

## Impact of Some Variables on Family Involvement at Early Childhood Education

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**Abstract:** This study was carried out as a descriptive study to determine the level of family involvement in preschool education and to examine whether the variables of gender of child, age, duration of attendance to school, number of children per household and level of parent education had an effect on the involvement. Parents (57 in total) of children attending to Gelincik Kindergarten at the age of 3-6 formed the sampling of the study. "Family Involvement Scale" was used to as a data collection tool determine the involvement of family in education. Average scores, independent t test and Kruskal-Wallis Test were used to evaluate the data. Depending on the results of the study, the involvement of family is not adequate enough especially at sub dimensions of "School Based Involvement" and "Home-School Conferencing". Age of child, duration of attendance to school, number of children per household and parent education had no effect.

**Key words:** Family involvement, home-school conferencing, family education, preschool education

### INTRODUCTION

It is of importance that a child show desired behaviours (acquisitions) suitable for his age at growth and development. It is also required that the acquisitions of the child be improved in every surrounding in order to make them turns out to be habits and to make them constant (Aral *et al.*, 2000; Senemoğlu, 2001). Child primarily reaches the acquisitions special to many fields of development with the guidance of family. After starting school, child is made to attain desired acquisitions in the climate of systematic education. It is significant in education that educational process be carried on outside the school and at home as well in turning child's potential into performance and making these acquisitions constant (Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Preschool Education, 2006). Therefore, home-school conferencing is needed so as to provide this process and improve the acquisitions.

Since, the time when the importance of environment at child development and education was adopted, family has started to be included in the process of education (Salinas *et al.*, 1997). Involvement of family in education at early childhood has been realised in and out of school surrounding (Watkins, 1997). Family involvement in general contains the involvement of the parents and those having a primary communication (like care-providers) with child at home and at school in order to make them consider in a way supporting school education and to demonstrate suitable behaviour in this matter (Aral *et al.*, 2000; Diffily, 2004; Fuller and Olsen, 1998; Ömeroğlu and Can Yaşar, 2005; Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Preschool Education, 2006; Tezel Şahin and Ünver, 2005; Zembat and Polat Unutkan, 2001).

There have been many other studies stressing the significance of family involvement at early childhood period and discussing the benefits of the involvement on child, family and school staff and the factors affecting the involvement (Bridgemohan *et al.*, 2005; Carlisle *et al.*, 2005; Dickinson and DeTemple, 1998; Diffily, 2004; Fantuzzo *et al.*, 2004; Fantuzzo *et al.*, 2000; Fuller and Olsen, 1998; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Ömeroğlu *et al.*, 2003; Salinas *et al.*, 1997; Votruba-Drzal, 2003; Watkins, 1997).

In a study carried out to examine family involvement at early childhood period, Fantuzzo *et al.* (2000) found that education status of parents and marital status had an impact on family involvement but that employment, number of children per household and child gender did not. Watkins (1997) found that family education level had no effect on the level of family involvement. In another study, it was found that family involvement diminished behavioural problems of children at school and increased vocabulary skills (Fantuzzo *et al.*, 2004). Dickinson and DeTemple (1998) determined that language acquisition of preschool and first grade children whose reading and writing skills were supported by their family at home was much better. In a study carried out by Gürşimşek (2003) in Turkey, it was found that age, education status of parents, number of children per household and income level of family had no effect on family involvement. With the Program of Preschool Parent-Child Education initiated in 1999 by Foundation of Mother-Child Education and Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Preschool Education involvement of families into the education was encouraged and it was found that the involvement had an positive effect on verbal and numerical skills of children and on the positive ideas of families over teachers and school (Sucuka and Kımnet, 2003).

Within the content of the Program of Preschool Parent-Child Education prepared by Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Preschool Education, what is emphasised was that maintenance at education should be supplied and family involvement is required in order to make it stable. Education of family, conferencing with family, involvement of family into the education of the child at school, home visits, education of the child at school, other things to be carried as to family, involvement of family into school decision making process are the items considered within the content of the involvement of family into the education in this program.

As mentioned in the Program of Preschool Education, although family involvement in the early childhood period in Turkey is adopted, there are rather few studies examining the level of family involvement over different sampling groups and the involvement of families depending on different variables. There is a need for more studies so as to make the involvement of family into education in early childhood education more significant and to make this involvement high level throughout the country. That is why; this study was carried out as a complementary study to determine the level of family involvement in preschool education and to examine whether some variables had an effect on the involvement.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Sampling:** The study was conducted with the parents of children at 3-6 age group and having an education at the spring term of the education year of 2006-2007 at Gelincik Kindergarten in Etimesgut, Ankara. 57 parents out of 120 in total volunteered in the study. So many university students (of Ankara, Anadolu, Gazi Universities) attending to the Teaching Program of Preschool Education have been practicing in Gelincik Kindergarten.

Fourty five of the parents included in the study were mothers and 12 were fathers. It was found that average age of the parents participated in the study was 34.56 (minimum: 26, maximum: 49). It was also found that 8.8% of the parents were graduates of a primary school, 29.8% were high school, 12.3% were college (a university with a 2 year education period) and 49.1% were university graduates (2 post graduates were included in the study). 47.4% of parents expressed that they had a child at the age of 3-4, 52.6% said they had a child of 5-6 years of age. 49.1% of these children had been attending to school less than 1.5 years and 50.9% had been attending more than 1.5 years. All of the parents stated that they had one (64.9%) or two (35.1%) children.

**Data collection instruments:** Data of the study was collected through questionnaires and "Family Involvement Scale". Age, education level of parents,

number of children, age, gender of children and their attendance period to school were included in the questionnaire form. Parent age was taken as open ended, whereas education level (primary-secondary, high school, college, undergraduate and post graduate), child gender, age and attendance period to school were asked as close ended.

**Family Involvement Scale (FIS):** FIS developed by Fantuzzo *et al.* (2000) was consisted of three sub-constructs (School Based Involvement-SBI, Home Based Involvement-HBI and Home-School Conferencing-HSC) and 25 items in total. Fantuzzo *et al* stated that reliability of the scale was high and Cronbach alpha coefficient for SBI was .85, it was .85 for HBI and .81 for HSC.

FIS was studied out by in terms of language validity by adopting the language into Turkish by Gürşimşek (2003). In the study of validity she carried on FIS she took 4 items with total correlations below .25 out and in this way 21 items in total were included in the scale with 7 items in the sub-construct of SBI, 5 in HBI and 9 in HSC. FIS alpha coefficient for the whole scale was found as .87 and as .79, .69, .84 respectively for the sub-constructs. FIS is a likert type scale and each item is evaluated at five levels between 1 to 5 (1; never, 2; rarely, 3; sometimes, 4; frequently, 5; always). The highest score to be obtained at the SBI is 35, 25 for HBI and 45 for HSC.

**Data collection:** Data was collected by making the parents fill in questionnaires and FIS after explaining the objections of the study and directions related to filling in the scale to the parents in the study group.

**Evaluation of the data:** The data were evaluated with the program of SPSS. The mean of the items taking place at FIS and of the sub constructs were used at evaluating family involvement statistically. Independent t test was used in determining whether average scores obtained from family involvement sub constructs were different in terms of child gender, age, attendance period to school and number of children per household. The effect of education level of parents on family involvement was evaluated through Kruskal-Wallis test.

## RESULTS

Table 1 includes the mean and standard deviation values for each item at FIS. As shown in the table, the items of "I involve in school excursions with my child" ( $\bar{x}$ : 2.03, sd: 1.01), "I talk to the parents of other children outside the school" ( $\bar{x}$ : 2.10, sd: .93) and "I participate classroom activities" ( $\bar{x}$ : 2.31, sd: 1.19) had the lowest means, respectively. The highest means were for the items "I supply teaching materials for my child at home"

Table 1: Item mean and standard deviations for Family Involvement Scale

	$\bar{x}$	Sd
School based involvement		
I involve school activities voluntarily	2.57	.99
I talk to the parents of other children outside the school.	2.10	.93
I involve in school excursions with my child	2.03	1.01
I involve in the activities to support school financially	3.12	1.35
I involve in the social activities held by the school	3.19	1.17
I involve classroom activities	2.31	1.19
I involve parent conferences	4.12	1.05
Home based involvement		
I supply learning materials for my child at home (TV, video, computer, book, VCD).	4.70	.56
I read or tell stories to my child.	4.38	.77
I take him to performances such as cinema, theatre and museum.	4.03	.90
I encourage my child over the experience of learning	4.24	.96
I do some activities with my child to improve his creativity	3.92	.92
Home-school conferencing		
I talk to the teacher dealing with the achievements of my child.	3.77	1.00
I talk to the teacher dealing with daily activities of my child	3.26	1.07
I communicate with the teacher dealing with the school activities of my child.	3.29	1.11
I share personal or familial issues with the teacher of my child.	3.68	1.13
I talk to the teacher over the activities at home.	3.05	1.27
I encourage my child in the presence of the teacher due to his activities.	3.85	1.20
I talk to the teacher over the relations of my child with his friends.	3.73	1.07
I talk to school administration to be informed about the problems.	3.29	1.26
I talk to the teacher of my child over classroom rules.	3.40	1.25

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviations of family involvement sub constructs depending on demographic features

	N	SBI			HBI			HSC		
		$\bar{x}$	sd	p	$\bar{x}$	sd	p	$\bar{x}$	sd	p
Gender										
Girl	29	18.96	5.30	.505	21.62	3.04	.721	28.79	6.43	.018*
Boy	28	20.00	4.95		20.96	3.36		32.00	8.84	
Age										
3-4	27	19.22	5.52	.150	22.00	3.13	.888	30.44	8.74	.234
5-6	30	19.70	4.80		20.66	3.15		30.30	7.01	
Attendance Period to school										
1	28	20.25	5.66	.156	21.82	3.17	.761	30.71	8.65	.184
2	29	18.72	4.48		20.79	3.17		30.03	7.03	
Number of children										
1	37	19.62	5.58	.351	22.13	2.63	.112	29.75	8.13	.583
2	20	19.20	4.22		19.75	3.59		31.50	7.24	

\* p<0.05

Table 3: Family Involvement sub constructs of parent concerning the level of education

	N	SBI			HBI			HSC		
		Mean rank	$\chi^2$ , df, p		Mean rank	$\chi^2$ , df, p		Mean rank	$\chi^2$ , df, p	
Parent education										
Primary-secondary	5	34.20	2.574		31.60	.270		25.00	2.754	
High school	17	30.53	3		29.09	3		29.53	3	
College (2 year education) Undergraduate	7	34.71	.462		26.64	.966		20.57	.431	
(4 year university)	28	25.71			29.07			31.50		

( $\bar{x}$ : 4.70, sd: .56), "I read or tell stories to my child" ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.38, sd: .77) and "I encourage my child over the experience of learning" ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.24, sd: .96). Generally speaking, sub construct item means for HBI were higher than those of the other two. This was followed by HSC and SBI, respectively.

Table 2 shows the dispersion of the scores obtained from sub constructs at FIS depending on child gender, age, attendance period to school and number of children per household. The scores obtained from sub constructs of SBI and HBI for child gender were not significant statistically while there was difference between the

scores of HSC (girl;  $\bar{x}$ : 28.79, sd: 6.43, boy;  $\bar{x}$ : 32.00, sd: 8.84, p = .018, p<0.05). Child age, attendance period to school and number of children per household had no effect on the scores obtained from sub constructs at FIS (p>0.05).

Average scores obtained from sub constructs of FIS depending on education levels of parents were given at Table 3. As shown in the table, while the highest score at HBI belonged the graduates of a primary-secondary school (31.69), it belonged to undergraduates (31.50) at HSC. It was found that level of parent education did not have an effect on family involvement (p> 0.05).

## DISCUSSION

School Based Involvement is of great importance for families to observe the activities performed at school and to maintain the surrounding-activities suitable for this experience at home. School Based Involvement contains such items as participating school and classroom activities, talking to the parents of other children outside the school and participating the conferences held for the families at school. The least participation in this study was School Based Involvement. Although, the importance of family involvement was highlighted at Preschool Education Program, low level participation might be resulted from the fact that families were not encouraged well enough, they were not able to invited and that an adequate program to supply enough participation was not to be applied at school.

A good level of family education and socio-economical status increase learning opportunities of child at home Votruba-Drzal (2003). There appear such items at Home Based Involvement as "I supply learning materials for my child at home (TV, video, computer, book, VCD)" and "I take him to performances such as cinema, theatre and museum" likely to be considered as related to economical status. Home Based Involvement is higher in this study compared to the others. This high level might be resulted from the fact that the parents participating in the study were undergraduates (61.4%) and that their socio-economical status was well enough. The possibility of the presence of these materials at the families with a better economic status is high, however, how much and in what way family benefited from these materials in the education of their child was not investigated in this study.

Mostly, the verbal communications of parents with the teacher and school administrators of the child take place in the Home-School Conferencing involvement. These types of communications are the ones to be achieved through the awareness of the family by the teacher as to school, classroom activities and the activities where the child will take place. It was determined in this study that such conferences were not realised at the highest level. As a matter of fact, the need that such activities should be realised between teacher and family is mentioned at the Program of Preschool Education by Ministry of Education. Bridgemohan *et al.* (2005) determined the fact that families regard preschool education institutions as nursery schools supplying care for their children, they get scared of school administrators and teachers, teachers are not well educated in his own teaching programs to work with family are major handicaps in such communications. As well as these factors play a role for the lack of communication between school and family communication, the fact that teachers

are able to spend their time with children just in classroom activities is might also play role depending on large classes. While child gender at SBI and HBI sub constructs had no effect, it was effective at HSC sub construct. This finding was parallel with the sub construct of SBI and HBI in the study by Fantuzzo *et al.* (2000) however, it did not support the sub construct of HSC. Whereas, whether child gender is effective on family involvement could be tried on larger and different sampling groups. It was found concerning the results of the study that age of child, attendance period to school and number of children per household did not effect family involvement into education in the period of early childhood. However, families in this study had one or two children. Whether number of children is effective on different groups could be tested supplying the similarity of other demographic features in the case of having more children. Fantuzzo *et al.* (2000) determined that number of children per household did not have an effect on family involvement. Gürşimşek (2003) found similarly, that the number of children were not effective on family involvement.

In this study, the fact that education levels of parents did not have an effect on any of the sub constructs of family involvement supported the finding achieved in the study by Gürşimşek (2003). Without an effect of education level, families involve education at any sub construct. Fantuzzo *et al.* (2000) found in their study that parent education was effective at the sub constructs of SBI and HSC, but that it was not effective at HBI. The fact that the level of parent education was not effective on family involvement recalls the need that every family should be encouraged to involve the process of education regardless the level of education and be informed and that their involvement in the activities both at school and at home should be supplied. Besides, the requirement to consider by determining other factors and handicaps affecting the involvement of family into the process of education could be put forward.

Involvement of family in the education program increases their own sufficiency and the achievement of their children (Ömeroğlu *et al.*, 2003b; Salinas *et al.*, 1997). This achievement obtained through involvement is realised for each child regardless of his socio economical status (Bridgemohan *et al.*, 2005). The results of this study reveal the necessity for producing some policies, strategies and applications by central administrators of preschool education and preschool managers and teachers in order to increase the involvement of family in education. Schools should determine how to help families and what to do in this matter to fully supply the education of children both at school and at home (Bridgemohan *et al.*, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Depending on the results of the study, the involvement of family is not adequate enough especially at sub dimensions of “School Based Involvement” and “Home-School Conferencing”. Age of child, duration of attendance to school, number of children per household and parent education had no effect. Although the necessity of family involvement studies is present at the Program of Preschool Education, some mechanisms should be developed supervising to what extent and at what dimension this applications are carried. Besides, some other applications should be practiced in order to form some samples in making these applications active. Determining school-teacher and familial factors limiting or preventing family involvement at preschool education and eliminating the determined negative factors are quite important. It is necessary to increase the number of teachers, include family involvement and sample applications in education programs for the candidates of teachers and increase level of skills of the teachers at every stage of family involvement with in-service educations. Maintenance of education within the principle of the fact that it should be parallel in both formal and informal contexts and the importance of the issue should be made to adopt by teachers and families.

**Limitations of the study:** Despite the limitations and the fact that it cannot be generalised, the results of the study could be a sample study for the future studies with the elimination of the mentioned limitations. Sampling is small in this study. In this sense, the results of the study cannot be generalised. Very few variables likely to affect family involvement in education in the period of early childhood are included in the study. Level of family involvement was not determined for socio economic status. In order to obtain family involvement of school and teachers, what activities they carry out, how often and in what way do it were not investigated.

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