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# Views of 4-5-Year-Old Children with No Nursery or Kindergarten Experience about School\*

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## Abstract

To have a successful school life, a child must be able to make a healthy start to this period both socially and mentally. For this, children's views about school have a strong potential to affect their entire lives. The research aimed to examine the views of 4-5-year-old children who have not started any formal school yet. The study group consisted of 12 children aged between 4-5 years who have not started kindergarten from the province of Rize in Turkey. For the study; an open-ended, concentrated interview and drawing methods were applied with a small group. The data obtained from the group interviews with the children and the interpretation of the drawings were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique. Based on the data, it was concluded that the family and the media are among the strong information sources of children about school and that positive features are frequently repeated. Negative features included crowding, rules, etc. The results also revealed that children who have no school experience and those who attend a pre-school education institution full-time have similar views about the school.

**Keywords:** School Readiness, Preschool Education, Phenomenology

## 1. Introduction

Although school is a place where formal teaching activities are carried out, it is also a social environment full of innovations for a child (Senemoglu, 1994). In this environment, many new rules and tasks to be accomplished are automatically included in the child's life. This is a significant and new change for children. The child must have completed the necessary development tasks in order not to be adversely affected by this change and to start school smoothly. Children should be able to express themselves, be aware of their responsibilities, not have to worry about leaving the family and home, communicate correctly with the teacher, establish friendships, maintain their

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cleanliness, dress by themselves, wait in line, find themselves in between classes while starting a primary school (Oktay & Unutkan, 2005). They must be able to protect themselves and have the ability to sit in line and concentrate for long periods. This information indicates that among the skills that the child should have regarding the transition to school, their awareness of themselves and the school environment they will be involved in should be at a sufficient level.

For twenty years, as a result of the acceptance of the view that children are active learners, it has become very important to listen to children's thoughts about their learning, life, and experiences (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). In addition, children's views about school have the potential to affect their entire lives. For this reason, since children's adaptation to school is problematic in some cases, it is considered as a crisis period that should be struggled by the families (National Ministry of Education [NME], 2018; Ryan, 1999). In this context, at the beginning of each new term, papers full of advice for families whose children have just started school are published in print and social media (for example see the page [www.ieu.edu.tr/en/news/type/read/id/6618](http://www.ieu.edu.tr/en/news/type/read/id/6618) ). Therefore, creating a positive perception towards the school also contributes greatly to the child's adaptation to school (Kocyigit, 2014).

Being a member of a new group sociologically is not easy, besides the anxiety of being psychologically distant from the family. However, in the normal course of life, when the time comes, it is an inevitable reality to leave the family and to go to school, even if it is compulsory. In this case, it is of great importance that children's school-related mental structures are formed positively from early childhood. In this process, visual media and printed resources, especially families, play important roles.

Although there are a limited number of studies focusing on the school experiences of primary school children in Turkey (see EIR, 2016), the absence of any study on the school-related views of children who have never had any formal school experience, including the pre-school period, gives this research significant originality. On the other hand, studies are examining the views and perceptions of children educated in independent kindergartens about school (Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2011, Geyik et al., 2018; Kocyigit, 2014).

For this purpose, a study conducted by Geyik et al. (2018), it was tried to reveal the changes in children's school perceptions according to their kindergarten and kindergarten attendance status and gender factors. Interviews were held with the children themselves, their families, and teachers, to reveal their school perceptions, the children were asked to draw their school and themselves at school one week apart, the pictures were examined as documents and the participation of the children in the activities in the classroom was observed by the researchers. As a result of the interviews, observations, and examination of the children's pictures in the research, it was seen that 12 out of 20 children had positive school perceptions and 8 children had negative school perceptions. The results of the research have concluded that the school perceptions of children do not differ according to their attendance to kindergarten and their gender.

The other study was conducted by Kocyigit (2014) whose data were collected using a mosaic approach, which includes different verbal and visual techniques in which children can express themselves comfortably. According to the research findings, preschool children defined primary school as large, crowded, complex, and remote. They also expressed family, teachers, and television as the main sources of information about primary school. Another finding of the study is that preschool children think that there are many rules in primary school and they cannot play games. Looking at the whole of the dialogues in the meetings, almost all of them had negative thoughts. The reason for this situation is the lack of correct information about primary school.

Although adults use the verbal expression as a way of expressing themselves, this skill is not sufficiently developed in children (Kocyigit, 2014). Therefore, drawing is undoubtedly one of the most original ways for the child to express feelings, thoughts, and dreams in many situations where they cannot express easily in terms of language skills (Yavuzer, 2016). Drawing is a fun and easy way for children to reflect on their feelings and thoughts (Skybo, Wenger, & Ying, 2007). For this reason, drawing is both a communication tool and an important element where children's perception, skills, and creativity emerge. They can reflect on their emotions and relax while drawing. The child expresses wishes, longings, shortcomings, fears, dreams, and perceptions through painting. These

expressions may not always be clear and understandable. The symbols, lines, and colors used are clues (Artut, 2017; Buyurgan & Demirel, 2013; Civek & Camlibel Cakmak, 2019; Digler, 2017; Yukay-Yuksel et al., 2015). For preschool children who cannot express themselves verbally, painting is an important tool in reflecting the child's inner world and providing detailed information about it (Halmatov, 2017)

In Turkey, the primary school starting age is 5 (60 months) as specified in the Primary Education and Education Law No. 222 and the National Education Basic Law No. 1739, which entered into force on March 30, 2012, and parents justify that their child's physical development is not sufficient to delay the child's starting primary school can make a written application. This situation makes the parents the only authority in the preparation process of the child and in the process of starting primary school.

Points to be considered in the interpretation of the pictures, it is seen that a picture is an important tool in reflecting the inner world of the child (Digler, 2012; Halmatov, 2017). For this reason, it is stated that the drawings, which reflect the feelings aroused by the school environment that the child meets after family, and point of view towards the school, are an important source of information for teachers and families is considered.

In the current research, the information and views of 4-5-year-old children about the transition to school were consulted in depth. When the relevant literature is examined, it is noteworthy that limited studies are examining school-related mental schemas of children with preschool and nursery experience, however, there is no information and views of 4-5-year-old children about school with no experience. In addition, all children are going through a transition process to a school that is shaped by their understanding and experience (Kocyigit, 2014). In this context, this research is considered important in terms of examining the transition to school from the perspective of children and aiming to bring educational suggestions in terms of children's thoughts about school with no direct school experience. In this respect, the research has the potential to reveal important information for innovators and decision-makers in terms of comparing the views of children with and without school experience in early childhood. Thus, the general purpose of this research is to reveal the views of 4-5-year-old children who did not attend kindergarten about school. In line with this general-purpose, answers to the following questions were also sought:

1. What are the knowledge and expectations of 4-5-year-old children about school?
2. What are the sources of information about the school for 4-5-year-old children?
3. What skills do 4-5-year-old children think are necessary for school?

## **2. Method**

The phenomenology method, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in the study (Creswell, 2013). It is used because the images of children in the same age groups related to the concept of school were examined in the research and the most appropriate techniques for both the purpose and the characteristics of the study group. To investigate childrens' views about schools open-ended interviews with small groups and also drawings and explaining pictures methods were used. In the research, firstly, open-ended interviews were held with the children aged between 4 and 5, and then they were asked to explain their views about the school by drawing a picture. Then, they were asked to verbally describe the pictures. In this way, the validity of the analysis results to be made by the researchers based on the drawings of the students was confirmed.

### *The study group*

The study group consisted of a total of twenty children, six boys, and six girls, in the 4-5 age group. In line with the purpose of this study, children were selected from those who had never enrolled in any kindergarten or kindergarten-type preschool education institution within the scope of a purposive sampling method. However, almost all children have a sibling or siblings who formally attend primary or secondary school. After informing

the parents of these children about the research in face-to-face communication, their permission was obtained for the research, which would last approximately 30 minutes.

#### *Data Collection*

The data obtained from the small group interviews with the children and the interpretation of the drawn pictures were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique. In the scope of open-ended interviews, questions in the research were not prepared before the research but were developed during the interviews. Interviews were held in the children's own homes as they felt comfortable. The interviews lasted between 20-30 minutes and were recorded with a voice recorder. After the small group interviews, children were asked to draw pictures of what the school would be like/could be in connection with the interviews. Then, the children were asked questions about the pictures they drew and they were asked to explain in a friendly atmosphere.

#### *Data Analysis*

While presenting the research findings, the names of the children participating in the research were given by changing them. The results were presented systematically in line with the sub-purposes of the research. The first sub-goal of the research, "What are the knowledge and expectations of 4-5-year-old children about school?" attached to the theme of "*school image*," the second sub-goal "What are the sources of information about the school for 4-5-year-old children?" is attached to the theme of "*information source*," the third sub-goal, "Which skills do 4-5-year-old children think are necessary at school?" attached to the theme of "*readiness for school*." Expertise in the relevant field is extremely important for the validity of child picture analysis. In this context, two of the researchers of this study took the postgraduate child picture analysis course at the Recep Tayyip Erdogan University. For this reason, the information produced by these two researchers, who work first in independent environments and then together in data analysis, is reliable.

### **3. Results**

The data obtained from the multiple data collection tools as open-ended interviews, school drawings, and verbal descriptions of them collected in line with the sub-purposes of the research were categorized under three sub-titles as school image, information source, and readiness for school as explained in the previous section.

#### *Theme 1- School Image*

The categories, frequencies, and percentages obtained from the small group interviews with the children about the place of the school are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Information on school definitions of 4-5-year-old children

Category	f	%
Big	7	17,5
Fun	9	22,5
Crowded	5	12,5
Beautiful	7	17,5
Regular	12	30
Total	40	100

Looking at the table; the school has been described as a place big, crowded, beautiful, fun but for regular. In the first posts about the school, it was seen that it was seen as a place where rules were dominant (30%), although it was remarkable that it was structured in the mind as a fun and beautiful place, in addition to the views in the form of large and crowded. The children who started the school as a place with rules put forward the following statements as a basis for this:

*"I can't play with my baby there, the teacher gets mad at me"*

*"I can't be naughty, then the teacher gets mad at me"*

*"If I don't read a book, the teacher won't love me"*

Now, from these statements, the school's regularity can be said that it is reflected not as a positive but a negative feature by the children. In other words, school is not attractive because it is a place where rules exist, on the contrary, it is foreign to children.

When asked "how do you know this?" almost all children answered as expected from the close environment, which has an important role in life, as, "my sister/brother or mother told me it." In this way, children begin to form their first images, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, about the school they have never encountered.

In addition to the statements used by the children and presented below, it was revealed that the school was physically seen as a "big place."

*"It's beautiful there, even bigger than our house"*

*"Lots of places to play there"*

*"There are always lockers with playdough and toys in them"*

From these statements, the fact that a school is a big place is reflected highly as a positive feature. On the other hand, there are also some negative thoughts somewhat fearful about school;

*"My mother will come too, otherwise I will be lost there,"*

*"There are many stairs, I fall"*

In ways that support children's definitions of the school shared up to this point, the drawings and interview notes of some students about the school are given below directly quoted.



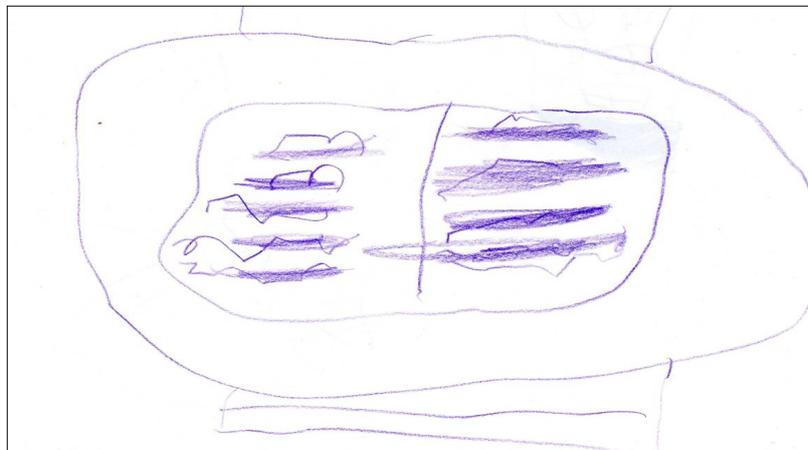
Picture 1: Ayse (56 months old child school picture)

When the definitions of children about school were examined, it was noted that the most frequently mentioned definition was an environment where they would stay away from their parents and the school was a place full of rules. *"I can't play with my baby there, the teacher gets mad at me"* (Ayse, 56 months old child).



Picture 2: Fatma (51 months old child school picture)

In this school picture child expressed in their own words that a school is a place where there are balloons and where children dance. The child is also thought to have too many kids so would have too many friends.



Picture 3: Ugur (54 months old child school picture)



Picture 4: Atakan (56 months old child school picture)

From the sentences such as "We celebrate holidays, we play a lot" (Ufuk, 51 months old) and as similarly "There are children there, there are games" (Selma, 60 months old), it is learned that they think that a school is a fun place.

### *Theme 2- Information Source*

Within the scope of the second sub-problem of the research, the question was asked "where and how you obtained information about the school?". Here is the frequency of what is expressed in the dialogues as a family ( $f = 27$ ), and television ( $f=11$ ). Under the family category, it has been found that especially mothers, siblings, and fathers are sources of information and thoughts that children have about the school. 11 expressions were belonging to the category of television in the theme of informing 4-5-year-old children about school. The most important finding here is that cartoons are an important source of information for children about school.

### *Theme 3- Readiness for School*

Within the scope of the third sub-problem of the research, the question was asked "whether you feel ready to go to school? and/or when do you plan to go to school?". Almost all children stated that it is still early to this question and that they can leave when some of the listed situations occur. It is noteworthy that the sentences such as "I can go to school when I carry a bag" (Eylul, 56 months), "I will go to school when I get taller" (Alperen, 57 months) are frequently mentioned by other children as well. It is an important finding of the research that almost all of the children stated that the increase in the calendar age is one of the prerequisites for them to start primary school.

## **4. Discussion**

As it is stated in the introduction of the research, it is important to examine the views of children about school, which started to form in their minds from early childhood, in many respects. In addition, in the studies in the literature related to the subject area, the views of children who are currently attending a kindergarten or pre-school education institution directly associated with the school have been examined (Dinc, 2013; Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2011, Erkan & Kirca, 2010; Geyik et al., 2019; Kocyigit, 2014). Besides the views that can be considered partially positive, mainly negative views also attract attention. In this, there is no doubt that the environment around the child's side is of great importance. On the other hand, the experiences of the school in question and the attitudes of the teachers, who are an important source in this, are at the forefront. Although there is some information that nursery or kindergarten experience facilitates adaptation to formal primary school and therefore school life, it is an important problem situation that how children who have never had a direct school experience differ in their views about the school. For these reasons, in the present study, the views of 4-5-year-old children in the early childhood period, who have no direct experience with school, were examined in detail. For this purpose, examining the views of children, albeit a limited group, with open-ended interviews, drawings, and multiple measurement tools based on the explanation of drawings confirms the validity of the information presented. In this context, the views of children who have never been enrolled in a kindergarten or any other pre-school education (which constitutes a significant proportion among the total children) about school were examined for the first time. As it is known, positive thoughts or mental structuring about a phenomenon or event affect the attitude towards the phenomenon and event, thus facilitating adaptation. On the other hand, the hypothesis in the literature that children with nursery or kindergarten experience in early childhood are better adapted to primary school needs to be tested (Yoleri & Tanis, 2014). Every experience that a child has about school affects school image (Guler, 2001; Guler, 2012). Many studies have shown that children's academic and social success depends on their adaptation to primary education (Entwisle, 1995; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Margetts, 2003; Seven, 2011). In this context, the results obtained in the current study reveals that children form both positive and negative ideas about school and that siblings who have direct school experience as much as parents in the home environment, which is considered as the close environment, are effective in the formation of these ideas.

In the second theme, it is revealed that television, mostly family, is also effective to some extent among the information sources of the child about school. Probably, in the process following the child's encounter with the concept of school, they act perceptually selective both when the relevant subject is brought up in the family and

when the relevant subject is exhibited in television programs. At this point, as a suggestion, to facilitate the adaptation of the child to the school, it is important to need to plan the process instead of waiting for random facts and events in the correct construction of the school image. That is, both parents and siblings need to be careful in the process of communicating with the child.

Similarly, special attention should be paid to help the child get to know the school and construct it in mind through appropriate programs through which they can gain a positive school image, followed by other possible undesirable school experiences that should be misrepresented. It is valuable information that children are aware that they are not ready for school yet, as examined in the third theme, and that this is a result of calendar age. Kocyigit and Kayili (2014) also found out that school readiness of preschool children differs in favor of children with reflective cognitive style. Probably, in this result, it is valuable to follow the sharing of the parents and the school enrollment periods of the siblings of the children, albeit implicitly, by the child. Similarly, in the first theme, family members in the close environment and programs on television are effective in the formation of school-related physical and social aspects as claimed in many similar studies (Kocyigit, 2014). In short, in this study, the views of children who had school experience in early childhood and those who did not were found to be quite similar. From this point of view, it has been revealed that the effect of nursery or pre-school education institution experience on the formation of positive views about the school is quite limited.

## 5. Conclusion

Especially when the research results are examined, it is seen that families and television are among the strong information sources of early childhood children about school. All stakeholders have important duties in informing children about school (Kocyigit, 2009). In this context, all stakeholders, especially parents, teachers, governments, and media, have responsibilities in preparing children for school. The preparation of projects such as cartoons, public service announcements, and special broadcast hours for children may be beneficial in supporting children in this regard (Erdogan & Simsek, 2014). Perhaps the most important thing is that the views of those who have never experienced a kindergarten and/or nursery are quite similar and that the home environment as an informal learning environment and the communication there are the main sources in the formation of views about the school. Based on the research, in the next process, the views of the children about the school when they officially start primary school are really wondered.

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