everything for shaping child	2	5
It is cleanliness	1	2
Friend, park, TV, child, family, school, garden and forest.	1	2

According to this information, the great majority of the parents considers %91 as the physiological, biological, economical and cultural environment in which the living together of inanimate beings lives together. %2 associate with other children, %5 to cleanliness, and another %2 to friends, parks, TV, children, families, schools, gardens and forests. When we look at the findings we have found, the majority of the parents identify with the correct definition when defining the environment, indicating that the parents have information about the environment.

Whether or not parents have love for animals is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Parental Opinions on Whether or Not to Love Animals

	f	%
Loves	38	88
Does not love	3	7
Undecided	2	5

In this direction, the majority of parents stated that %88 loved animals, %7 did not like animals, and %5 said they were undecided about loving animals.

The feeding situations of the animals in their homes are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of Parental Home Feeding Situations

	f	%
Feeding	25	58
Not feeding	18	42

According to this information, %58 of the parents have a pet at home while %42 have not fed any animals at home. In this case, although the majority of the parents do not like the animals, the rate of feeding the animals is lower.

It is shown in Table 5 that the parents did not grow or grow the plants in their homes.

Table 5: Frequency and Percentage of Plant Growth Conditions in Parents' Homes

	f	%
Growing	34	79
Not growing	9	21

In this direction, %79 of the parents stated that they had grown plants at home and %21 did not have any plants at home.

Table 6 shows the parents' beliefs about their children's responsibilities to animals and plants.

Table 6: Frequency and Percentages of Thoughts of Parents About Their Children's Responsibilities Towards Animals and Plants

	f	%
They have responsibility	26	60
They do not have responsibility	17	40

According to this information, %60 of the parents think that their children are responsible for animals and plants, while %40 think that their children are not responsible for animals and plants. When looked at in this case, families are aware of their children's responsibilities towards living things.

Table 7 highlights whether parents' children are compassionate and protective against the environment.

Table 7: Frequency and Percentages of Parents' Thoughts On Whether Their Child Is Compassionate and Protective of the Environment

	f	%
They are	40	93
They are not	1	2
Not much	2	5

In this direction, %93 of parents think that their children are compassionate and protective against the environment, %2 think that they have no compassion and protection against the environment, and %5 think that they are not much compassionate and protective.

Table 8 shows the activities the families have made about the environment in the house.

Table 8: Frequency and Percentage of Parental Activities in The Family

	f	%
Care to keep the environment clean	16	37
Making trips related to the environment	24	56
Reading a book	12	28
Playing in the garden	2	5
Dealing with plants	5	12
Observing a bug	1	2
No activity is being done	6	14

According to these findings, %37 of the parents do care to keep the environment clean with their children, %56 to travel around the environment, %28 to read books with their children, %5 to play in the

garden, %12 of the parents plants in the garden, %2 are observing insects and %14 are not doing any activity. According to this information, most of the families are doing activities with their children. Only %14 do not do anything.

The table for parents to talk about protecting their children and the environment is shown in table 9.

Table 9: Frequency and Percentages of Parental Conversations with Children About Environmental Protection

	f	%
They are	40	93
They are not	1	2
Sometimes	2	5

In this direction, %93 of parents do not speak or talk about protecting their environment with their children, %2 do not make any speeches and %5 sometimes speaks.

Table 10 provides information on how parents have contributed their children's activities to their schools.

Table 10: Frequency and Percentages of How Parents Have Contributed Their Children's Activities to Their School

	f	%
Alert and encourage	8	19
Providing awareness	6	14
Garbage collection, cleaning and flower watering	1	2
Tree planting	2	5
Social support	8	19
It does not provide any support	19	44

According to these findings, %19 of parents stimulates their children for activities, %14 make their children conscious, %2 participate in garbage collection, cleaning and flower irrigation activities, %5 go to tree planting, %19 give social support and %44 do not provide support for events.

Table 11 shows whether or not families want to participate in environmental activities.

Table 11: Frequency and Percentage of Parents' Participation in Environmental Activities

	f	%
Want to join	33	77
Does not want to join	10	23

According to these findings, %77 of the parents want to participate in the activities, while %23 do not want to participate in the activities. A great majority of parents are willing to participate in the information provided, but almost half of the parents do not attend when we compare the results in table 10.

Those parents who want to participate in environmental events from parents are shown in Table 12 which events they want to participate in.

Table 12. Frequency and Percentages of Parents Which Events Want to Participate

	f	%
Cleaning the environment	6	14
Planting trees	4	9
Take part in any kind of activity	6	14
Participating in informative activities	2	5
Taking part in social activities	7	16

In this direction, %14 of parents want to participate in environmental clean-up activities, %9 to participate in tree planting activities, %14 to participate in all kinds of activities, %5 to participate in informative activities and %16 to participate in social activities.

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

There are many factors that affect early childhood attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. Some of those; gender, age, educational attainment, place of residence, socio-economic level and formal education process. Formal education process has been found to be the result of many studies that help children to develop positive attitudes and behaviors towards the environment (Taşkın & Şahin, 2008; Erdoğan et al., 2012, Okur & Ünal, 2010). In our country, science is dealt with with the necessary importance in the curriculum, and in particular, it is tried to provide the foundation of the science sciences in the pre-school curriculum (Okur Akçay, 2014).

This research was conducted to determine the contribution of parents to environmental awareness of pre-school children aged 5-6 years. As a result of the research, %91 of the parents consider the environment as a physiological, biological, economic and cultural environment in which living and non-living assets live together. The definition made in this direction is close to the definition of Buhan (2006); The environment is a combination of humans and all other living beings at the same time, together with elements of human nature in nature. Based on this information, it can be said that families have information about the environment.

According to the research results, %7 of the parents do not like animals, %42 do not feed any animals at home, %21 do not grow plants at home, %40 have no children's responsibilities to animals and plants and %2 have children's compassion and protection towards the environment. In this direction, %93 of parents do not speak or talk about protecting their environment with their children, %2 do not make any speeches and %5 sometimes speaks. Most parents state that they talk with their children about the environment, but according to these results, it has been determined that %40 of children have no compassion and protection against the environment. As a result, family-related conversations may be inadequate or ineffective. In addition, only %14 of the parents who were found not to participate in environmental activities (%23), did not provide support for such activities (%44) and did not do any environmental activities were asked to participate in any activities related to the environment.

In our country, the training program being implemented since 2005 is quite adequate in terms of environmental issues (Alım, 2006). Along with that the majority (91%) of the parents who participated in this study found that living and non-living beings were very aware and gave detailed information by evaluating their living together as a physiological, biological, economic and cultural environment. This may be due to the educational and income levels of the parents, the role of the teacher in the family participation work, the nature of the child-nature relationship, and other factors affecting the teaching process such as media and mass media.

Parents and other adult people in the community have important powers that are very influential in implementing environmental laws. But adults are faced with some problems in educating. Some of these problems are; the lack of time to actively participate in environmental education, the lack of economic support and resources, and the development of appropriate communication channels for adults. The lack of adequate environmental activities due to the climatic conditions inherent in the Eastern Anatolia region also supports this view. For this reason, environmental education for the elderly is mostly applied through the media, but this method is often not successful enough to influence and inform environmental behaviors. That is why the environmental education program shown in schools needs to include parents and other individuals. That is why the environmental education program shown in schools needs to include parents and other individuals. In this way, there should be an educational approach in which children and adults interact to discuss environmental problems and behavior related to the solution of these problems.

It is taken in the pre-school period of the attitudes and behaviors of the parents about the environment. Therefore, the positive attitude and behavior towards the environment is an important process that aims to increase the environmental sensitivity of the people and the education for the environment should be lifelong starting from early ages (Akçay, 2006). Individuals should start at an early age to gain basic habits. The pre-school period is the most appropriate time for children to acquire their health habits (Halmatov & Okur Akçay, 2014). Therefore, the family should educate their children about the environment.

In order to increase the awareness of the children towards the parents and their sensitivity towards the environment in the direction of the obtained results, the following suggestions can be presented:

- Giving trainings emphasizing the importance of parents and children with low educational level in relation to the natural environment,
- Pre-school teachers may be advised to plan activities for parents to participate in family activities, such as organizing activities (tree, flower planting, sightseeing, observation, taking part in experiments, etc.) that enable parents to become more active.

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