

**AN EVALUATION OF READINESS FOR ELEMENTARY
EDUCATION OF 6 YEAR-OLD CHILDREN FROM DIFFERENT
SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS**
**FARKLI SOSYO EKONOMİK KÖKENLİ 6 YAŞ GRUBU
ÇOCUKLARIN İLKOKULA HAZIRLILIK DÜZEYLERİNİN BİR
DEĞERLENDİRMESİ**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at the evaluation of readiness for elementary education of 6 year old children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The subjects of the study are 143 children with the following distribution: 47 from families of lower socioeconomic standing, 46 from the middle class and 50 from affluent families. Each subject underwent evaluation by the Metropolitan Readiness Test, involving 6 sub-tests: Test 1. Word Meaning, Test 2. Sentences, Test 3. Information, Test 4. Matching, Test 5. Numbers and Test 6. Copying. The tests provide an assessment of the levels of reading readiness status, number readiness status and total readiness status of the children. The data obtained were evaluated through the One Way Anova-Scheffe statistical method. Significant differences were found between socioeconomic status and school readiness levels.

ÖZET

Bu araştırma farklı sosyoekonomik düzeylerdeki 6 yaş grubu çocukların ilkokula hazır bulunuşluk düzeylerinin belirlenmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklem grubunu , alt sosyoekonomik düzeyden 47, orta sosyoekonomik düzeyden 46 ve üst sosyoekonomik düzeyden 50 çocuk olmak üzere toplam 143 çocuk oluşturmuştur. Örneklem grubunu oluşturan çocukların ilkokula hazır bulunuşluk düzeyleri Metropolitan Olgunluk Testi kullanılarak değerlendirilmiştir. Test, kelime anlama, cümleler, genel bilgi, eşleştirme, sayılar ve kopya etme olmak üzere altı alt testten oluşmaktadır. Testin sonucunda çocukların, okuma, sayı ve toplam olgunluk düzeyleri belirlenmektedir. Elde edilen veriler, One-Way Anova ve Scheffe istatistiksel analizi ile değerlendirilmiş ve analiz sonucunda sosyoekonomik düzeylerle okul olgunluğu arasındaki fark önemli bulunmuştur.

Introduction

At pre-school age children begin to learn more, gain more experience about the environment they live in and they are quite curious to learn.

The knowledge they have about their environment is closely related to their experience. At this stage, their vocabulary grows, they learn to express themselves, their motor coordination matures and they learn to be with, to coordinate and to share with other children (Caplan & Caplan, 1983).

As of the age of six, children are faced with the situation where they must enter a primary school, a learning institution quite different from the kindergarten, and they will be spending the majority of their time trying to adapt to this situation.

Many of the studies conducted (Lamberty & Cronic,1994; Golant & Golant, 1990; Oktay,1980) emphasize that the readiness of the children in passing from kindergarten to primary school is very important.

It is possible to talk about numerous factors which affect the readiness levels of children. These are development of the mind, the environment in which the child lives, and the emotional readiness of the child (Oktay,1999).

Families want their children to attend the best and the most ideal school, however, the features included in the concept of most ideal vary from family to family. These differences change according to the families' expectations from the school and from their children. The framework of the families' expectations is shaped ac-

cording to socio-cultural and socio-economic life standards (Arı; Tuğrul; Üstün; Akman, et.al,1995).

Although in the 1996-2000 Development Plan the ratio to establish pre-school schooling in Turkey was targeted at 6.0%, the current schooling ratio is only 10.0%.

In the 1998-1999 academic year the total number of preschools was 7,976, the number of teachers was 17,091 and the number of students was 261,159 (M.E.B.,1999).

State-run kindergartens comprise the majority of these schools. Such schools are observed to have serious problems such as poor landscape, and shortage in number or lack in quality of educators. However, Turkey is still a developing country and the distribution of per capita revenue is still insufficient. Therefore, because of economic difficulties, families send their children to such kindergartens, even though they lack in quality, if not primarily for education, at least for the care of children; and the families adjust their expectations accordingly.

The kindergartens of universities are laboratory kindergartens affiliated with sections related to the subject, whereas state-run kindergartens are affiliated with different units of the state. Some of the state-run kindergartens are affiliated with the Ministry of Education, while some others are affiliated with the Social Services and the Society for the Protection of Children of the Prime Ministry, still others are independent (SHÇEK,1999).

In this study the focus is on socio-economic level, being one of the most important factors to affect the readiness of a child for school, and its role in determining the readiness of 6 year old children of families with different socio-economic levels is evaluated.

Method and Instruments

143 children in the age group 6 from families with different socio-economic levels were taken as samples. 50 of these children came from families with a high socio-economic level, 46 from medium and 47 from families with a low socio-economic level.

The children who attended university kindergartens were children of academic personnel with a high socio-economic level, the children attending kindergartens run by the state were the children of government employees with a medium socio-economic level and of workers with a low socio-economic level.

| SES | N | % |
|--------|-----|-------|
| High | 50 | 35.0 |
| Medium | 46 | 32.2 |
| Low | 47 | 32.8 |
| Total | 143 | 100.0 |

All the parents with high socio-economic level covered in this research study were university graduates, the majority of the government employee families were high school graduates and some were university graduates, and considering that all the worker families were secondary school graduates, such differences in the scores of the school readiness test of children were expected.

Considering the qualifications of the educators at the kindergartens under research: in the university kindergartens there were one or two educators who had university degrees in the related subject and assistant teachers (secondary-high school graduates). In the kindergartens run by the state and attended by the children of government employees there was one university graduate for each class (a graduate of any subject, social services, finance, accounting, etc.) and in the kindergartens attended by the children of workers, high school graduates were employed as educators.

In this study, the school readiness of children was evaluated through the Metropolitan Readiness Test.

Metropolitan Readiness Test

This test was developed by G.H. Hildreth, N.L. Griffiths and M. McGouvran and adapted for Turkish children by A. Oktay (Oktay,1988).

The type of this scale is a performance test and is applied to children between the age groups of 5.6 and 6.0. The scale is comprised of six sub-tests and covers 100 items.

These are;

- | | |
|-----------------|----------|
| 1- Word Meaning | 19 items |
| 2- Sentences | 14 items |
| 3- Information | 14 items |
| 4- Matching | 19 items |
| 5- Numbers | 24 items |
| 6- Copying | 10 items |

The evaluation is made by giving 1 point for each correct answer the child gives.

The coefficients for validity were found between 0.34-0.53 and for reliability were found between 0.53-0.83 according to the validity and reliability of the scale performed by Oktay (Öner,1997).

Oktay, A. (1980) applied the Metropolitan Readiness Test in Istanbul to children between the ages of 5.5 to 6, from different socio-economic and cultural circles and in this way assessed the school readiness of children from families with different socio-economic levels.

The data obtained from this study were evaluated through the One-Way Anova and Scheffe statistical analysis in SPSS.

Metropolitan Scores

| Test 1-4 Reading Readiness | Test 5 Number Readiness | Test 1-6 Total Readiness | Letter Rating | Reading Status |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 61-66 | 21-24 | 90-100 | A | Superior |
| 56-60 | 16-20 | 80-89 | B | High Norm |
| 47-55 | 10-15 | 65-79 | C | Average |
| 33-46 | 5-9 | 40-64 | D | Low Norm |
| 0-32 | 0-4 | 0-39 | E | Poor Risk |

Discussion

As can be seen in Table 1-6, the differences between the scores obtained by the children of families of different socio-economic levels found meaningful according to the Scheffe statistical analysis.

In Table 1-2 the significant correlation between reading readiness and socio-economic levels ($p < 0.05$) is shown. As can be seen from Table 3-4 an important difference was in the number readiness scores of children ($p < 0.05$) found between the groups as a result of the variance analysis according to the socio-economic levels. Statistical analysis was conducted to evaluate the difference between the groups and the difference in the low-medium, low-high, medium-high socio-economic levels of the children was found to be important (Table 5-6, $p < 0.05$).

In order for the children to reach a sufficient readiness level, education programs, prepared by taking into consideration the needs of the children, and using educators qualified to implement these programs, are necessary. Of course the educator must include the family of the child in the education program to achieve the targeted goals (Golant & Golant, 1990).

In the School Readiness conference given by Lamberty and Crnic (1994), it was emphasized that school and teacher was one of the most important factors in school readiness, that the educational philosophy of the

Table 1. Variance Analysis of Reading Readiness According to Socio-Economic Levels

| Reading Readiness | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | p |
|-------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
| Between groups | 91.708 | 2 | 45.854 | 79.675 | .05 |
| Within groups | 80.572 | 140 | 0.576 | | |
| Total | 172.280 | 142 | | | |

Table 2. Comparison of the Reading Readiness Scores of Children of Different Socio-Economic Levels

| SES | Mean Difference | | Standard Error (S.E) | | p | |
|--------|-----------------|---------|----------------------|--------|-------|--------------------|
| | Low High | Middle | Low High | Middle | | |
| Low | | 0.7928* | 1.9319* | 0.157 | 0.154 | P<0.05 significant |
| Middle | -0.7928* | | 1.1391* | 0.157 | 0.155 | |
| High | 1.9319* | 1.1391* | | 0.154 | 0.155 | |

*The mean difference is significant at .05

Table 3. Variance Analysis of Number Readiness According to Socio-Economic Levels

| Number Readiness | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | p |
|------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
| Between groups | 51.987 | 2 | 25.993 | 45.537 | .05 |
| Within groups | 79.915 | 140 | 0.571 | | |
| Total | 131.902 | 142 | | | |

Table 4. Comparison of the Number Readiness Scores of Children of Different Socio-Economic Levels

| S.E.S | Mean Difference | | | Standard Error (S:E) | | | p |
|--------|-----------------|---------|---------|----------------------|--------|-------|--------------------|
| | Low | Middle | High | Low | Middle | High | |
| Low | | 0.8700* | 1.4587* | 0.157 | 0.153 | | P<0.05 significant |
| Middle | -0.8700* | | 0.5887* | 0.157 | | 0.154 | |
| High | -1.4587* | -0.5887 | | 0.153 | 0.154 | | |

*The mean difference is significant at .05

Table 5. Variance Analysis of School Readiness According to Socio-Economic Levels

| School Readiness | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | p |
|------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Between groups | 91.308 | 2 | 45.654 | 88.488 | 0.005 |
| Within groups | 72.231 | 140 | 0.516 | | |
| Total | 163.538 | 142 | | | |

Table 6. Comparison of the School Readiness Scores of Children of Different Socio-Economic Levels

| S.E.S | Mean Difference | | Standard Error | | p | |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| | Low | Middle High | Low | Middle High | | |
| Low | | 0.7942* | 1.9281* | 0.149 | 0.146 | P<0.05 significant |
| Middle | -0.7942* | | 1.1339* | 0.149 | 0.147 | |
| High | -1.9281* | -1.1339* | | 0.146 | 0.147 | |

*The mean difference is significant at .05

school was quite important and that a radical approach rather than the traditional approach should be adopted. It was stated that families must be included in the education programs implemented.

It was emphasized that the instructors who implement these programs must be experts on the subject and that they should also be trained in cooperation with families. One of the factors effective on school readiness is the child's academic skills.

It was stated that for success in school it is necessary to develop the child's problem-solving skills, estimation, productive and receptive languages, and ability to concentrate on one subject for an extended period of time, in the pre-school years (www.rochester.edu).

Considering the data obtained from this study, it can be seen that the children from high socio-economic level families have obtained a high norm and superior scores in the reading and number readiness tests in the Metropolitan Readiness Test, according to the Metropolitan scoring.

We can say that these results tell us that the families

of high socio-economic level place great importance on developing the academic skills of their children during the pre-school readiness period.

In Graue's (1992) study on the beliefs of families and teachers about the school readiness of children, he discovered that families believed school readiness began in the kindergarten and said that the enriched education programs of schools were very important. In the study conducted during 1992-1993 by West et.al, they observed that the education level of the parents influenced the child's social-emotional behaviour, verbal skills, curiosity and desire to learn, which are related to the child's school readiness. Knudsen-Lindauer in the 1989 study discovered that parents, more than the teachers, placed importance on the academic skills of their children and desired that the education environment of their children be well equipped academically.

In 1988 Knudsen-Lindauer observed that families with low socio-economic levels placed more importance on skills to acquire income and development of receptive language, and that they overlooked the skills of self-sufficiency, and independent observation of his/her environment. Families with high socio-economic levels placed importance on the education of their children from pre-school age and they evaluated these schools in respect to appropriate education programs with the individual features of their children.

We can say that the pre-schools in Turkey, where children spend all the day, are not up to certain standards in terms of personnel, program, and physical conditions.

According to the results obtained and the numerous studies conducted on this subject, it is necessary to conduct further research about different dimensions of school readiness, especially in a developing country like Turkey. We think that this will shed light on numerous aspects of the preparation of education programs and parent-teacher interaction.

This study showed that educational programs geared towards a smooth transition of preschool children to elementary school are important. Equally important is the education of teachers who can successfully implement these programs. The role of cooperation between family and school is also crucial. Schools must evaluate whether the developmental characteristics of children are satisfactory to commence first grade and must share the results of their evaluations with the families.

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