

## Examining Parents' Views on Parental Involvement in Preschool English Teaching<sup>1</sup>

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This study aims to examine parents' views on parental involvement in preschool English language teaching. Today, as parents realize their roles, they have started to play a more active role in their children's educational process. In this period when children need their parents' support the most, parents need to turn this situation into an opportunity and contribute to their children's foreign language acquisition process. For this reason, this study examined the views of parents on their participation in this process in the preschool period, which is considered to be very important in terms of foreign language acquisition. It is predicted that this study will shed light on parents' thoughts about their participation in the preschool foreign language education process and will benefit the studies to be carried out to make English language teaching more effective in the preschool period. In this study, the case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used to obtain parents' views on their involvement in preschool English language teaching. A total of 15 parents, consisting of eight fathers and seven mothers, whose children received preschool English education in different schools in Afyonkarahisar province in Turkey, voluntarily participated in the study. In this study, the parents' opinions about their involvement in English language teaching were obtained through semi-structured interview forms. As a result of the study, it was found that although almost all the parents adopted the view that parental involvement was necessary when the situation of supporting their children's English learning at home was examined, it was found that they could not support their children in their English learning process due to limited time, insufficient English level, the view that school alone is sufficient and similar reasons. It is concluded that parents who thought that their English level was insufficient for their children's participation in the English language learning process, remained passive in this process and were not informed about how they could participate in the foreign language teaching process of their children.

Keywords: preschool, English language teaching, parent involvement, English as a foreign language, preschool English teaching

### INTRODUCTION

The early childhood period covers the period from birth to the age of 8 (McCollum, 1999) and, as Lambert (1972) (as cited in İltter & Er, 2007, p. 21) stated before, it has a critical importance for the child's development (Yazıcı, 2003, p. 1). Language development is particularly rapid during this period, which is critical as it will also affect the child's development in the following years. (Berk, 2013; Senemoğlu, 2012, p. 5; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978 p. 3). As stated by Chilla and Fox-Boyer in the "Bilingualism/Multilingualism Parents' Handbook" (2012, p. 20), it was determined that

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the process of language acquisition in the brain progresses faster between the ages of three and eight. In this period, with the support of the family, school, and environment, the child can use his/her mother tongue with approximately 2000 words at the age of five and completes a large part of his/her language development (Karakuş, 2000, p. 128; Erden & Akman 1997).

Foreign language learning in the preschool period, like mother tongue acquisition, is a critical and sensitive period (Hakuta, et al., 2003, p. 35; Knudsen, 2004, p. 1421), because during this period, while a child is learning a foreign language, he or she is also laying the foundations of that language and communication skills of the language development begin to take shape. Previous researchers of linguists, and educational scientists (Chilla & Fox-Boyer, 2012, p. 20-22; Kızıldaş, 2021, p. 1022; Onursal, 2019, p. 43) showed that it was advantageous to start learning a foreign language in early childhood when children's brain functions were most intense.

For this reason, foreign language education in preschools is becoming more and more widespread in our country, as it is all over the world. Every conscious parent who wants to design their child's future well knows how important it is for their child to learn English and communicate effectively (Özmen & Balçıkanlı, 2021, p. 13). Parents spend a lot of time and money to help their children learn English so that they can get a good education across borders, have job opportunities, and communicate effectively with the world. For this purpose, they send their children to private preschools, courses, or public schools that provide English language education from the preschool period onwards. Almost all private preschools compete with each other with the number of hours of foreign language classes they have added to their programs in recent years. In some state pre-schools, English as a foreign language is even included in the education process under the name of clubs upon the request of parents, even though it is not included in the official program. But is this enough on its own?

When a child starts a preschool institution, it does not mean that the responsibility for his/her education is completely transferred to the school; on the contrary, parents become supportive of formal education at this stage (Saracho & Spodek, 2003, p. 179; Yazar & Çelik & Kök, 2008 p. 234). The set of activities that parents carry out in cooperation with the school to support their children's education is referred to as "parental involvement" in the literature (Tezel Şahin & Ünver, 2005, p. 23). Demirezen (2003) stated that there was a critical period for foreign language acquisition and if the school and the family were not cooperating during this period, there would be problems in foreign language learning, while Barbre (2003, p.2) stated that parents made great contributions to their children's language development, but they were not aware of how important their role was in this regard.

When it comes to supporting children's foreign language learning, not much is known about parents' involvement in the foreign language learning process (Forey et al., 2016, p. 2). In addition, although there are many studies on the effect of parental involvement on children, no research was found that only takes parents' perspectives on this subject. In this period when children need their parents' support the most, parents need to turn this situation into an opportunity and contribute to their children's foreign language learning process. In this study, parents' opinions about their children's participation in English learning during the preschool period, which is considered very important for foreign language acquisition, were examined. It is anticipated that this research will shed light on parents' thoughts about their participation in the preschool foreign language education process and will benefit studies to make English teaching in the preschool period more effective.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to examine parents' views on parental involvement in the English language teaching process in the preschool period. To reveal the views of parents on this issue, the following questions were sought to be answered:

1. Do parents think that they should be involved in the English language learning process for their children to learn English?
2. To what extent do parents support their children's English learning process at home? What do they do to support this process?
3. Are there any factors that prevent parents from being involved in their children's English language learning process? What are they?
4. How do parents interact with the English teacher to be involved in their children's English language learning process?
5. According to parents, what are the views that "ideal" parents can do for a child to learn better English in preschool
6. What do parents expect from the teacher to be involved in their child's English learning process?

## **METHOD**

In this study, which was produced from a master's thesis called “*Examining Views on Parental Involvement in Preschool English Teaching*” and conducted at Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Curriculum and Instruction in 2023-2024, the case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used to reveal parents' views on their participation in preschool English language teaching. Merriam (2015, p. 40) defines a case study as an in-depth investigation and description of an existing situation. For this reason, a semi-structured interview protocol was prepared as a data collection tool for an in-depth examination of parents' views on their involvement in English language teaching. This semi-structured interview form, which was prepared with expert opinions, was finalized with a pilot application. Data was collected through face-to-face or telephone interviews at a time when the participants were available.

## **Participants**

While selecting the study group, criterion study group type, one of the purposeful study group methods, was used. With this technique, individuals who are generally interested in and knowledgeable about the research topic are utilized in determining the participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In the selection of the participants in this study, the main criterion was that they were parents whose children received English education in the preschool period. Fifteen parents in a province in Turkey, whose children receive English language education in preschool period in different schools, voluntarily participated in the study. The demographic information of the participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1  
Demographic characteristics of the study group

Participant	Parent	Age	Occupation	English Level*
E1	Mother	38	Teacher	Intermediate
E2	Mother	35	Housewife	Beginner
E3	Father	49	Retired Soldier	Intermediate
E4	Mother	30	Housewife	Beginner
E5	Father	47	Secretary-General	Upper-Intermediate
E6	Father	32	Lecturer	Proficient
E7	Mother	46	Teacher	Not know
E8	Mother	32	Lawyer	Beginner
E9	Mother	39	Teacher	Beginner
E10	Father	33	Lecturer	Proficient
E11	Father	48	Tradesman	Beginner
E12	Father	36	Teacher	Proficient
E13	Father	40	Officer	Not know
E14	Father	43	Self-employment	Intermediate
E15	Mother	38	Project Coordinator	Intermediate

\*Participants' English language level is based on self-rating during the interview.

#### Data Collection Tool

In this study, a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher was used to obtain the data. There are 6 questions in this form. The form was reviewed by 4 different experts from Eskişehir Osmangazi University and Afyon Kocatepe University. It was finalized with the feedback received as a result of the reviews. Face-to-face or telephone interviews were conducted through this semi-structured interview form when the participants were available. Before starting the interview, the participants signed a document stating that they voluntarily participated in this study and were informed that their voices would be recorded for analysis. The audio recordings of the answers given during the interviews were then transcribed and made ready for analysis. The semi-structured interview form, which was a data collection tool, consisted of the following questions:

- 1- Do you think you must be involved in the English learning process for your child to learn English? Please explain.
- 2- What do you do at home to support your child's English learning process? Explain.
- 3- Are there any factors that prevent you from participating in your child's English language learning? Please explain.
- 4- How do you interact with your child's teacher to be involved in the English language learning process? Explain.
- 5- What do you think an "ideal" parent can do to help a child learn English in preschool in the best way possible? Explain.
- 6- What do you expect from the school and the teacher to be involved in your child's English language learning? Please explain.

#### Data Analysis

In this study, the data obtained from the interview form was analyzed by content analysis. Content analysis is a method that aims to reach some results by organizing similar qualitative data under

certain themes and categories and interpreting them in the form of a cause-effect relationship (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Participants' thoughts were given through direct quotations. In this study, it was aimed to analyze parents' views on their children's participation in English language learning in depth by systematically summarizing and coding them. Content analysis was preferred to organize similar data under certain themes and categories and to make comments based on cause-and-effect relationships. For this purpose, the answers to six questions in the semi-structured interview form prepared for the parents were analyzed by inductive content analysis. Interviews took almost 25 minutes. 6 questions were asked of the participants. The data was coded by four experts and the results were compared. The coding was corrected by reaching a consensus on the differences seen in the coding. The codes and categories obtained as a result of this analysis were classified and presented in tables in the findings section. In this study, various measures were taken by the researcher to reduce or eliminate the factors affecting validity and reliability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The questions of the semi-structured interview form prepared as a data collection tool were prepared by taking expert opinions to increase internal validity. Explaining the data collection tool and process, explaining the characteristics of the study group in detail, specifying the selection method of the study group, describing the implementation process of the study, explaining the rationale for choosing the method used, ensures the external validity of the research. During the interview, a voice recorder was used to minimize data loss and the audio file was then transcribed into written text. In the findings section, the sentences of the participants are quoted as they are. In this way, internal reliability was ensured. The consistency between the data was confirmed by 4 experts from Eskişehir Osmangazi University. In this way, external reliability was tried to be ensured.

## FINDINGS

### Findings Related to Parents' Views on Parental Involvement in Preschool English Language Teaching

Table 1

Parents' views on the necessity of being involved in the English language learning process for their children to learn English

Category	Code	Frequency
Parental involvement cases	Parental involvement is required.	13
	Parental involvement is not required.	1
	Parental involvement is required if the child wants it.	1
Reasons for Parental Involvement	What is learned at school should be reinforced at home.	7
	What is learned at school must be put into practice.	4
	The parent should be a role model.	3
	Exposure to language should be increased.	1

When Table 1 was analyzed, the categories of parental involvement situations and reasons for parental involvement emerged about parents' views on the necessity of being involved in the English learning process for their children to learn English. Three codes related to parental involvement situations and four codes related to reasons for parental involvement emerged. Some of the parents' views on these codes are given below:

Code 1: *...parents should be involved [E9].*

Code 2: *No. I mean, this cannot be done with mom and dad. I don't want not only the father but also the mother to be involved. Because the child sees the parents in the role of parents. It never happens in the role of a teacher [E3].*

Code 4: *The child learns the table at school, but he/she also needs to see that table at home and get its English equivalent in his/her mind. They need to reinforce it [E1].*

Code 5: *There is a learning method called learning by doing and experiencing. The more you use it in your life, the more effectively you will learn [E2].*

Table 2

Parents' support for their children's English language learning at home

Category	Code	Frequency
Supporting Statues	I cannot support	9
	I support.	6
Reasons for not supporting	I cannot find time.	4
	My English level is not sufficient.	3
	The school is sufficient, I do not need to support my child.	3
	I think it is too early	3
	I think the support of a single parent is enough.	1
	I do not think English is necessary now.	1
Forms of support	Singing songs	6
	Playing games	6
	Speaking English	4
	Watching cartoons	4
	Responding to the child's questions	4
	Doing activities together	3
	Doing activities from the activity book.	2
	Telling stories	2

When Table 2 was analyzed, three categories emerged regarding parents' support for their children's English language learning process at home. These categories are support situations, reasons for not supporting, and ways of supporting. There were two codes related to supporting situations, six codes related to reasons for not supporting, and nine codes related to ways of supporting. Some parent opinions about these codes are given below.

Code 1: *Our previous English teacher told us not to do anything related to English at home and, to leave it to me. She said that maybe he might misunderstand what you say, he might learn the pronunciation wrong, or he might get angry, he might react differently. But we tried. At home, her mother asked questions like what was that? Then my daughter told her mother no mom, you don't know. When this happened, we withdrew ourselves [E10].*

Code 2: *We try to support as much as we can, of course... [E9]*

Code 3: *I mean, am I very limited in time? Yes, I can't spare much time. I mean, I don't prefer English in that period, to be honest [E7].*

Code 4: *My English level is not enough to support my child. No, unfortunately... Let's say at a low level, at the beginner level, so I can't support much. If I had English, I would support [E8].*

Code 9: *Now she sings songs in English and I listen to her and applaud her as if she is a new learner. I show that interest in my daughter. Sometimes I pretend I don't know anything and ask her to teach me. Then I try to sing it too. [E10].*

Code 10: *We play games in English [E15].*

Table 3  
Parents' barriers to their children's participation in English language learning and the factors preventing participation

Category	Code	Frequency
Conditions that prevent parent involvement	There are barriers.	11
	There are no barriers.	4
Factors hindering parent involvement	Inability to allocate enough time	9
	Insufficient level of English for support	6
	The young age of the child	3
	The teacher is closed to communication	2
	The school is closed to communication	1

When Table 3 was analyzed, the categories of the circumstances preventing parents' participation in their children's English language learning process and the factors preventing participation emerged. There were two codes related to the situations preventing participation and seven codes related to the factors preventing participation. Some of the parent' views on these codes are given below.

Code 1: *I mean, my husband prevents me a little bit, I go to a sewing course... [E4]*

Code 2: *We do not have such an obstacle at the moment. [E14].*

Code 3: *I cannot spare time because I work intensively. I come home after a certain time, and since my child goes to sleep early, I don't want to spend one or two hours in between doing something in English. [E12].*

Code 4: *Not knowing English well is an obstacle [E7].*

Table 4  
Parents' communication with the teacher during their children's English language learning process

Category	Code	Frequency
Communication status	We are not in communication with the teacher.	12
	We communicate with the teacher.	3
Reasons for not communicating	I am not informed about the process of teaching English	10
	There is no network to communicate with the teacher.	3
	My wife communicates with the teacher, so I do not need to.	2
	I expect the school to inform me.	2
	I do not know the English teacher.	2
	The English teacher does not participate in parent meetings	2
Ways of communicating	By message	2
	Face-to-face communication	2
	Phone conversation	1

When Table 4 was analyzed, three categories emerged regarding the parents' communication status with the teacher in their children's English language learning process. There were two codes related to the category of communication situations, six codes related to the reasons for not communicating, and four codes related to the ways of communicating. Some of the parent' views on these codes are given below.

Code 1: *We have no communication with the English teacher [E1].*

Code 2: *I call her from time to time to see how my daughter is at school [E9].*

Code 3: *We do not have much conversation[E15].*

Code 4: *I don't know who my child's English teacher is, so you can understand how involved I am [E7].*

Code 9: *They send us the activities they do at school every day. Our class teacher gives a daily flow of information. Our English teacher also sends suggestion messages saying we did these activities and you can listen to these songs [E2].*

Code 10: *I call him from time to time to see how he is doing [E9].*

Table 5

Parents' views on what an ideal parent should do to participate in the English language teaching process of their preschool children

Category	Code	Frequency
What an ideal parent should do to be involved in the English language teaching process of his/her child?	Exposure to English by speaking English at home.	6
	Know English well.	5
	He/She should take private courses	4
	Choose a kindergarten with good English language teaching.	2
	Travel abroad with his/her child.	2
	Watch videos with his/her child in English.	2
	Read books to his/her child in English	2
	English materials should be available at home.	2
	Technology must be harnessed.	1
	If his/her English level is not sufficient, do not involve	1
	He/ she should act in cooperation with the teacher	1
	If he/she does not know English, he/she learns with his/her child	1
	Listen to English songs with his/her child.	1
	Play English games with his/her child.	1

When Table 5 was analyzed, 14 codes emerged about the views of the parents on what an ideal parent should do to be involved in the English language teaching process of their children in the preschool period. Some of the opinions related to these codes are given below.

Code 1: *Therefore, I can talk to my daughter at home and ensure her language development [E10].*

Code 2: *For her to learn English perfectly, I think I should have an excellent level of English and be able to speak it in daily life [E8].*

Code 3: *I can have her take private lessons from trainers who speak English like her mother tongue [E14].*

Code 7: *...or reading English books every day...[E9].*

Table 6

Parents' views on their expectations from the English teacher to be involved in their children's English language learning process

Category	Code	Frequency
Views on involvement in the English language teaching process	We should be involved.	13
	We do not need to be involved.	2
Opinions on expectations from English teachers	Teacher should inform us about involving in this process	3
	Teachers should communicate with us more.	3
	Teacher should be an expert in teaching English to children	2
	English classes should be increased.	1



When Table 6 was analyzed, two categories emerged regarding parents' views on their expectations from the English teacher to be involved in their children's English language learning process. These categories are the views about being involved in the English language learning process and the views about their expectations from the English language teacher. There were two codes related to the views on being involved in the English education process and four codes related to the views on expectations from the English teacher. Some of the opinions related to these codes are given below.

Code 1: *Since we are English teachers as parents, we believe that it would be beneficial for us to be involved [E12].*

Code 2: *No. I mean, this cannot be done with parents. I would not want not only the father but also the mother to be involved [E3].*

Code 3: *If the teacher informs us about the activities in the classroom that week, we can try to support them at home [E14].*

Code 4: *We could be more effective if we had more communication [E2].*

### **CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

In this study, when the views of parents on the necessity of being involved in the English language learning process for their children to learn English were examined, it was found that almost all the parents adopted the view that parental involvement was necessary. The reasons for parental involvement include their desire to reinforce the English they learn at school at home, to have the ability to use a new language they have learned in real life and to be role models for their children in this process.

Nevertheless, when the parents' support for their children's English language learning at home was analyzed, it was found that most of the parents could not support their children in their English language learning process due to reasons such as limited time, insufficient level of English, the view that school alone is sufficient, the child's young age and the responsibility of this responsibility being placed on one parent. A similar conclusion was reached by Tutkun et al. (2023), who examined the views of teachers and fathers on the benefits of parental involvement in preschool activities and found that although fathers knew that they should participate in the teaching process, their participation in their children's educational process was low. On the other hand, parents who support their children's English language learning at home use forms of support such as singing English songs, playing games, talking, watching cartoons, answering curiosities, doing activities together, using activity books, and telling stories. Lee and Bowen (2006) stated that having parents speak English or watch videos at home would support language learning.

When the barriers to parents' participation in their children's English language learning process were analyzed, it was understood that most of the parents are prevented from participating due to reasons such as limited time, insufficient English level, and lack of communication by the school or the teacher. Forey et al. (2016), in their study titled "Parental Involvement in Foreign Language Learning," confirm that not having sufficient English level is one of the most important factors preventing involvement. Similarly, Epstein (1986), in his study examining parents' views on teachers' parental involvement practices, supports the view that parents' feeling of inadequacy hinders parental involvement.

When the parents' communication status with the teacher during their children's English language learning process was analyzed, it was found that the majority of the parents stated that they were not informed by the teacher about their children's English language teaching process. It was concluded that the parents could not communicate effectively with the teachers due to reasons such as the lack of communication with the English teacher, the fact that the English teacher did not attend parent-teacher

conferences, or even that they did not know the English teacher at all. One of the important conclusions drawn from this study is that although parents communicate with their classroom teachers, English teachers are excluded from this circle of communication. Also, there is a communication gap between them and English teachers due to the lack of English teachers' involvement in parent-teacher conferences or family involvement activities. Bilaloğlu and Arnas (2019) investigated the barriers to family involvement in preschool education and found that the lack of communication between parents and teachers had a negative impact on parental involvement. It was stated that parents who communicated with the teacher used forms of communication such as messages, telephone, or face-to-face meetings.

When parents' views on what an ideal parent should do to participate in the English language teaching process of their preschool children were analyzed, the most common view was that an ideal parent should speak English naturally at home and expose their children to as much English as possible. For this, parents think that they should have a good command of English. Parents who do not have a good command of English should take private lessons to support their child's English learning process. Preferring English-medium educational institutions, traveling abroad so that the child can observe the language in its natural environment, watching English videos, reading English books, and keeping English materials at home are the behaviors expected from an ideal parent who actively participates in the English teaching process.

When the views of the parents on their expectations from the English teacher to be involved in their children's English learning process were analyzed, it is seen that they think that they need to be guided by the English teacher to be involved in this process. Bandura (1997) argued that one of the main elements of parental involvement is the guidance of teachers and the school. In addition, English teachers are expected to be more communicative and experts in their field.

From the data obtained as a result of the research, it was seen that almost all parents believed that they should have played an active role in their children's English learning process, but they had difficulty in putting this into practice. In this process, parents' lack of time, insufficient level of English, belief that it was too early to provide such serious support to their child, or belief that it was enough for a single parent to undertake this task, prevented parents from participating in their children's English learning process during this critical period. However, it was observed that the most preferred methods by parents participating in this process to support their children's learning of English were to sing the songs that the children had learned at school and play English games at home. It can be concluded that children mostly direct their parents in this regard. It can be concluded that there were no activities that parents planned themselves or did at home with the guidance of their English teachers. It was revealed as a result of the research that some teachers warned parents not to do anything at home regarding the English learning process. In this respect, it can be thought that teachers are not willing to receive support from parents in this process. For this reason, English teachers need to inform parents in detail about what they can do and include them in the process. It was seen that parents' participation in the English learning process was mostly home-based, while school-based participation was neglected. Parents who stated that the teacher or school was closed to communication regarding English lessons, see this as an obstacle to participating in the English learning process. It was revealed that the kindergarten teacher is more open to communication than the English teacher, and although more information is given about the classroom lessons, the same interest is not shown for the English lesson. This shows that English lessons in kindergartens are put on the back burner. For this reason, schools should organize parent participation events not only for classroom teachers' activities but also for English, and parents' participation in school activities should be encouraged. Parents who do not speak English should be informed about how they can support their children and participate in the English teaching process. Parents who think that their English level is not sufficient think that they cannot participate in this process and cannot support their children's learning of English. If parents are

well informed and guided in this process, teaching English as a foreign language in the preschool period, which is the golden age of development, will successfully achieve its goal with the perfect balance established between teacher, parent, and child.

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