An Investigation of Children’s Play Preferences at Learning Centers

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Extended Summary

Preschool period is the fastest developmental period of children. The environment and rich experience opportunities provided to children influence their whole development. In order to make sure that children’s development is positively affected by the learning environment, rich materials should be provided, and their functions are to the point. In this context, the research aimed to examine the functioning of the learning centers organized in pre-school classrooms from various perspectives (preferred learning centers, children’s works, number of children playing at each learning center, learning centers preferences according to gender, individual or small group work preferences, etc.) to respond such common queries in the field and contribute to the relevant literature.

Method

In this research it was aimed to examine the functioning of the learning centers organized in pre-school classrooms from various perspectives (preferred learning centers, children’s works, number of children playing at each learning center, learning centers preferences according to gender, individual or small group work preferences, etc.). This study is a part of a long-term project named “The Right of Play – Play More” which was supported by Afyon Kocatepe University Projects Coordination Unit. In the aforementioned project, mixed design method was used. As the project also had overtones of qualitative characteristics, in this study, only the outcomes derived by direct observation were presented according the aim. Participant observation technique principles were followed in this case study. The data were collected simultaneously with the quantitative data during the weak experimental study which was the parallel dimension of the project.

Study Group

A total of 5-6-year-old 41 children were included in the study group of this case study the kindergartens affiliated to the Afyonkarahisar Provincial Directorate of National Education in 2015-2016 academic year by using non-selective sampling technique.

Data Collection Tools

The "General Information Form" developed for the purpose of collecting personal information about children and their parents and the "Learning Centers Observation Records Form" to assess the functional
characteristics of the learning centers and the plays carried out by the children were used. The learning centers were arranged so that a total of 41 children could work for about 75-90 minutes per day for five days a week for eight weeks.

Data Analysis

The data were collected using the "General Information Form" and the "Learning Centers Observation Records Form". Frequency and percentage values were presented as findings in tables. Qualitative data obtained from observation forms were analyzed through descriptive analysis method.

Conclusion and Suggestions

According to the results obtained from the "Learning Center Observation Records Form" during the observations made during the research period; it was observed that during the eight weeks of the study, circle time in the morning and afternoon groups and the play in the learning centers were mostly carried out in accordance with the objectives of the project and in accordance with the training given to the teachers and the teachers' assistants. However, as a result of the observation, it was determined that, teachers did not inform the children about the learning centers during the following weeks as they did so in the first weeks of the practice. It was determined that teachers send children at different times during the day to the learning centers in a manner they deem appropriate and that the teachers do not take short notes and make anecdotal recordings about their observations in the learning process in the learning centers but assess each child in detail according to the items in the development observation form. According to the results of the observation records of the learning centers attracting attention of children, it was found that the children most loved the literacy, math-science, books and art centers. However, it was determined that girls preferred to play games in literacy, mathematics, science, books, arts and dramatic play centers, and boys mostly preferred to play games in literacy, mathematics, science, books, arts and block centers. As to the number of children playing in learning centers, it was reported that children mostly preferred to play group games. In line with the conclusions, it is recommended that the materials in the learning centers in preschool education classrooms throughout the country are enriched with the materials supporting the development of the children, teachers are trained to plan, prepare and use the materials placed in learning centers, games in learning centers, the methods and strategies and assessment topics, parents should be trained on the development of children's play, effects on children's development and education, preparing games for children and games, and preparing projects for implementation. In addition, the implementation made within the scope of this study can be repeated with the participation of parents in other provinces and socio-economic level in order to determine the effect of learning and compare the results with this study to elaborate the effectiveness of learning centers.