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INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING CENTERS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOLERS FROM PRESERVICE TEACHERS' VIEWS

***Annotation.** In our country, due to the rapid increase in the rate of pre-school enrollment in recent years, the importance of the physical equipment of the schools has increased rapidly in order for these schools to provide quality education to their students. For this reason, the importance of learning centers that affect all developmental areas of the child has increased remarkably. In this study, it is aimed to examine the importance of learning centers in the preschool period and the level of their place in the education program in line with the opinions of teacher candidates. 20 pre-school teacher candidates participated in this research, which was organized in a qualitative design. These participants were asked 17 open-ended questions about learning centers. Necessary suggestions were made at the end of the research.*

***Key words:** Learning centers, preschool, teacher candidates, open-ended questions, quality.*

Introduction. Although pre-school education institutions have become widespread in our country in recent years, it is noteworthy that their educational environments and equipment are not yet at the desired level. Although the importance of pre-school education has begun to be understood in our country, it can be said that many people do not have enough information about the features that pre-school education institutions should have [15]. For a quality preschool

education, it is important and necessary that the educational environment and equipment be arranged and designed following the health and development of children [7], that is, in a way that meets the educational needs of children (MEB, 2013). Many other names are also used for learning centers, such as «areas of interest», «activity centers», «points of interest» and «centers of interest». The corners that were designated as 'interest corners' in the MEB 2006 Pre-School Education Program were named as 'learning centers' in the MEB 2013 program. Centers for children; It gives the chance to explore, learn, dream, create, try and practice, use problem-solving and critical thinking skills, learn independently, share with classmates [16, 17] . The results of the studies conducted in our country indicate that the learning centers are not sufficient mostly due to economic and spatial inadequacies; shows that teachers need support in the creation of learning centers and adapting activities to learning centers [1,2,6,8,17]. It consists of learning the opinions of teacher candidates about the learning centers that should be established in the classrooms according to the current pre-school education program, seeing how the teachers practice and determining whether the learning centers and materials are sufficient.

Purpose and Importance of the Research. In this study, it is aimed to examine the importance of learning centers in the preschool period and the level of their place in the education program in line with the opinions of teacher candidates. In line with this purpose, it is thought that it will contribute in terms of raising awareness about the arrangement of pre-school education and educational environments in disadvantaged regions in terms of education and environment and encouraging researchers to conduct new studies.

Research Model. This research in the general screening model was organized in a qualitative design [11]. Qualitative research; It is defined as research in which data collection methods such as interview, observation and document analysis are used, and a process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in their natural environment, realistically and holistically [23].

Working group. The study group of the research consists of 20 pre-school teacher candidates studying at Necmettin Erbakan University Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty in Konya city center in 2020-2021. In the determination of the study group of the research, easily accessible case sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, which is thought to be suitable for the research, and which allows the selection of voluntary and easily accessible pre-school teacher candidates, was used.

Data Collection Tools. A semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers was used to obtain the data of the study. During the preparation of the interview form, a literature review was conducted, similar studies in the field were examined, and a draft plan and form consisting of 17 open-ended questions was prepared.

Results. In this part of the study, the findings obtained in line with the semi-structured interview form of the teacher candidates and the comments made according to the findings will be included. In the findings; The situation of the learning centers, the frequency of use, the existence of materials and equipment used in the learning centers and the opinions of the teachers about the learning centers will be included.

1 - Were there any learning centers in the institution where you did your internship?

To this question; 100% of the participants answered yes.

2 - Which learning centers were located in the institution where you did your internship?

35% of the participants answered book center, 33% block center, 9% art center, 8% music, 8% game, 7% science center.

3 - What could be the reason why there are no learning centers/centers that you see are missing in the institution where you did your internship?

60% of the participants answered that the space of the classroom was insufficient, 25% of them said that the material was insufficient, and 15% was the financial impossibility.

4 - What do you think about the size of the learning center areas in the institution where you do your internship?

75% of the participants answered as not sufficient, 15% of them as sufficient and 5% of them as moderate.

5 - What are the problems encountered during the game in the learning centers in preschool education?

30% of the participants have limited space, 25% lack materials, 20% disagreements between children, 7% want too many children to play in a center at the same time, 5% children having difficulty participating in the game, 5% Children's use of the centers for other than their purpose, 3% gave the answer that children's attention is quickly distracted.

6 - How do learning centers in Pre-School Education affect the developmental areas of the child?

100% of the participants think that it will affect them positively. In addition, 25% say that it will contribute to the language development of children.

7-What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning centers for teachers?

30% of the participants think that the teacher can observe the children and this is an advantage. 25% consider it an advantage to save time for the teacher. 20% considered it a disadvantage that problems may arise among children. 15% see the small learning center areas as a disadvantage, while 10% see it as a disadvantage that children want to spend more time in the centers.

8 - Can you rank the learning centers preferred by the children in the institutions where you do your internship, from the center that attracts the most attention to the center that attracts the least attention?

55% of the participants think that the block center is the center that attracts the most attention, and 45% think that the center that attracts the most attention is the dramatic game center. 70% think that the center that attracts the least attention is the

book center, 10% think that the art center, 10% think that the science center and 10% think that the music center is the center that attracts the least attention.

9 - How much time should be spent in learning centers during the day for the child to benefit from preschool education institutions at the expected level and for the teacher to be efficient?

45% of the participants think that half an hour, 30% an hour, 10% fifteen minutes, 10% two and a half or three hours, 5% think that there is no time limit and the time should be adjusted according to the interests of the children.

10 - What should be considered when organizing learning centers in pre-school education? To this question;

50% of the participants think that attention should be paid to the developmental levels of the children, 20% to the use of safe materials, 20% to their separation with clear boundaries, and 10% to the centers where it is necessary to be quiet, away from noisy centers.

11 - How often should learning centers be organized in order to keep children's interests alive in pre-school education?

45% of the participants stated that it should be organized once a week, 25% once a month, 10% once every two weeks, 5% on important days and weeks, 5% frequently, 5% when needed, 5% stated that they did not have an opinion.

12 - How does the inclusion of children in this process affect the teacher-student relationship while organizing learning centers in pre-school education?

65% of the participants stated that it had a positive effect, 30% stated that the children would feel valuable, and 5% stated that the awareness of responsibility in children would increase.

13 - What should be considered in the selection of materials for learning centers in preschool education?

50% of the participants think that attention should be paid to the developmental characteristics of the child, 30% to be safe, 15% to be healthy, and 5% to be economical.

14 - What kind of problems does the lack of materials in pre-school education learning centers cause?

65% of the participants stated that there might be a problem among the children, 15% of them would not attract the attention of the children, 15% of them stated that their creativity and development levels might be affected negatively, and 5% of them had no idea.

15 - At what level are learning centers located in pre-school institutions located in environmentally disadvantaged regions?

70% of the participants stated that they were given a little place, 15% of them were given a medium level, 10% of them had no idea, and 5% of them stated that they were given a place within the possibilities.

16 - What is the difference between the development of children in institutions with and without learning centers in pre-school education?

70 of the participants stated that the development of children in institutions with learning centers is more advanced, 20% of them think that there is a significant difference, and 10% of them think that there is not much difference.

17 - How would you rank the learning centers that should be found in pre-school classes in order of importance?

30% of the participants put the dramatic play center, 15% the book center, 15% the science center in the first place. 20% put the art center and 20% the music center in the last place.

Conclusion. In this study, in line with the data obtained from the semi-structured interview forms, the majority of teacher candidates, in general, stated that they are aware of the importance of learning centers in preschool institutions and their place in education and that they have a positive effect on the developmental areas of children. It was emphasized that the organization of learning centers and educational environment is important for increasing the quality of education. In this study, all of the teacher candidates stated that learning centers were included in the institutions where they did their internship [2]. While most of the pre-service

teachers stated that learning centers were given a low level of space in pre-school institutions located in environmentally disadvantaged regions, some of them stated that they were given a moderate place. In a similar study, It was stated in their research that teachers had difficulties in creating learning centers in classrooms because of the unsuitable physical conditions and the high number of students [2, 19]. While most of the pre-service teachers stated that blocks and dramatic play centers were the most preferred learning centers of children, they stated that the least popular centers were book and music centers. Similar to these findings, in studies conducted by different researchers, it has been determined that the centers most preferred by children when playing are block and dramatic play centers [2, 20] In their opinions, pre-service teachers stated that in the selection of materials in learning centers, attention should be paid to the developmental characteristics of the child, being economical, reliable and healthy. He thinks that in case of lack of tools and materials, problems may arise among children regarding the problems encountered and that the use of insufficient materials in the activities will reduce the interest of the children in the activities and negatively affect the creativity of the children. The teacher should be in favor of producing practical solutions in the face of this situation. The teacher can ensure that the children benefit from the learning center on a rotational basis, following the conditions. Although the lack of materials is seen as an obstacle, the teacher can increase the variety of materials with the possibilities of himself or the people around him. In this study, pre-service teachers stated that the area allocated to learning centers in their schools is insufficient in general. It was observed that they associated this situation with the inconvenience of the physical conditions in the classrooms. Teacher candidates point out the necessity of shortening the time intervals for the organization of learning centers. They stated that in the arrangement of learning centers, attention should be paid to the interests and needs of children, their level of development, and a clear separation of learning centers from each other, and that the centers that need to be quiet should be away from.

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