

The Influence of the Physical Environment on Early Childhood Education Classroom Management

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Abstract

Problem Statement: The physical environment of the classroom has an impact on various components of the teaching and learning processes. Recently, there has been research into the relationship between classroom management and the physical environment in elementary schools. However, the focus of these studies was only on one dimension of the physical environment of the classroom such as the relationship between class size or the physical environment and academic achievement. Therefore, there is a need for research into how early childhood teachers perceive the impact of the physical environment on classroom management.

Purpose of Study: This study aimed to examine the perceptions of a group of early childhood teachers in Ankara, Turkey, in relation to the influence of the physical environment of the classroom on classroom management. More specifically, the present study examined teachers' perceptions about the factors that influence their classroom management practices, how the physical environment of the classroom influences their instructional processes and teacher-student interactions, and elicited suggestions from teachers about improving the physical environment.

Method: This study is a qualitative study where the data was obtained from a semi-structured interview schedule containing 16 questions; six pertained to demographic items while the remaining 10 open-ended questions aimed to investigate the teacher's perceptions. The participants were 36 female early childhood education teachers.

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Findings: Content analysis was performed at the end of the study. The themes that emerged from the findings were categorized as follows: (1) factors influencing classroom management, (2) physical characteristics of classrooms, (3) strengths and weaknesses of the physical environment, (4) remedies for the weaknesses of the environment, and (5) suggestions for improving the physical environment.

Conclusions and Recommendations: A combination of semi-structured interviews and observations of classroom practice can create a wider picture of the **teachers'** perceptions. In addition, since the physical environment is important in both primary and secondary education, the same study could be applied to teachers working at other grade levels to examine their beliefs concerning the relationship between the physical environment and classroom management.

Keywords: Teacher perceptions, classroom management, preschool physical environment, content analysis.

Ünal and Ünal (2009) define classroom management as the provisions and procedures essential to establish and maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur. This is an important issue not only for teachers but also for students and school administrators (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Burden (2003) reported that classroom management includes teacher actions to create a learning environment that supports positive social interaction, active engagement, and self-motivation. Thus, from the teacher's perspective, classroom management includes the arrangement of time, space, materials, pupils and herself/himself into various constellations of a learning environment (Rashid, 1968).

Classroom management starts when the students enter the classroom. Therefore, it is the teacher's first responsibility to make the best use of the classroom space within the limits imposed by the architecture of the building. Furthermore, s/he must decide on the activities that can occur in the classroom (Cantrell & Cantrell, 2003; Manke, 1994). Cantrell and Cantrell (2003) define the teacher as the CEO (chief executive officer) of the classroom, as s/he can transmit her/his vision to the students and is the manager of the physical environment of the classroom.

The teacher needs to be aware of how the relationship between the environment and classroom management contributes to the achievement of the educational goals of the curriculum. The way a teacher perceives this environment is important in terms of her/his management of the class. Therefore, this study examined the perceptions of early childhood teachers in relation to the influence of the physical environment of the classroom on classroom management.

The research issues concern the teachers' perceptions of:

- a. the factors that influence their classroom management practices,
- b. the physical environment of their classrooms,

- c. how the physical environment of the classroom influences their instructional processes and teacher-student interaction.

Historically, classroom management has been considered synonymous with discipline. It was defined as the maintenance of on-task student behavior and reducing off-task or disruptive behavior. However, there is a new understanding of classroom management not concerned with observing and punishing misbehavior, but instead encompassing the process of creating a positive social and emotional climate in the classroom (Hardin, 2004); according to Lemlech (1988), it can be compared to conducting an orchestra. Well-managed classrooms can be seen as a harmony of decisions and physical factors. Thus, classroom management includes various decisions such as the student seating plan, planning of classroom activities in terms of time and content, organizing materials, and encouraging the active participation of each student (Emmer & Gerwels, 2005).

Since the physical environment of a classroom is not only a place for instruction, it has various important functions such as the provision of security and shelter and facilitating social contact; it is a place that has a symbolic identification that allows for task instrumentality, pleasure, and growth. While physical security is the first condition that must be satisfied, students must **also feel “that this is a safe, comfortable place to be,” which is how Weinstein defines psychological security** (1996, p. 29). Social contact includes student interaction with peers and between the teacher and students. Symbolic identification involving the personalizing of the classroom environment is particularly important for young children. Task instrumentality includes the many ways in which the physical environment can help teachers and students accomplish planned activities. Pleasure, in this context, refers to whether the students and teachers think their classroom is attractive and **satisfying. Lastly, growth means supporting students’ development**, and it includes areas such as increasing self-confidence and learning cooperation (Weinstein, 1996).

The physical environment is one of the dimensions of a classroom that Carter and Doyle define as **“the shape of the site in which learning occurs, the number and types of participants, the arrangement of participants in the available space, and the props or objects available to the participants”** (2006, p. 379). This is an important element of **classroom management** (Tabanca, 2007), because the physical environment has an immediate impact on students (Hardin, 2004). Moreover, Carter and Doyle (2006) comment that the physical environment has an important effect on classroom events such as spelling tests, reading activities, or the morning song in preschools. Therefore, facilitating good traffic flow and communication, ease of access to supplies and equipment, and the creation of private spaces are necessary for the **continuity of classroom activities and maintaining the teacher’s control**.

Variables of the physical environment of the classroom related to the comfortable use of the space include class size, lighting, temperature, color, noise regulation, seating pattern, and hygiene. First, the classroom size must be big enough for the types of activities to be undertaken. There should be adequate storage for student and classroom materials and the areas to be used for activities and movement of students should be **large enough** (Tabanca, 2007). Moreover, the level of

illumination should be appropriate for students to clearly see each other and the teacher. Inadequate or lighting that is too bright can strain the eye and can result in inattentiveness, nervousness, and inefficiency (Di Giulio, 2007; Tabançalı, 2007; Taş, 2007; Tayfur & Çelikten, 2008). Studies show that the temperature of the classroom affects students' performance and behavior; in rooms that are too hot or too cold, students have difficulty in focusing on the learning activities. According to literature, the ideal temperature of classroom is 20°C (Di Giulio, 2007; Imer, 2001; Tabançalı, 2007; Tayfur & Çelikten, 2008). Color has an influence on various bodily functions such as breathing, blood pressure, pulse, and muscular activities (Tayfur & Çelikten, 2008). Furthermore, too much noise from outside or inside the classroom can affect physical and psychological health. Although it can be difficult to limit external noise from entering the classroom, reducing noise in the classroom is possible by determining rules for the amount of noise the students make (Tabançalı, 2007). The creation of an appropriate seating pattern positively influences classroom interaction and it is important to facilitate ease of access to resources and the organization of classroom traffic (Taş, 2007). Finally, since classrooms are areas that are used collectively, the cleaning and ventilation of the classroom are important for the health of the students and teacher (Imer, 2001; Tabançalı, 2007).

Interest areas where students engage in a special activity are an important component in early childhood classrooms. Within the physical environment it should be possible to accommodate these areas and their equipment. Typical examples of the areas include creative art, blocks, dramatic play, books, music, science, and math (Gestwicki, 1999), and the location for each area should be considered. For example, a book corner should be separated from the main classroom to provide a quiet reading space. Together with the contents of the interest areas all essential materials in a classroom need to be clearly visible and accessible to the students so they can complete a task with ease and efficiency (Trussell, 2008). Therefore, when students can access what they need, the teacher is saved from being the sole distributor of commonly used materials (Stronge, 2007).

A teacher has multiple roles of guide, questioner, listener, interactor, motivator, planner, researcher, and resource person (Heck & Cobes, 1978). An effective teacher must design an overall environment that supports student learning through instructional techniques and contains interesting materials, and s/he must facilitate a rapport with the whole class. In order to do this, the teacher must have the skills to organize and manage the physical environment of the classroom in order to orchestrate an environment that supports exploration, discovery and investigation. The teacher should be aware of the fact that the classroom is not her/his sole territory and effective use of the available space must be planned by students and teachers together (Proshansky & Wolfe, 1974). There should be adequate notice boards and display facilities students can use to decorate the classroom and display their work and therefore have a sense of ownership of the physical environment (Di Giulio, 2007).

Method

The participants of the study were 36 early childhood education female teachers working in state and private schools in Ankara, Turkey. Most were early childhood education graduates (n=20, 55.5 percent), some were child development graduates (n=15, 41.6 percent) and two teachers graduated from other departments. Their work experience varied from two weeks to 26 years.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews designed by the researchers. In order to develop the interview schedule, a relevant literature review was undertaken to determine the dimensions and variables of the classroom environment in relation to classroom management (Maxwell, 2007; Sylvia, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2006). Eight dimensions of the classroom environment were selected. They were: choosing a philosophical model of classroom management and discipline, student behavior management, creating a respectful, supportive learning environment (management of relations and communication), managing and enhancing instruction (management of planning and programming activities), interacting with colleagues, parents, and others to achieve classroom management goals, time management, facilitating classroom safety and wellness, and physical environment (Başar, 1999; Burden, 2003; Çelik, 2003; Demirtaş, 2007; Sabancı, 2008; Groves, 2009). The variables of the classroom environment were class size (Tabancalı, 2007), lighting (Di Guilio, 2007), temperature (Imer, 2001), colors (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000), noise regulation (Tabancalı, 2007), seating pattern (Taş, 2007), and hygiene (Imer, 2001).

Finally, an interview schedule comprising 21 open-ended questions was created. The content and face validity of the semi-structured interview schedule was conducted by two experts from the departments of Early Childhood Education and Educational Sciences at Middle East Technical University. Then three pilot interviews were carried out to provide structure validity, some items were modified, and the question order was rearranged to increase the clarity for the participants. The final interview schedule contained 16 questions; six pertained to demographic items and the remaining 10 open-ended questions aimed to investigate the perceptions of teachers about physical environment of the classroom and its influence on classroom management (see Appendix A for the final interview schedule).

Approval was obtained from the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic (MONE) to approach teachers in the selected schools. Appointments were made directly with the teachers or via the school secretaries. The researcher visited schools and met the teachers to explain the aim of the study and asked if they wished to participate. If they agreed, the teachers signed a volunteer participation form. Next, interviews were held in appropriate rooms in the school. In 15 schools, contact was made with 76 teachers, of which 36 volunteered for the study. It was planned to audio record all the interviews to ensure that all the information was obtained and to reduce the time taken in the interview to handwrite the teachers' responses (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Although the rationale behind using audio recording was explained, some of the teachers (n=19) did not accept the method and those interviews were transcribed by hand. The duration of interviews varied between 20

and 55 minutes; this was due to the time difference between audio recording and hand writing the responses.

In this study, content analysis was used to obtain concepts and relations that explain the data. More specifically, transcripts were prepared from the recordings and the handwritten record of certain interviews. They were carefully read several times by the researcher and the content analysis began. First, the coding was carried out. This is the process of naming the meaningful parts (words, sentences, paragraphs) of the data then examining, comparing, conceptualizing data and **making connections between data** (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Then, the codes were listed and related codes were combined. After the researcher had examined all the thematic codes and compared data, the following main themes were determined:

1. Factors influencing classroom management
 - A. School infrastructure
 - a. Rotation system (n=2)
 - b. Location of classroom (n=2)
 - B. Teacher characteristics
 - a. Experience of teachers (n=3)
 - b. Love of their profession and students (n=3)
 - c. Unplanned meetings for teachers (n=2)
 - C. Student profiles
 - a. Socioeconomic status and educational level of parents (n=3)
 - b. School experience of the students (n=3)
 - c. Mainstreaming students (n=4)
 - D. Physical environment of classroom
 - a. Physical features of classroom (n=21)
 - b. Security of the classroom (n=2)
 - c. Furniture of the classroom (n=1)
2. Characteristics of the teachers' classrooms (physical characteristics),
3. Strengths and weaknesses of the physical environment,
4. Remedies for weaknesses of the environment,
5. Suggestions for improving the physical environment.

Last, in accordance with Creswell's (2007) emphasis on the value of participants' ideas, besides reporting the themes, the codes and their frequency, some clarifying quotes were directly taken from the interviews. These quotes were incorporated into the results of this study. Therefore, the description of the themes was enriched.

Research Findings

When asked to name the factors that influence on classroom management, the teachers stated that school infrastructure, teacher characteristics, student profiles, and physical environment of classroom were the main items. This article focuses on the physical environment. Therefore, the first three factors are described very briefly.

In relation to school infrastructure, two issues emerged which teachers felt had a negative effect on class management: the rotation system where students change rooms for different activities and the location of the classroom. In terms of teacher characteristics it was considered that a love of their profession and the students and having patience and tolerance were essential for early childhood teachers. In experienced teachers, unplanned meetings and visitors entering the classroom were mentioned as negative facts. Several teachers stated that the profiles of the student profiles affected classroom management. In particular, teachers mentioned the **socioeconomic status and education level of parents, students' prior school experience and mainstreaming students**. The first two items could have a positive affect if the socio-economic status and education level were high. However, mainstreaming was considered to have a negative impact on classroom management.

In relation to the physical environment of the classroom, three issues emerged: physical features (n=21), security function (n=2), and furniture and equipment (n=7). In relation to the first issue, large class sizes (n=17) and small movement areas (n=17) were mentioned by most teachers. The following comments from the teachers illustrate the importance of this issue.

"As I see it, two points are very important: small movement area and large class size because an overcrowded classroom prevents me from reaching all the students. Also, in small classrooms, movement is not easy."

"Since the students cannot move comfortably, they become more negative and irritable. Furthermore, they do not feel free."

In addition, teachers stated that an overcrowded classroom made the teacher exhausted, reduced the movement area, and complicated the classroom management and monitoring of the students. Teachers stressed the adequacy of the movement area in their classrooms. Some (n=5) said their classrooms were large enough. However, one teacher said that although her classroom was large, there were too many students in the class and this reduced the movement area. There were teachers (n=4) who stated that movement areas that are too large negatively influenced classroom management because the teachers lost control of the students. A teacher said that a large movement area made class management difficult. The larger the classroom is, the harder it is to retain control of students.

Teachers (n=3) stated that the shape of the classroom was a significant element in classroom management, since it influenced student seating arrangements, the lighting, and organization of furniture and equipment. Some teachers (n=4) said that the physical environment of their classroom was appropriate for the development of their students. Teachers particularly focused on the wall design of their classrooms that allowed the display of children's work. Furthermore, teachers (n=10) said that exhibiting students' work on the walls of the classroom motivates the members of

their class, and displaying the results of group work in particular has a positive influence. Three teachers indicated that a classroom with four walls of equal length was more functional than other rectangular classrooms that did not permit the easy division of interest areas. Teachers said that the appropriate separation of interest areas was important and provided order in the classroom, resulting in the teacher being less tired (n=6). Other teachers explained the importance of the appropriate separation of areas in terms of classroom control (n=5) and student observation (n=3) and an appropriate location of the areas, saving **teachers' time** (n=13).

The security function category was mentioned by teachers. They particularly commented on lighting (n=1) and temperature (n=1) as important factors that affect the motivation of students and teachers. Three teachers said that lighting and temperature of their classrooms were appropriate. However, only one teacher commented that her classroom was clean and hygienic.

Regarding the furniture equipment and materials, teachers mentioned items such as chairs and tables (n=8), cupboards for various purposes (n=12), and CD players (n=4). Moreover, while some teachers (n=4) said that the equipment and materials were adequate, three said there was a lack of materials. Storage was an important element in the teachers' responses; the cupboards needed to be child-sized because according to some teachers (n=3) if the materials were not easily accessible then this **could limit the students' activities and their development. It also means that the teachers have to spend extra time removing and returning the materials from storage.** Several teachers (n=6) also stated that a lack of equipment and materials affected classroom management. For example, one teacher said that a lack of materials resulted in her spending time changing her lesson plans or trying to find other materials.

In the interviews, teachers were asked what they considered the strengths and weaknesses of their classrooms. Then they were asked to suggest how the weaknesses could be remedied. Many teachers (n=11) stated that the width of their classroom was appropriate because there was enough space for the number of students, and the students could move easily. Furthermore, a teacher expressed that her classroom had equal sides and that gave the advantage of being able to easily reach all the students. Finally, certain elements of the security function of the classroom were seen as strengths. For instance, many of the teachers were happy with the lighting (n=15) and the temperature (n=9). However, only one teacher emphasized the hygiene of her classroom as a positive aspect. Some teachers (n=4) saw the location of their classroom as a strength and that early childhood classrooms being separate from the primary school was an advantage for the safety and comfort of students. Moreover, classrooms at the entrance (n=1) to the building and close to the toilets/sinks (n=2) were also strengths of the physical environment.

In terms of the weaknesses of the physical environment, the rotation system was mentioned **because it limited materials and restricted the students' creativity.** Also teachers (n=2) stated that the sense of attachment to a particular classroom, equipment, and materials could not be developed, and this could result in reducing a **student's motivation.** A small movement area (n=15) and large class size (n=4) were also considered weaknesses, with one teacher commenting that these two issues

prevented the appropriate placement and division of interest areas. One teacher claimed that the small movement area meant that she had to divide her students into two groups. If she did not do this, students had to sit too close to each other, which distracted them from their task. However, there were teachers (n=4) who stated that movement areas that are too large negatively affected classroom management because the teachers lost control of the children.

Overall, the teachers' comments about interest areas were positive, but some stated the weaknesses of these areas. Two teachers said that in larger classrooms, they could place materials for each area appropriately but in small and overcrowded areas, students had problems easily accessing materials in the interest areas. A teacher said:

"Since there are a large number of students in my class, the puppet area is not ready to use at any time. I have to organize these areas again every day for students to use them comfortably in the free time activities."

Another point stressed by the teachers (n=4) was inadequate interest areas. A teacher said that a lack of interest areas resulted in insufficient activities, disruptive student behaviors, and loss of time. A few teachers (n=3) complained that the materials in the interest areas were insufficient and the interest areas (n=7) should be supported.

Teachers also said that adequate furniture, equipment, and materials (n=8) should be provided. Additionally, as a weakness, some teachers reported a lack of activity materials (n=7) and toys (n=6). They especially focused on the amount of time spent changing lesson plans to compensate for missing materials. Although lighting and temperature were given by some teachers as a positive aspect, nine teachers said that dark rooms and poor lighting were problem; another four teachers said the heating system was inadequate. One teacher said that the windows were too high so the classroom was dark and gloomy. Teachers felt that dark and cold classrooms were not attractive and had a negative impact on the students. Two teachers said that their classrooms were in the basement and the ceilings were too high, resulting in poor acoustics and too much noise in the classroom.

In the interviews, several teachers (n=6) said that if the weakness was related to the features of the physical environment such as a small movement area, they could do nothing. However, two teachers stated that they could rearrange chairs or tables; one of these teachers said that she would push the tables and chairs back to create more space. Other teachers (n=3) explained that moving chairs and tables, changing the plan, using materials sequentially, and dividing students into groups were only temporary solutions and they would face similar problems the next day. If the weakness was furniture and equipment, teachers said that they could solve this in different ways. **First, they (n=10) would approach an administrator or the students' parents to buy materials.** Furthermore, teachers said that they could use their own supply of materials (n=6), change their lesson plan (n=2), or use materials sequentially (n=1).

For all weaknesses in the physical environment, most teachers (n=6) said that they could communicate with the school administration, and others said that they

could discuss their problems with the parents (n=4). In terms of the remedies that could be undertaken by the school administration in the teaching rooms, they focused on creating a new classroom (n=2) or re-planning the existing classroom (n=5). Some teachers (n=7) stressed that the administration should consider the capacity of the classroom when students register for school. Six teachers said that the school administration could buy more materials, and others (n=3) thought that the administration should use the money collected from parents for preschool classrooms. They (n=3) also said that the school administration could ask teachers and parents for ideas to resolve the problems. Some teachers (n=3) stated that in schools, the administration could do whatever they wanted. There were teachers (n=4) who said that they could do nothing **about the classroom's** weaknesses.

When teachers were asked who could find a solution to the weaknesses of classrooms, apart from teachers and the school administration and parents, they named the Ministry of National Education (MONE) and the General Directorate of Preschool Education, other school personnel, parents, students, nongovernmental organizations, and publishers. Some teachers (n=9) stated that the Ministry of National Education would supply additional resources. Furthermore, according to teachers (n=2), personnel in the school such as office staff could help solve the problems. For example, two teachers said these people could repair equipment or photocopy worksheets for activities. Moreover, half the teachers (n=18) claimed that parents could contribute to resolving the lack of resources in the classroom, and one teacher said that students could bring materials from home. Finally, according to a teacher, nongovernmental organizations and publishers could supply materials and equipment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Teacher characteristics are an important factor, including the relationship between teaching experience and classroom management. It was reported that teachers faced many problems in terms of classroom management during the first years of teaching, but experienced teachers could manage their classrooms more effectively and easily (Tezcan & Demir, 2006). In fact, the characteristics of the teacher are an important factor for classroom management at all grade levels (Ritter & Hancock, 2007). The extent of the **teacher's experience may account for the** difference in their responses to the questions in this study.

According to the findings of this study, it was mostly public school teachers who stressed that the profiles of the students influenced classroom management. These teachers said that the socioeconomic status of students was important. Furthermore, teachers said that parents with low socioeconomic levels did not care for their children, which **influences the child's motivation and can lead to disruptive** behavior.

The findings of the study showed that physical environment of the classroom was influential in terms of classroom management. The strengths of the classroom support positive behaviors of the students and effective management by teachers. However, the inadequacies can contribute to disruptive behavior, reduction in motivation and attention in the students, and have a detrimental effect on the energy

level of the teacher and their ability to manage the class. In the literature, it was reported that in early childhood classrooms, a good physical environment in the classroom could prevent disruptive behavior and support classroom management in various ways (Bullard, 2009). This study demonstrates that the teachers recognized the influence of the physical environment on classroom management.

Many of the teachers agreed that the movement area and class size were the most significant points since they affect other areas of classroom management. In this study teachers said that fewer students and larger movement areas **increase teachers' enthusiasm and satisfaction, positively affect teacher-student interaction and enhance the students' ability to maintain attention** to and involvement in learning activities. The literature supports this finding (Finn & Achilles, 1990). However, some teachers stated that if the classroom was too large this could create classroom management problems because the teacher may not be able to adequately maintain control. Although the literature did not mention the negative influence of large classrooms, the appropriate ratios of the movement area to class size were stressed (Blatchford, Moriarty, Edmonds & Martin, 2002).

This study presents important information about the general perceptions of a cohort of early childhood education teachers about the physical environment and its influence on classroom management. Consequently, this research may help develop **teachers' awareness of the necessity of creating an appropriate physical environment and its impact on students' behavior**, helping them in the administration, delivery and application of teaching/learning activities. Moreover, teachers may be encouraged to work closer with the administration of the school and specialists in order to reorganize the physical environment.

The findings of this study also have implications for school administrators who need to find ways to provide the necessary support for teachers to manage their classes more successfully and for teacher education programs both in initial and in-service training. Several teachers in this study did not know what they could do to improve the physical environment or whom they should contact for help. Others were not fully aware of the factors that affected classroom management. Teacher-training departments, especially those involved in early childhood education, should place more importance on classroom management and physical environment by **adding more courses or enriching existing courses such as "Classroom Management in Early Childhood Education."** In-service courses also should be run to support teachers working in schools, especially those with particular problems in the physical environment of the early education centers. In addition to teacher education programs, the Ministry of National Education should consider the significance of the physical environment on the classroom management practices of early childhood education teachers and work toward modifying existing premises and plan more appropriate new buildings for the early education of students.

This study could be developed by evaluating the perceptions of a more diverse and representative sample of early education teachers and schools. Furthermore, to create a wider picture of the issue, observations of classroom practice can be combined with the semi-structured interview method.

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Appendix A
Interview Schedule

1. How long have you been working as a teacher?
2. Which educational institution and department did you graduate from?
3. Do you work in a public or private school?
4. What is the total number of children on the school roll?
5. Which age group do you teach in the school?
6. How many children are there in your class?
7. Can you describe physical environment of your classroom (pictures on the wall, materials, etc.)?
8. In your opinion, what are the factors that influence classroom management (such as the effect on activities of large/small movement area or crowded classroom)?
9. Can you explain the effect on activities of physical arrangement of classroom?
10. What interest areas do you have in your classroom? How do you use them?
11. In your opinion, what are the strengths of physical environment of your classroom? Please give your reasons for your answer.
12. What are the weaknesses of physical environment of your classroom? Please give your reasons for your answer. In your opinion, how do these weaknesses influence your teaching and your students learning?
13. What can be done to remedy these weaknesses?
 - a. By the teacher?
 - b. By the school board?
 - c. By others?
14. What are your suggestions for improving of your the physical environment of your classroom?
15. How does physical arrangement of the classroom influence teacher-children interaction? How would you change it?
16. Do you have any other ideas on this subject?

Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Sınıf Yönetiminde Fiziksel Çevreye Dair Algıları (Özet)

Problem Durumu

Sınıf yönetimi, sınıf içerisinde öğrenme ve öğretmenin gerçekleşmesi için uygun eğitim ortamının sağlanması amacıyla gerekli hazırlık ve uygulamaların tamamını kapsamaktadır. Bu nedenle, sınıf yönetiminin; öğrencilerin kendi kendini motivasyonu, öğrencilerin etkinliklere aktif katılımının sağlanması ve sosyal etkileşiminin desteklenmesi gibi öğretmen davranışlarını da içerdiği ifade edilebilir. Zamanın, mekânın, materyallerin düzenlenmesi ve öğrencilerin her türlü öğrenme etkinliğine katılması sınıf yönetiminin parçalarıdır. Aslında sınıf yönetimi, öğrencinin sınıfa girişi ile başlar. Bu da, öğretmenin ilk görevini mimariden kaynaklanan sınırlılıkları azaltarak sınıfın kullanım alanını en iyi şekilde düzenlemek olarak belirler. Öğretmenin sınıf yönetimi ile sınıf ortamı arasındaki ilişkiye dair farkındalığı ve söz konusu ilişkinin eğitimin hedeflenen amaçlarına ulaşmadaki etkisine dair algısı büyük önem taşımaktadır. Son dönemlerde, sınıf yönetimi ve fiziksel çevre arasındaki ilişki ile ilgili çalışmalar yapılmış ancak bu çalışmalar, fiziksel çevrenin, öğrenci sayısının akademik başarı ile ilişkisi ya da sınıf yönetimi ve ilköğretim öğrencilerinin başarıları gibi sınırlı boyutlarına odaklanmıştır. Bu nedenle de, literatürde sınıf yönetiminde fiziksel çevreye dair okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin algıları ile ilgili çalışmaların yetersiz olduğu söylenebilir. Özellikle Türkiye’de, öğretmenlerin, sınıf yönetiminde iletişim becerileri, sınıf yönetimi metotları ve okul öncesi kurumlarda istenmeyen davranışlar ve bunlarla ilgili çözüm yollarına dair algılarının ortaya konduğu çalışmalar yapılmış olmasına rağmen, bu çalışma sınıfın fiziksel ortamı ve sınıf yönetimi arasındaki ilişkiye dair öğretmenlerin algılarını belirlemek açısından önemlidir. Özellikle Türkiye’de okul öncesi eğitimde sınıf yönetimi açısından fiziksel ortamın önemi henüz tam olarak fark edilmemiş olduğundan, bu çalışmanın bulguları, okul öncesi eğitimde sınıfların fiziksel ortamlarını düzenlemek ve geliştirmek açısından etkili olabilir. Ayrıca, okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarının önem ve etkisinin günden güne artması da, bu çalışmaya ayrı bir önem kazandırmaktadır. Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarının hedeflenen amaçlarına ulaşabilmesi ancak okul öncesi sınıflarının fiziksel ortamları ve bunların sınıf yönetimine etkilerinin en iyi şekilde belirlenmesiyle mümkündür. Bunlara ek olarak, öğretmenin, sınıf yönetimi üzerinde doğrudan etkisi olan sınıf ortamını düzenlemek gibi önemli bir sorumluluğunun olması da, öğretmenlerin bu durum ile ilgili algılarının belirlenmesini gerekli hale getirmiştir.

Araştırmanın Amacı

Öğretmenin sınıf ortamı ile ilgili algısı, onun sınıf yönetimi sürecinde etkili bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, sınıfın fiziksel düzeninin sınıf yönetimi üzerindeki etkisine dair okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin algılarını

tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada, özellikle öğretmenlerin, sınıf yönetimini etkileyen faktörler, sınıfların fiziksel ortamı, fiziksel ortamın etkinlikler ve öğretmen-öğrenci iletişimi üzerine etkisi ile ilgili algıları incelenmiştir.

Araştırmanın Yöntemi

Bu çalışmanın verileri, araştırmacıların geliştirmiş olduğu yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formu ile elde edilmiştir. Formun geliştirilmesi için, önce ilgili literatür taranmış ve sınıf yönetimi ve sınıf ortamının boyutları ile değişkenleri belirlenmiştir. Daha sonra, 21 açık uçlu soruyu içeren, bir görüşme formu oluşturulmuştur. Bu form, içerik ve yapı geçerliliği için, Okul Öncesi Öğretmenliği ve Eğitim Bilimleri bölümlerindeki iki uzman tarafından incelenmiş, ardından üç pilot çalışma uygulaması yapılmıştır. Formun bazı maddeleri birleştirilmiş, bazı sorular ise, katılımcıların daha rahat anlamaları için yeniden düzenlenmiştir. Formun son hali, toplam 16 sorudan oluşmaktadır. Bunların, 6 tanesi demografik bilgilere ait olmakla birlikte, kalan 10 tanesi öğretmenlerin, sınıflarının fiziksel ortamına ve bunun sınıf yönetime etkisine dair algılarını anlamaya yönelik açık uçlu sorulardır. Ardından Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'ndan seçilen okullardaki öğretmenlere ulaşmak için gerekli izin alınmış ve öğretmenlerle görüşme zamanları belirlenmiştir. Bilginin eksiksiz kaydedilmesi ve görüşme süresinin kısa sürmesi için, ses kayıt cihazı kullanılması planlanmıştır. Bu nedenle de, görüşmeye başlarken çalışmanın amacı açıklanmış ve ses kayıt cihazı kullanmak için öğretmenlerin izni sorulmuştur. Ancak, öğretmenlerin bir kısmı (n=19) kayıt cihazı kullanılmasını kabul etmemiş, bu da görüşme süresinin 20 dakika ile 55 dakika arasında değişmesine neden olmuştur. Çalışmanın örneklemini 3-6 yaş gruplarında çalışan 36 okul öncesi eğitim öğretmeni oluşturmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin 12 tanesi özel okul öncesi kurumlarında çalışırken, 24 tanesi ise devlet okullarında görev yapmaktadır.

Araştırmanın Bulguları

Çalışmanın sonunda yapılan nitel analize göre 5 temel tema belirlenmiştir: (1) sınıf yönetimini etkileyen faktörler, (2) sınıfın fiziksel ortamı, (3) sınıfın fiziksel ortamının olumlu ve eksik yönleri, (4) fiziksel ortamın eksik yönleri ile ilgili çözüm yolları, (5) fiziksel ortamın gelişimi için çözüm önerileri. Öğretmenler sınıf yönetimini etkileyen faktörlerle ilgili olarak, okulun altyapı sistemi, öğretmen özellikleri, öğrenci profili ve sınıfın fiziksel ortamı başlıca etkenler olarak belirtilmiştir. Fiziksel ortam ile ilgili olarak ise, sınıf mevcudunun fazla olması ya da hareket alanının dar olması gibi fiziksel özellikler, sınıfın ısınması, aydınlatılması, ses düzeni gibi güvenlik özellikleri ve masa-sandalye, çeşitli amaçlarla kullanılan dolaplar gibi bazı mobilya ve materyaller vurgulanmıştır. Çalışmanın bulgularına göre elde edilen bir diğer tema ise sınıfın fiziksel ortamının olumlu ve eksik yönleridir.

Araştırmanın Önerileri

Bu çalışma farklı bölgelerden daha büyük sayılarda okul öncesi öğretmen örneklemini seçilerek öğretmenlerin bu konu ile ilgili algıları değerlendirilerek geliştirilebilir. Bununla birlikte, konuyla ilgili daha geniş bir tablo oluşturmak için sınıf uygulamaları gözlemlenerek yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemi ile bir araya getirilebilir. Ayrıca daha fazla veri elde etmek için, görüşme formunun soruları çeşitlendirilip artırılabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğretmen algıları, sınıf yönetimi, okul öncesi eğitim sınıflarının fiziksel ortamı, içerik analizi.