



OPINIONS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND COUNSELLORS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GUIDANCE SERVICES IN PRESCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Preschool education is a very important educational stage in the development of the child. Guidance services in pre-school education have an important place due to the characteristics of the developmental period children are in. The aim of the guidance services to be provided in this period can be listed as the child's self-knowledge and acceptance, socialisation, ensuring adaptation to school, enabling the child to discover his/her interests and abilities, developing problem-solving skills, identifying children with special educational needs, determining the child's readiness for transition to basic education and providing guidance to families. This study, which aims to evaluate preschool guidance services according to the views of preschool teachers and guidance counsellors, was designed in accordance with the phenomenological model, one of the qualitative research methods. The participant group of the research will consist of preschool teachers and guidance counsellors working in primary schools and independent kindergartens in Edirne Central District. The data of the research will be collected with a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers and analysed by descriptive analysis. The findings of the research will be discussed in line with the related literature.

Key words: Preschool Education, Guidance Services, Preschool Teacher, Guidance Counsellor

INTRODUCTION

Guidance service carried out in schools can be defined as a systematic and professional assistance process carried out by experts, which helps individuals understand themselves, recognise the opportunities in the environment and help them make the right decisions so that they can realise themselves (1). In the pre-school education period, when the individual begins to recognise himself/herself, guidance practices should be emphasised with much more care. The basic understanding and attitudes that the child will acquire in this period, which is considered as a transition and a beginning from being a play child to being a school child, significantly affect the whole education process (2).

Preschool education is a very important educational stage in the development of children. It is important that guidance services, which are known to make great contributions to supporting the development of children in this period, are provided in a planned and programmed manner in these institutions. Guidance services offered in pre-school differ from the guidance services offered in higher education institutions. Since children in this age group have not yet fully completed the development of a series of skills such as reading and writing, expressing their own feelings and thoughts, they receive an indirect guidance service offered through the class teacher and family under the leadership of the school counsellor, rather than guidance services offered directly by an expert (3).

Guidance services that can be provided in the pre-school period should be activities aimed at the child's self-acceptance, self-confidence development, self-concept formation,

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socialisation; educational activities aimed at school adaptation and readiness for primary education, liking school, motivation towards reading-education, gaining basic skills; and professional development tasks in terms of professional guidance (2). Activities in pre-school education should also aim at recognising the child, ensuring adaptation to school, identifying and helping the child's problems, identifying children requiring special education, enabling the child to realise his/her strengths and weaknesses, determining the child's readiness for school and providing guidance to families (4).

Guidance services carried out in this context consist of a comprehensive integrity of services provided in cooperation and interaction with the family, teachers, school administration, friends and all individuals in the child's living environment, including protective, preventive and crisis intervention services (5).

Guidance and psychological counselling services in preschool education are planned and programmed services as in other levels. It is important that guidance services in pre-school education are carried out with structured and purposeful programmes. In the realisation of the objectives of the programme, it is necessary that the staff have a modern understanding of guidance and exhibit attitudes and behaviours in accordance with the principles and objectives of guidance. In addition, the cooperation of the family, school administration, teachers, guidance counsellors and other employees will facilitate the achievement of the programme objectives (6).

While providing guidance education in preschool education, special attention should be paid to ensure that these services are in interaction with the preschool education programme, that they are in relation with the achievements and indicators of the preschool education programme, that the active participation of the child is ensured, and that the characteristics of the developmental period in which the child is in are taken into consideration. In order to increase the effectiveness of these competency areas, everyone from school administrators, school counsellors, kindergarten teachers to the parents of the child has some duties (3).

The guidance counsellor, who is an important actor of guidance services in preschool education, is expected to prepare the guidance programme, support preschool teachers in the

implementation of the programme and provide feedback to teachers about these implementations. In addition, providing the materials and measurement tools that will be necessary in guidance activities, carrying out the guidance activities included in the programme at the relevant times, making a general evaluation of the programme, identifying the problems and taking the necessary measures are also important tasks. Finally, guidance counsellors are expected to cooperate with school administration, preschool teachers and parents, inform parents about the programme and implement family education programmes (3, 7).

Preschool teachers also have important duties for the successful implementation of guidance activities. First of all, teachers need to understand the programme and its general structure. In this direction, preschool teachers are expected to conduct research on the topics, work in coordination with the guidance counsellor and thus be prepared for the practices. In addition, teachers should plan their guidance practices in a way to provide children with experiences that will enable them to gain attitudes, skills and values. During these practices, the teacher should allow children to express themselves. The teacher is expected to provide reinforcements for children when necessary and to be a model for the skills to be acquired. Finally, the teacher is expected to cooperate with parents to follow the development of children and to ensure that parents participate in counselling activities (3, 7).

In this study, it was aimed to reveal the views of preschool and guidance counsellors on the importance of guidance services in preschool education. In line with this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

- 1) What are the views of preschool and guidance counsellors on the importance of guidance services in preschool education?
- 2) What are the opinions of pre-school and guidance counsellors about the problems encountered while carrying out guidance services in pre-school education?
- 3) What are the views of preschool and guidance counsellors on the development of guidance services in preschool education?

METHOD

Research Design

This study, which aims to evaluate preschool guidance services according to the views of preschool teachers and guidance counsellors,

was designed in accordance with the phenomenological model, one of the qualitative research methods. In phenomenological research, it is aimed to reveal the individual's experiences, perceptions, experiences and meanings attributed to the phenomenon by focusing on phenomena that are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding (8).

Working Group

The study group of the research consisted of a total of 14 teachers, 7 preschool teachers working in six different primary schools in Edirne Province Centre in the autumn term of the 2024-2025 academic year and 7 guidance counsellors working in the same schools. Thirteen of the interviewed teachers were female and one was male. Seven of the teachers were preschool teachers and seven were counselling teachers. In terms of age distribution, 3 of the interviewed teachers were 31-40 years old, 10 were 41-50 years old, and 1 was 50 years old or older. According to professional seniority, 1 teacher with 1-10 years of experience, 4 teachers with 11-15 years of experience, 6 teachers with 16-20 years of experience, and 1 teacher with 20 years of experience or more were interviewed.

Data Collection

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews. While preparing the interview form to be used in teacher interviews, it was paid attention that the questions should be open-ended, should not be multidimensional, should not be directive and should be easily understood by the participants. The interview form was presented to the opinions of faculty members with expertise and experience in the subject and the questions were finalised on the basis of feedback.

The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder with the knowledge of the teachers. In order to eliminate the possibility of any disruption in the recordings and to take into account the non-verbal aspects of the interviews, notes were taken by the researcher during the interview.

Analysing the Data

The data obtained from the teachers through semi-structured interviews were analysed with the content analysis technique since the conceptual structure of the research and the themes that would form the basis for the analysis could not be determined in advance (8).

In this context, in the analysis of the data obtained from the teachers, firstly the voice recordings and the written data were transferred to the computer environment. Then, the voice recordings and computer transcripts were given to an expert to check whether the data were correctly transferred to the computer environment and approval was obtained. After this stage, the answers given for each question were analysed and codes were obtained. Categories were formed by combining the codes and themes were formed by combining the categories. As the last step of the analysis phase, the data obtained were discussed at the consensus meeting held with the participation of two experts in the fields of preschool education and guidance, and inter-coder reliability analysis was carried out. In this process, the formula $\text{Reliability} = \left[\frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}} \right] \times 100$ (9) was used and the inter-coder reliability was calculated as 94%.

In order to ensure the external validity of the research; the study group, data collection tool and how the tool was created, data collection process, data analysis and interpretation, and how the findings were organised were described in detail. In order to ensure the transferability of the results obtained in the research, the data were described in detail and supported with direct quotations from time to time. In the direct quotations, the real names of the participants were kept confidential, and abbreviations such as PT1, PT2 for preschool teachers and C1, C2 for counsellors were used in direct quotations.

FINDINGS

Within the scope of the research, the findings are presented below in accordance with the sub-objective questions of the research. The codes that emerged from the participant statements were categorised under three themes. These are; the importance of pre-school guidance services, the problems encountered while carrying out pre-school guidance services and suggestions for the development of pre-school guidance services.

Findings on the Importance of Guidance Services in Preschool Period

The most frequently expressed opinion under the theme of the importance of guidance services in preschool education by preschool teachers and guidance counsellors participating in the study was that guidance in preschool education supports the holistic development of the child (**Table 1**). Again, both preschool

teachers and guidance counsellors stated that guidance services in preschool education support the process of adaptation to school and are very important for the solution of common problem behaviours in children. Teachers also stated that guidance services in preschool education are very important for a successful academic life and make important contributions to the development of school-family relations. Sample teacher opinions are as follows:

'...since the 0-6 age period is one of the most important critical periods especially in personality development, guidance activities should definitely have a place in pre-school education. Solving the problems that children may encounter in this period when they enter the social environment for the first time with the support of guidance will help to overcome the critical times in the future. Within the scope of preventive guidance activities, coping skills that the child can use in later life are strengthened. Again, it is possible to diagnose and guide the child with some special conditions observed and noticed in the child during this period through guidance services. With the guidance services provided to the parents, the child will be prepared for the future with the maximum benefit'. C7

'... Pre-school counselling activities are very valuable for the student to start his/her academic life at the right time and strong. It is also very important in terms of gaining the ability to initiate and maintain social

relationships and problem solving skills. At the same time, students who have gained the skills of saying no and setting limits can continue their academic life with high self-confidence and leadership skills'. C5

'...I think that observing, recognising and communicating with this student group, which constitutes the lowest group in terms of the developmental period of formal education, and taking precautions in every subject will contribute to the student's educational life and social life'. C3

'...guidance services are of great importance in supporting the development of children in this period. It contributes to all developmental areas of the child. It is very important in terms of strengthening parent and school relations regarding the solution of the problems encountered by teachers with students. Since the preschool period is the new period in the lives of students and families when they meet with the school, I think that parents and children need guidance more." PT6

'...helps children to adapt to school. It supports children's holistic development. It enables the child to recognise and accept himself/herself and to form a self-concept. PT3

'...pre-school counselling is important in terms of solving the problems faced by teachers with students, educating parents and strengthening their relationships with students'. PT2

Table 1. Teachers' Views on the Importance of Guidance in Preschool Education

| Theme | Codes | C | P |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Importance of Guidance Services in Preschool Education | Supports children's holistic development | 6 | 5 |
| | Facilitates the process of adaptation to school | 6 | 6 |
| | Contributes to academic success | 4 | 4 |
| | Provides the solution of behavioural problems | 4 | 3 |
| | Contributes to the Development of School Family Relations | 2 | 2 |

C: Counsellor P: preschool teacher

Findings Regarding the Problems Encountered While Conducting Guidance Services in Preschool Period

The most frequently expressed opinion under the theme of problems encountered while carrying out guidance services in preschool education by preschool and guidance counsellors participating in the study was the lack of information about guidance services in preschool education (**Table 2**). Another problem frequently mentioned by the guidance

counsellors and preschool teachers participating in the study was the lack of sufficient number of guidance counsellors in preschool education. In addition, the high number of students in schools was also emphasised by the teachers as a reason why guidance counsellors could not allocate sufficient time to students in pre-school education. According to the teachers, these problems lead to the disruption of counselling services. Sample teacher opinions are as follows:

'...I think the most important problem is that it is considered unnecessary because it is the youngest age group in formal education and the concept of a psychological counsellor is not established'. C3

'... The biggest problem in this field is the norms of counsellors in schools. What absolutely needs to be done is to reduce the number of students and recruit more psychological counsellors and guidance counsellors to schools. At the same time, I think that the number of class students should be less.'. (C5).

'...the guidance services carried out in schools are definitely not sufficient. Especially in schools without guidance staff, guidance services are not provided and the teachers assigned in the middle of the term cannot meet the problems'. PT2

'...I think it is sufficient in the school where I work, but there may be times and situations when the number of students is high and the counsellor cannot keep up with this number. I think that the number and support of counsellors should be increased according to the number of students in the school or the special education needs of the students that year PT6

Other problems frequently mentioned by the teachers participating in the study were the lack of adequate support from families for guidance services and the lack of coordination and cooperation in the provision of guidance services in preschool education. The problem

of the workload of guidance counselors was another problem emphasized especially by the counselors who participated in the study. One guidance counselor participating in the research stated that the competencies of guidance counselors in their fields should be improved. Sample teacher opinions are as follows:

"...until the last two or three years, there have been major problems with the staffing of psychological counselors in preschool institutions. The formation of a continuous and systematic guidance approach has been hindered. Studies have remained inadequate. However, psychological counselors working in these institutions need to be equipped with trainings that will contribute to the development of the child and produce more effective solutions in various problem areas". C2

"...the fact that pre-school classrooms are located in institutions such as primary schools disrupts guidance services. Due to the student and workload in schools, preschool students are often ignored and guidance services are provided when problem behaviors occur". C7

"...parents of students who need guidance support do not accept this support. Insufficient parent participation are important problems." C4

"...it is an important problem that the family does not accept the interview, presents the child's situation differently than it is or does not accept the situation" PT5

Table 2. Teachers' Opinions on the Problems Encountered While Carrying Out Guidance Services in Preschool Education

| Theme | Codes | C | P |
|--|---|---|---|
| Problems Encountered in Preschool Guidance Services | Lack of coordination and co-operation | 5 | 4 |
| | Inadequacy of the programme | 1 | 1 |
| | Insufficient number of counsellors | 6 | 4 |
| | Lack of knowledge about the scope of counselling services | 6 | 5 |
| | Lack of sufficient support from families for counselling services | 5 | 4 |
| | Work intensity of counsellors | 5 | 2 |
| | High number of students in schools | 4 | 3 |

C: Counsellor P: preschool teacher

Suggestions for Improving Guidance Services in Preschool

The most frequently expressed opinion under the theme of improving guidance services in preschool education by preschool and guidance

counselors participating in the study was to rapidly increase the number of guidance counselors in schools and to establish special physical spaces for guidance services (**Table 3**). Another suggestion frequently expressed by the

teachers was the development of cooperation between school administration, guidance counselors, preschool teachers and parents for the successful implementation of guidance services. Another suggestion frequently emphasized by both guidance counselors and preschool teachers was the organization of informative trainings for families on the importance and scope of guidance services (**Table 3**).

"...guidance services in preschool education can be carried out with the dedication of school counselors. However, I think they should be supported more in this regard. If material support, special area support for group work, material support and training support could be provided, it would be an easier process for the guidance counselor and more productive for the student." C5

"...in order to improve guidance services, psychological counselors and guidance counselors responsible for preschool classes should be appointed separately. Counselors should also be subjected to separate trainings for the preschool period. For example; play therapy, child assessment tests, etc." C7

"...if there are enough guidance counselors and if the family agrees to meet with

the guidance service, adequate services can be provided. In order to improve it, first of all, preschool should be seen as a level and given the necessary importance by the parents. Then, the teacher, family and guidance service should work diligently and in cooperation". PT5

"...in order to eliminate these problems, both written and visual explanations about the general functioning and importance of guidance services should be increased, and parents should be constantly informed by class teachers and guidance counselors." PT6

"...in the 0-6 age period, when the cornerstones of personality are formed, the guidance service can evaluate the child within the framework of both family and teacher relationships, on the basis that family dynamics should be included in the studies to a significant extent". C2

"...school guidance services require teamwork. However, this teamwork is not fully established. Both the lack of guidance counselors and the fact that preschool teachers partially implement vocational guidance activities in the education process and are insufficient to some extent in this regard. Parent education is needed and children need to be educated at the same time". PT2

Table 3. Teachers' Opinions on the Development of Guidance Services in Preschool Period

| Kategoriler | Kodlar | C | P |
|---|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Suggestions for the Improvement of Guidance Services in Preschool Period | Enhance co-operation | 5 | 3 |
| | Staff allocation | 4 | 4 |
| | Creation of physical spaces | 5 | 2 |
| | Providing training to families | 6 | 4 |

C: Counsellor P: preschool teacher

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the importance and value given to guidance services in preschool education has increased in recent years, as in all educational institutions. According to the findings of the study, the most frequently mentioned benefit of guidance services in preschool education is that they support the holistic development of the child. The research findings also revealed that guidance services in preschool education support the process of adaptation to school and are very important for the solution of common problem behaviors in children. The teachers who participated in the research think that the guidance activities carried out in preschool education will make positive contributions to the school adaptation process for children who

have recently separated from their families at this level. The findings of the study also revealed that guidance services in preschool education are very important for children to have a successful academic life and make important contributions to the development of school-family relations.

These results are similar to the results of the studies in the literature (3, 5, 6, 11, 12). For example, in the study conducted by Kanak, Ersoy, and Yerliyurt (5), participants stated that it is easier to reach children through guidance services in preschool, and that guidance services make important contributions to healthy development, revealing their capacities and abilities, and adaptation to the school environment. Similar results were obtained in the study conducted by Bilgin (11). As a result

of the research, it was stated that the guidance activities implemented in the preschool period support the development of the child and prepare him/her for the next level of education and this helps the child to develop social relations in harmony with his/her environment, emphasizing the importance of guidance in the adaptation process of the child. (11)

The findings of the study revealed that the main problem encountered by preschool and guidance counselors while conducting guidance services in preschool education is the lack of knowledge about guidance services in preschool education. The lack of sufficient number of guidance counselors in preschool education and the high number of students in schools were also emphasized as factors that may hinder the implementation of guidance services. Again, the lack of adequate support from families for guidance services and the lack of coordination and cooperation while carrying out guidance services in preschool education are among the findings of the research.

Similar problems were also mentioned by the participants in the studies in the literature (3, 5, 10). For example, the most frequently mentioned problem by counselors and preschool teachers participating in the study conducted by Dilek and Talu (3) was “parental indifference”. Especially the lack of participation of parents in organized activities was expressed as an important problem. In the same study, “lack of cooperation” and “inadequate physical conditions” were the problems mentioned by guidance counselors. (3) As a result of another study (12), it was suggested to increase the number of psychological counselors in primary schools in order to carry out effective studies at the preschool level. A higher number of psychological counselors will provide a division of labor among psychological counselors and will enable more effective work to be carried out with the preschool level.

According to the findings of the study, in order to improve guidance services in preschool education, it was suggested that the number of guidance counselors in schools should be increased rapidly and special physical spaces should be established for guidance services. Another finding in this regard was the suggestion to improve cooperation between school administration, guidance counselors, preschool teachers and parents for the successful implementation of guidance

services. Another suggestion frequently emphasized by both guidance counselors and preschool teachers was the organization of informative trainings for families on the importance and scope of guidance services.

Similar suggestions for improving guidance services in preschool education have been put forward in studies in the literature. For example, the opinion frequently expressed by counselors and preschool teachers participating in the study conducted by Dilek and Talu (3) is that cooperation is important for successful guidance services. One of the views frequently emphasized by the participants was cooperation. It was emphasized by the groups that this cooperation can be established between the administrator-teacher-guidance counselor as well as between the guidance counselor and parents or teachers. Counselors and preschool teachers expressed their opinions about the guidance staff in preschool education institutions. In this regard, teachers in both groups emphasized that the norm staff should be maintained and increased. In addition, the suggestion of improving physical conditions was also expressed by guidance counselors.

It is thought that this study will contribute to the literature by examining the guidance services provided in preschools in the context of the views of preschool teachers and school counselors. In line with the results of the study, the following suggestions can be made:

- In order for guidance services to be effective on children in preschool period, it is very important that school administration, guidance counselor, preschool teacher and family act together. For these reasons, while preparing preschool guidance programs, the expectations and needs of all stakeholders such as preschool teachers, school counselors, parents and school administrators should be taken into consideration.

- At least one guidance counselor can be allocated in each preschool education institution regardless of the number of children.

- The importance and importance of guidance services provided in the preschool period

Informative family education programs can be organized on their functions.

- In order to develop and maintain preventive and intervention guidance services in every school, cooperation between school administration, guidance counselors and preschool teachers should be improved.

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