

# Parent Involvement Activities Based on Project Approach in Pre-School Education

By

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## Abstract

*In this study, it is intended to determine the ideas of parents about the parent involvement activities conducted during project and effects of parent involvement activities and other activities on children's development. In this study which is designed as a qualitative study 17 children from four-year age group (36-48 months), 30 children from five-year age group (48-60 months), 47 children in total and their parents are involved through non-random sampling technique. Views of parents were collected through semi-structured "Clothing Project Evaluation Form of Parents" and personal interviews. Giving priority to the parent involvement, "clothing project" was implemented on both groups. Project continued ten days among four-year age group and fourteen days among five-year age group. In their statements, parents emphasized that there is development in the self-care abilities of four-year age group children and differences emerged in most of the five-year age group children's cognitive, language, emotional development areas. Most of the families involved in clothing project stated that they are happy with parent-involvement activities, they feel valuable and they developed awareness to participate in the following parent-involvement activities thanks to observing their children's development closely.*

**Keywords:** Pre-school education, project approach, parent involvement, parent involvement activities

## 1. Introduction

Human beings maintain their life by experiencing critical periods in terms of psychological, physiological, and social developments. Preschool years are accepted as one of those critical periods. Shaping of character, acquiring and developing basic knowledge, skills, and abilities are mostly being shaped during early years which makes those years as critical periods. Basic knowledge, skills, and abilities that will be acquired by experiences provided in early years for the child will both affect the future life of him and help the child to become a constructive, creative, independent and self-expressive individual (Oktay, 1999; Aral, Kandır & Yaşar, 2002; Arı, 2003; Yavuzer, 2006). For this reason, early years and early childhood education given through those years are defined as the most important step of human life span and all educational system (Arı, 2003).

During early years, not only early childhood education associations, but also families have important responsibilities on development and education of the child. In order to carry out those responsibilities it is not possible to receive needed success without collaboration of families and schools (Kaya & Gültekin, 2003). Though the education is perfectly prepared by schools, it cannot be so effective without being supported by families (Tezel Şahin & Ülver, 2005).

The child comes to the school by his/her early behaviors learnt from families; unless there is consistency between behaviors learnt from school and family, it becomes difficult to make the child acquire predicted knowledge, skills and abilities. Therefore, families, that have concessive place through the child life, should have its place in educational period (Aksoy & Arabacı, 2005).

Parent involvement is involved in literature with various definitions; support of family to academic success of the child (Bloom, 1984), communication of the parents with the child about issues of education and school (Walberg & Keefe, 1986), participation of parents to school activities (Stevenson & Baker, 1987), communication of parents with school and teachers (Epstein & Dauber, 1991), and orientation of child by parents at home (Marjoribans, 1992) (Fan & Chen, 2001). As all those definitions include, parent involvement has important contributions to child development. Observing their children within environments where they communicate with other children provides families opportunity of learning weak and strong sides of their children. In his study, Marcon (1999) had found significant relationship between the times that parents spend at school and basic school skills of children. Based on the focus points of the parent involvement study of Driessen, Smit, and Slegers (2005), participation of parents to the school activities creates differences between achievements of the children, breaks the ice in the family, positively affects self –confidence and self-efficacy of children. According to the results of the study of Brooks (2004) about the effects of parent involvement on child socialization and academic achievement, it is defined that giving way to parent involvement increases child socialization and academic achievement of the child. Parent involvement not only has positive effects on the child but also it has positive effects on parents. Participation of family into the education increases knowledge and skills of parents on child rearing and make parents become more effective (Çelik % Daşcan, 2007). By that reason, various techniques are used to make parent involvement sustainable. Family meetings, family informing meetings and tours, telephone interviews, bulletin and bulletin boards, news letters, booklets, brochures, posters, photographs, and two-way letters are defined as the main activities used to make parents involved in the school in the study of Çaltık and Kandır (2006).

It is known that project-approach is effective to support parent involvement activities. Family is always included in project-based education, by that way, parents can see the style of education and learning of their child, sustainability of education is provided in the family, and family can be supportive for the child development (Liu & Chu-Ying, 1998). Project-based education makes the child be motivated, be involved in all studies such as maths, science, art, language, and social area that are related with the project issue, be aware of his/her curious feelings and can create more attentive perceptual surrounding (Bryson, 1994; Diffily, 1996). So, it is predicted that project-based education will provide important contributions on child and family. From that prediction, the aim of that study, which is conducted four and five age group of children continuing Ankara University Application Preschool 1, is to investigate the effects of parent involvement activities and other activities during project on children’s development, to make deeply investigation on their awareness on clothing with mother-father beliefs, and to define differences based on age groups among “clothing project” developed upon project approach.

## **2. Method**

The aim of that study is to investigate the effects of parent involvement activities based on projects based approach on developments of children and examine differences upon age groups.

### ***The Model of the Study***

The study is designed as a case study which is one of the qualitative research techniques. In qualitative research, the most fundamental characteristic of case study is the deeply investigation of one or a few cases. Factors (Environment, individuals, cases, etc) about a case are investigated within holistic approach and how they affect the case and how they are affected from the case are focused on (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005).

### ***Study Group:***

17 four age group (36-48 months), 30 five age group (48-60 months), at sum 47 children and their families, selected by convenience sampling, are involved in the study. 58,7% of the children involved in the study are girls and 41,3% are boys. 12,5% of four age group children’s mothers are graduated either

secondary or high school, 43,8% are graduated from university, 43,8% have master or higher degree; 18,8% of fathers of children are graduated from secondary or high school, 50% are graduated from university, and 31,3% have master or higher degree. 13,3% of five age group children's mothers are graduated from secondary or high school, 46,7% are graduated from university, and 40% have master or higher degree; 16,7% of fathers of children are graduated from secondary or high school, 33,3% are graduated from university, and 50% have master or higher degree. Mothers and fathers are evaluated as participators, mothers and fathers are coded as K1, K2.....K46, and K47.

### ***Data Collection Methods***

In the study, the effects of activities of parents upon parent involvement activities conducted during project and other activities, knowledge levels of children about clothing, and their views on parent involvement activities are collected through semi-structured "Clothing Project Evaluation Form of Parents" and personal interviews. Developmental characteristics of children before and after project, knowledge levels of children on clothing, and their views about parent involvement activities are wanted from parents to be written in the "Clothing Project Evaluation Form of Parents". Personal interviews are conducted through the demonstration which is last process of the project and interviews made during later periods. Views of mothers and fathers on developments of children, their awareness on clothing, and their views on parent involvement activities are asked during personal interviews and anecdotal notes are taken.

### ***Procedure***

Initially, teachers made deeply investigation on clothing, then, knowledge of children on clothing and things they are curious about clothing are determined. Through the knowledge of children on clothing and things they are curious about clothing, a concept map was conducted and activities that will be made during project are designed. With priority of parent involvement activities, project tour and inviting expert guest, Turkish, Science-Maths, Art, Drama, Play, and Music activities were prepared within activity list that will be conducted during project. Parent communication activities (news letters, information notes, communication by telephone or e-mail, getting views before and after project), participation activities of parents into educational activities ( T-shirts, parent involvement activity on clothing design, classification activity of children on clothings that they see and did not see during their trips on markets with their mothers, clothing design activity for carton babies at home, inviting expert guest (from dentist, doctor, chemistry, policeman, cook, nurse families), advertisement on special clothings of professions, support for clothing bank for "friend school", material, book, information, and poster helpings, project demonstration) and a conference on "What should us take care on while buying a cloth" are planned to do during project period. At least two, at most three activities were conducted within both two age groups. Project continued ten days among four-year age group and fourteen days among five-year age group.

## **3. Data Analyze**

The raw data gathered from interviews are analyzed by using descriptive techniques. Received findings are presented to the reader by been organized and interpreted in descriptive analyze in which data are summarized and interpreted based on predetermined themes. Besides, in order to increase internal validity and reliability of the study findings, direct quotations are generally involved in the study to reflect views of observed or interviewed individuals in a remarkable manner in descriptive analyze (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Data collected from "Clothing Project Evaluation Form of Parents" and personal interviews are initially analyzed, they are been grouped in terms of views of mothers and fathers, developmental characteristics of children, awareness levels on clothing project, and satisfaction conditions on parent involvement activities. Arrangements are made on views of mothers and fathers without breaking the meaning. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

Parent involvement is needed for efficient early childhood education associations, receivment of defined goals and objectives, and reinforcement of attitudes and behaviors learnt in preschools. In addition, parent involvement creates a life chain between school and home, makes home as a stimulator environment for the child, and makes parents develop positive attitudes and behaviors with their children. Parent involvement activities also encourage parents to have positive communication with their children (Çağdaş and Seçer, 2004). Consistency between things that the child learnt at school and learnt out of school is possible with parent involvement studies (Gültekin, 2008). For that reason, parent involvement studies are placed toward clothing project in that study and results are interpreted.

“What are your opinions on the effects of parent involvement activities and other activities developed during clothing project process on developments of children?” was asked to mothers and fathers of four and five age group children.

The views on developments of four age group children are listed below:

K1, K5, K7, K8, K11, K12, K14, and K16: “He/She wants to put on and put off his/her clothes while coming to schools and other times.”

K2: “He/She began to classify clothes according to seasons.”

K1: “He/She is aware of girls and boys clothings.”

K5: “He/She began to differentiate front and back of the clothes and started to fold his/her clothes.”

K13: “He/She began to wear clothes with zipper or fastener more comfortable, wear clothes with button, and began to select his/her clothes according to the weather.”

K11 and K15: “He/She began to more easily open and close buttons, zippers and fastener on clothes.”

K3: “He/She started to share what he/she lived at school more than previous.”

K9: “He/She expressed his/her happiness with our participation his/her school and its activities.”

The views of four age group of children’s mothers and fathers of parent involvement activities developed during clothing project process and other activities on developments of children are seen that they are mostly about self-care skills, besides, families expresses their satisfaction on participation into activities by coming to school.

The views on developments of five age group children are listed below:

K1: “He/She began to put on and put off his/her clothes.”

K1 and K8: “He/She wants to put on and put off his/her clothes by his own. He/She arranges his/her clothes when puts off arms and legs of the cloth inversely.”

K7: “His/Her vocabulary is developed.”

K14: “He/She is more successful on putting on clothes with button and shoelace.”

K9: “He/She expresses that different professions have different clothings.”

K3 and K19: “He/She started to take attention on color coherent while selecting clothes.”

K22: “He/She expresses that clothes have different texture and pattern.”

K26: “He/She presents very creative opinions while changing his/her babies clothes and tells different stories.”

K16: “He/She defines details on clothes of people on pictures.”

K7: “He/She shares what he/she learnt about clothes at home.”

K4: “He/She have learnt the process of cleaning clothes very well.”

K13: “He/She started to tell more about what he/she did with his/her friends at school.”

K10: “He/She expressed his/her happiness with our participation his/her school and its activities.”

The views of five age group of children’s mothers and fathers of parent involvement activities developed during clothing project process and other activities on developments of children are seen about, with

order, cognitive, language, social, emotional areas and self-care skills. Besides, families expressed their satisfaction on parent involvement activities.

Goals and objectives that are aimed to be achieved were interpreted toward developmental characteristics of children while clothing project was been planned and activities were planned with that direction. Due to being at the beginning of the year, it was needed to develop self-care skills of four age group children, goals and objectives on psychomotor, cognitive, social-emotional developmental areas and self-care skills are emphasized at five age group children. When study results that were planned in that manner are being evaluated, it is seen that families mostly expressed that their children indicate improvement on cognitive, language, social, and emotional developmental areas.

Project based education is so effective on child development as it gives response to the questions of what the child should learn and which techniques will be the most effective while teaching those (Curtis, 2002; Tuğrul, 2002). There are studies stating that project based education is more effective than traditional educational models (Ryser, Beeler & Mckenzi, 1995). According to those studies, project based education positively affects character development (Tuğrul, 2002), motor development (Kim, Park , & Lee, 2001), cognitive development (Katz & Chard, 2000; Kucharski, Rust, & Ring, 2005), language development (Beneke, 2003;), social/emotional development (Dungi, Sebest, Thompson, & Young, 2002), and self-care skills (Ho, 2001;) of children. Beside project approach studies, parent involvement activities have positive effects on developments of children. Ceyhan (2008) and Ergin (2007) emphasized in their studies that school-home collaboration is one of the fundamental keys on increasing achievements of children at each step of education.

“What are your opinions about parent involvement studies and other activities developed during clothing project about awareness of children on clothing?” was asked to the mothers and fathers of four and five age group children.

The views on cloth awareness of four age group children are listed below:

K1, K5, K7, K9, K10, K11, and K13: *“He/She started to tell names and types of clothes and he/she became aware of that professions could have special clothes.”*

K1, K6, and K9: *“He/She tries to teach his/her brother how and by whom clothes are been sewed,”*

K1: *“He/She tells that clothes of boys and girls are different and he/she makes cloth selection based on gender.”*

K4: *“He/She tells where clothes are been sold.”*

K3: *“We had a clothing bank at home, we put his/her favorite clothes at vitrine, he/she wants to give clothes that he/she dislikes to others.”*

K11 and K15: *“He/She started to give attention to some features such as button, fasteners and zips on clothes.”*

The views on cloth awareness of five age group children are listed below:

K23: *“He/She tells types of clothes, where and why they are been wore to his/her grandmother.”*

K13: *“He/She had learnt how and by whom clothes are been dikildiğini”*

K10: *“He/She tells that clothes are been designed by fashioners and stylists.”*

K5: *“He/She organizes fashion display by wearing different clothes.”*

K14: *“He/She warns me on the issue of how clothes are been dried.”*

K8: *“He/She tells texture and features of clothings.”*

K14: *“He/She tells his/her father that clothings and accessories are different from each other, he/she selects his/her clothings based on his/her gender.”*

K7: *He/She tries rehearsals made by tailors on me.”*

K2: *“He/She tells that detergent should be bought for colorful clothings in order not to have their colors be faded after cleaning.”*

K21: *“He/She wants dry cleaning for his/her favorite clothes.”*

The views of four and five age group of children's mothers and fathers of parent involvement activities developed during clothing project process and other activities on developments of children are seen to increase awareness on types of clothings, texture and pattern of clothings, by whom they are been sewed and which materials are been used, how they are been cleaned, where clothes are been sold, and clothings and accessories based on appropriate gender.

Project approach is defined as investigation of a meaningful topic for children within many sides in a deep manner (Tuğrul, 2002). Participation of parents and other people in the environment for each step of project activities provides contribution of becoming effective learning surrounding for each surrounding for children (Katz & Chard, 2000). Awareness of children on project topic increases by the activity that is made based on planned goals and objectives upon project process. Project study is used as a preferred approach in education in recent years as it involves parents. In addition, it is seen that families that experience communication problem with the child have begun to use projects within family education (Youngquist, Edwards & Heaton, 2005). As project studies and parent involvement studies becoming together provides effective learning environment and sustainability in education, they contributes to awareness of children on project topic.

The question of "What are your opinions on project process and parent involvement?" is asked to mothers and fathers.

It is seen that both four and five age group children's almost all of mothers and fathers gave the response of "we satisfied" on project process and parent involvement. Some results of participators are:

K3: *"We felt that we supported adaptation process to school, because he/she started to come to the school more willingly."*

K12: *"We felt us as happy and valuable, besides, we got comfortable with having collaboration with school and we had chance to see what are been done at school."*

K8: *"We got awareness that our child was not behaving as they do at home."*

K23: *"Our sharing at home increased by parent involvement activities."*

K12: *"I had chance to see what type of activities are been done at school and observe relationships of my child with his/her friends."*

K10: *"I had opportunity to see different behaviors of my child at home and at school."*

Generally, it is seen that mothers and fathers have positive opinions on parent involvement activities, the knowledge that became about awareness of developments of children and their life at school environment relaxed both families and children, and had positive effects on school-family relationship. Especially, being involved in different activities during each step of project provided mothers and fathers to be aware of that they had very important place on life of their children (Hughes & Greenhough, 2006).

Involving parents into teaching and learning process of their children and collaboration of school-family relationship is possible with parent involvement. Parent involvement is rooted not only from the importance of school for families, but also the need for support of families for the wanted success of schools (Berger, 1991). Parent involvement must be done within a plan in order to make family know his/her child's school, get knowledge about school environment and school program, and such reasons (Oktay & Unutkan, 2003). It takes attention in the studies that families had been satisfied from the parent involvement. In their research in 2003, Kaya and Gultekin stated that mothers and fathers have interest for the program that is been applied in early childhood education and are ready for the collaboration of school and family.

## **Result and Suggestions**

It has been observed after the study that parent involvement activities under clothing project and the process of project provided positive contributions for the child and their awareness on clothing was increased. Families of four age group children generally emphasized that there are positive changes on

self-care skills, families of five age group children generally emphasized that there are positive changes more on cognitive, language, social, and emotional developmental areas. It is mostly examined that all families got satisfaction from parent involvement activities and they felt themselves as valuable; besides, families stated that seeing what their children experience during the process closely will be effective their next participation into parent involvement studies.

In the manner of those findings, it can be suggested that;

- Studies should be organized about increasing parent involvement activities in early childhood education,
- Project studies should be done in early childhood education that make families be engaged in education from beginning to the end,
- In-service training should be provided for teachers in order to make project activities be executed healthy.

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