

Psychological Counseling and Guidance Services in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify views of counselors working in early childhood education institutions about psychological counseling and guidance services. To this end, face-to-face interviews were carried out with 73 guidance teachers using semi-structured interview forms in order to explore their views about counseling and guidance services offered in early childhood education. The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. The sample consisted of 73 guidance teachers working in preschools or nursery classes in primary schools. The data were analyzed using content analysis. According to the analysis results, the guidance teachers mostly considered psychological counseling and guidance services to be necessary especially for parent education, preventiveness, and developmental guidance. They also held the view that there should be a separate assignment for the reconstruction of psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood education and focus should be directed on especially family-related work. The results were discussed in relation to the existing literature.

Keywords: early childhood education, counseling and guidance, school counselor.

DOI: 10.29329/epasr.2019.186.1

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Introduction

Early childhood education institutions try to guide children through this time – when their personality is shaped – for their healthy physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, to prepare them for life and inform families about early childhood education (Kandır, 2001). Early childhood education is effective in children’s social and emotional development such as social skills (Erbay, 2008), and problem-solving skills (Anliak & Dinçer, 2005). Additionally, early childhood education, which is planned to be compulsory in Turkey in 2018, aims to satisfy all aspects of children’s needs and development. Therefore, early childhood education refers to not only a place where teaching activities are carried out but also an institution that supports children’s development as a whole.

Early childhood education is considered one of the main factors behind children’s academic achievement and one of the main determinants of the academic achievement gap among children (Lee & Burka, 2002). The removal of educational inequalities in society is also associated with the quality of early childhood education (Lamy, 2013). Thus, a pleasant early childhood experience provides children with social skills and greater psychological readiness for learning, thereby heralding a sound start to life skills (Lamy, 2013). Similarly, resilience to life events is also associated with social opportunities offered to children during early childhood and by extension with early childhood education (Lindon, 2003; Wright & Masten, 2005).

Oktaç (2004) defined the needs of preschool children as good care, trust, action, adult support, support for creativity, developing an aesthetic sense, self-recognition, self-actualization, freedom, being with other children, and playing. The healthy social and emotional development of preschool children is crucial to school readiness and long-term results of academic achievement. (Thompson & Raikes, 2007). Research has shown that early childhood psychosocial interventions yield positive social and emotional outcomes for children (Perry, Allen, Brennan, & Bradley, 2010). However, preschool children cannot benefit from services to meet their needs. Stahmer et al. (2005) found that neglected and/or abused children have developmental and behavioral needs, but only a few children receive services for these issues. Tekin (2012) also emphasized the need for psychological counseling and guidance services for teachers, families, and children in early childhood education.

Positive emotional experiences shared between caregivers and children serve as building blocks for the development of social and emotional skills in the period of early childhood that determines how well children view themselves, each other, and their world (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005). Thus, schools should have guidance services and implement a strong and effective guidance program for the healthy development and well-being of children.

In the face of problems that may arise in the developmental process of children during the early childhood period, parents alone fail to decide what misbehaviors should be defined as problem behaviors (Poyraz & Özyürek, 2005); thus, they need psychological support (Özbey, 2010). Similarly, early childhood education teachers need to have collaboration with the school guidance service to cope with problem behaviors they face in their classrooms and they tend to cooperate with families (İkiz, Mete-Otlu & Ekinçi-Vural, 2016). Therefore, psychological counseling and guidance services offered in early childhood education institutions should be provided not only to children but also to parents and teachers. Indeed, research has shown that mental health services offered to preschool children and their families are effective in problems such as attachment disorders (Cicchetti, Rogosch & Toth, 2000, 2006; Lieberman, 1992) or behavior problems (Holtz, Carrasco, Mattek & Fox, 2009).

Guidance teachers are responsible for providing mental health services in schools in Turkey. In the broadest sense, guidance refers to a systematic and professional aid to support people in acquiring knowledge and skills that help them to make choices, interpretations, decisions and plans required for the most efficient development and satisfactory adjustment and in implementing their choices and decisions (Tan, 1992, p.18). In this sense, guidance services refer to a professional service provided to everyone without discrimination. The comprehensive guidance program, which is widely acknowledged in Turkey and based on the developmental guidance and psychological counseling approach, aims to reach all students ranging from preschool children to those involved in the school-to-work transition process (Doğan, 2000).

Apart from developmental guidance, preventive guidance also emphasizes the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention. When preventive guidance services focus on the early childhood period and the early years of primary school, services are more effective (Korkut, 2003; Korkut-Owen, 2011). A meta-analysis by Durlak and Wells (1997) suggested that preventive work with children and adolescents reduces problems that may be encountered in the upcoming years and increases children's competencies. Accordingly, the sooner psychological counseling and guidance services are provided, the fewer problems are encountered so that it can lead to the economical use of both material resources and human resources.

In Turkey, it is still a matter of debate whether psychological counseling and guidance services will be provided in early childhood education and in which areas guidance teachers will work. In her survey in which pre-school teachers evaluate school guidance services, Akgün (2010) reported that priority guidance services offered in nursery classes include programs with special needs children, children with behavior problems and children in inclusive classes and with their families, while parent education programs are of second priority. In his study with teachers and principals in early childhood education, Kardeş (2014) suggested that the most important tasks of guidance teachers include individual guidance services, group guidance, orientation programs, and participation in classroom

activities. The author also discussed that the most important problems include guidance teachers' lack of subject matter knowledge of early childhood, the failure to introduce guidance programs, and inadequate practices of guidance programs.

Accordingly, it is important for teachers and principals to evaluate psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood. Additionally, it is also necessary to identify views of guidance teachers who are directly responsible for the provision of these services in order to determine deficiencies and offer higher quality services. In their study aiming to identify perceptions of guidance services in early childhood education, Aliyev, Erguner-Tekinalp, Ulker and Shine-Edizer (2012) interviewed guidance teachers and principals and found that guidance teachers lacked knowledge of especially early childhood education and did not receive adequate training in this subject during their undergraduate study. Likewise, in Aktaş and Demirtaş-Zorbaz (2018), guidance teachers had deficiencies in psychological counseling with children and proposed the organization of in-service training as the primary option and the inclusion of courses on child counseling in undergraduate teaching programs as the secondary option to rectify their deficiencies. Akalın (2014) showed that guidance teachers working in early childhood education institutions have limitations of knowledge and skills concerning inclusion practices. Accordingly, guidance teachers express their lack of knowledge of work with young children. This lack can affect the quality of the services they offer.

The regulation on the permanent employment of principals and teachers in educational institutions affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, published in the official gazette No. 2014/29034, abolished the permanent employment of guidance teachers in early childhood education institutions; however, the amending regulation No. 2017/10939 reinstated the practice of permanent employment. Thus, since the 2018-2019 academic year, graduates of psychological counseling and guidance programs have started to work in early childhood education institutions. The abolition and reinstatement of the permanent employment of guidance teachers in early childhood education institutions by various regulations show that the importance of psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood education has not yet been recognized in Turkey.

Considering the existing literature and bureaucratic practices in Turkey, there appears the necessity for providing psychological counseling and guidance services in and for conducting more research on how to organize these services. Against this background, this study seeks to identify guidance teachers' views on the necessity and reasons for guidance services in early childhood education and on the ways how to restructure these services. Thus, through first-hand views, this study establishes the quality and shortcomings of psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood education as well as defining what to do to improve these services. To this end, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Why are guidance services necessary in early childhood?
2. How should guidance services be restructured in early childhood?

Methods

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. The phenomenological approach is considered an effective approach to study affective, emotional and often intense human experiences (Merriam, 2013). In this study, one-to-one opinions were taken regarding the necessity of guidance services in pre-school education and how they should be structured. On the basis of the phenomenological approach, inferences have been made over the experiences of each guidance teachers.

Sample: Among 73 interviewed guidance teachers, 53 was working in a primary school and 15 in a secondary school. 49 were women and 24 were men. Considering the field of undergraduate study, 48 guidance teachers graduated from psychological counseling and guidance programs or psychological services in education programs. 14 guidance teachers completed various educational sciences programs such as psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Since not the whole sample studied psychological counseling and guidance, the term ‘guidance teacher’ was used to refer to the sample rather than ‘school counselor’.

Data Collection Instrument: The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form designed by the researchers. In line with the purpose of the study, the form includes two open-ended questions, which were asked face-to-face to the guidance teachers by the researchers.

Data Analysis: The data were analyzed using content analysis. Conventional content analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis method in which coding categories are derived directly from the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Procedure: The guidance teachers were selected among those who had been actively working for at least a decade. Interviews were conducted in their school. The verbal consent of the respondents was obtained for audio recordings. The answers of those who did not allow an audio recording were written with precision. Precautions were taken by the researchers concerning the validity and reliability of the study. A face-to-face sitting arrangement was designed and attention was paid to minimize distractions in the room. Considering that the interviewer is a psychological counselor, attention was also paid to establish a relationship during the interview by using psychological counseling skills to ensure that the respondents feel more comfortable. The audio recording device was placed in such a way not to disturb the respondents.

The audio recordings of the interviews were digitized using word processor software without any addition or subtraction. First, a subject-matter expert other than the researchers reviewed the documented recordings and coded the responses. Second, a researcher among the research team separately reviewed and coded the responses. Then, the codes described separately by the expert and the researcher were compared to find out whether there are differently coded expressions. Thus, a common code list was produced. Later, the other researchers examined the codes and the categories of codes and agreed on them.

Results

The analysis results are presented under two headings including views on the necessity of guidance services in early childhood education, and suggestions for restructuring guidance services in early childhood education. The categories and codes produced for each theme are presented and various respondent expressions are given for each theme.

1. Results Concerning Guidance Teachers' Views on the Necessity for Guidance Services in Early Childhood Education

Table 1 presents the themes, categories, and codes for the respondents' views on the necessity and reasons for providing guidance services in early childhood education.

Table 1. Themes, Categories and Codes Concerning Views on the Necessity and Reasons for Guidance Services in Early Childhood Education

Theme	Category	Code	f
The necessity and reasons for providing guidance services in early childhood education	Necessity	Necessary	69
		Necessity depends on the situation	3
		Unnecessary	1
	Parent education	Parent education	15
	Preventive role	Preventive role	11
	Developmental role	Personality development	6
		Developmental guidance	4
	Interventionist	Orientation	7
		Early diagnosis	4
	Facilitating role	Inter-stakeholder communication	2
Relieving the upper levels of education		2	

According to the analysis results, almost all the respondents thought it necessary to provide guidance services in early childhood education. Only one guidance teacher (a female respondent with

a degree in educational sciences) thought guidance services unnecessary by stating that *“Well, I do not find them very necessary because the early childhood education program, I think, already, includes necessary services. This year the guidance department did not give the guidance services framework plan to the early childhood department. I think so. I think they are not necessary because what should be provided is already provided”*. Three respondents were not clear about the necessity and held the view that it might change according to the situation. The relevant expressions are as follows:

“Guidance can be offered in early childhood education but in a very superficial manner. Because children can do and learn limited things. First of all, they are little. But it can still be performed” (a male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“I worked in a nursery. But it was not efficient. When the number of children is small, you cannot work efficiently. Most of the time I was sitting idle and waiting for the time to pass. So, I started a part-time job. That was enough. Also, there, in the nursery, I couldn’t work comfortably. Since it was a private nursery, the administration regarded my every guidance practice as a problem. They did not want it. When I wanted to talk to parents, they were asking me whether there was a problem or why I would talk to parents. And they were saying that we had to handle it on our own. I encountered such situations. I did not receive support for my guidance services. Therefore, it was not efficient. I think if the number of children is large, guidance is necessary. Otherwise, it would not be efficient” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“But when we look at the conditions of Turkey, and if we consider it as a priority, it is not in early childhood, perhaps not even in primary school. Considering their conditions, secondary and high schools must have guidance services. Only after secondary and high schools, and only when the staff is enough, early childhood education institutions can absolutely have guidance services. But now they are urgently needed in secondary and high schools, not in early childhood education. One should also note this” (a male respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

Considering the reported reasons that psychological counseling and guidance services are necessary for early childhood education, the respondents’ views are grouped under the following categories: parent education, the preventive role of guidance, the developmental role of guidance, the interventionist role of guidance, and the facilitating role of guidance. The categories are discussed separately with example expressions for each category.

Parent Education in Guidance

According to the analysis results, the majority of guidance teachers stated that guidance services are especially necessary for early childhood education for organizing parental education programs. Considering the reasons for their views, some respondents pointed out that working with

children is difficult or not necessary, while others stressed that parental education is a form of both preventive guidance and interventionist guidance. Example expressions are as follows:

“Guidance is not directed towards children in early childhood education, and this is not possible. Children need to be reached indirectly by reaching families. It had to go on like this” (a male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“In early childhood education, all of our teachers are graduates in child development or early childhood teaching. I think there could be activities for parents. I think teachers are handling the part aiming at children. There are two nursery classes near my room; I give them little support. Because before they come to me, they can handle it; they are already equipped in guiding” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“Families can also be very unaware of issues about children. For this reason, parents of preschool students should also be informed about various topics such as reward and room arrangement. So, I think guidance services are necessary” (a male respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

The Preventive Role of Guidance

Another theme often expressed by the respondents following parent education was preventive guidance. Below are given example expressions that emphasize the preventive aspect of guidance services in the early childhood period.

“I think guidance services are essential for early childhood. Because early childhood education is like the foundation of a building. The more solid that foundation, the better the building” (a male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“Guidance services are necessary for early childhood education. Because the sooner you start guidance, the better the outcomes will be. ‘As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined’, the proverb says” (a male respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

Considering the codes regarding preventive guidance, one respondent (a male respondent with a degree in philosophy) drew attention to the prevention of abuse by saying that “*Again an annoying picture, sexual abuse cases occur between 6-12 years of age. Children should be empowered and supported*”. An example expression that highlights the importance of preventing behavioral problems in children is as follows: “*So I give an example of whether a preschool child is hyperactive or not. Is he or she inattentive or overactive? Does he or she have fears? If such issues are identified and children are referred to the hospital in this period, they will be ready when they start primary school. Grade 1 in primary school is very different from the preschool. The preschool has games. Children do*

nothing but play. But they start reading and writing in the primary school. They sit for forty minutes and need to learn how to read and write. If they are not ready, I mean if you cannot solve their problems in the preschool, which problem will you deal with in the primary school?" (a male respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

The Developmental Role of Guidance

Some respondents who explained the necessity of guidance services in the early childhood period through an understanding of developmental guidance emphasized that the development of personality begins at an early age. An example expression is as follows: *"Guidance services are very necessary because we know that personality development begins in this period. We know that children start to become different at that time, which is very important. It is even more important than the development in the high school, secondary school, and primary school"* (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance). Below are given further example expressions that emphasize the understanding of developmental guidance.

"The essence of guidance lies in the successful completion of individuals' developmental tasks. Each age group has its own developmental tasks. Therefore, in the early childhood period, children have developmental tasks that they have to complete successfully. Of course, I believe in the importance of guidance for that age group" (a female respondent with a degree in psychology).

"We are addressing the developmental model. Hence, development begins at birth but not in early childhood or primary school" (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

"Absolutely necessary. I am telling you, the more well-grounded things are, the better they will be. The guidance services in practice must be based on the understanding of developmental guidance, starting from early childhood" (a male respondent with a degree in psychology).

The Interventionist Role of Guidance

The respondents who emphasized the interventionist aspect of guidance often referred to school adjustment or orientation work and to the importance of early diagnosis. Example expressions are as follow:

"There is a social environment; there are students and teachers in the school. First of all, there is a process of adjustment" (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“Guidance in early childhood can be very useful for adjustment” (a female respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

“Of course, I think guidance services are necessary for early childhood. Because adjustment problems are among the most common problems that we encounter in early childhood” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“A lot of things can be unveiled through early diagnosis. In the nursery class, we provide guidance about students’ psychosocial, health, or mental problems” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“Now we know science has progressed a lot. It is said that babies perceive sounds in mother’s womb and feel whether they are wanted or unwanted babies. That is what the new scientific developments are saying. In the past, attention deficit and hyperactivity, and learning difficulties were not very well-known concepts. What do we know now? If children have such problems, the earlier the diagnosis is made, the sooner the treatment can be started. Or, let’s call it education, the treatment was a wrong example. Of course, guidance should be provided in preschools” (a female respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

The Facilitating Role of Guidance

Some respondents referred to the role of guidance teachers in inter-stakeholder communication and the importance of solving early childhood problems in relieving the upper levels of education, thereby stressing the facilitating aspect of guidance. Below are given example expressions.

“If some problems are not solved in the early childhood period, they are reflected in the first grade. Sometimes it takes a few years to solve children’s problems when discovered in the first grade. But in the nursery class, children’s academic burden is much lighter. It is very nice to solve a problem discovered in early childhood education and take precautions before children move to the next level of education” (a female respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

“Considering that many teachers have difficulty communicating with parents, it is absolutely necessary” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

2. Results Concerning Guidance Teachers’ Suggestions for Restructuring Guidance Services in Early Childhood Education

Table 2 shows the themes, categories, and codes for the respondents’ views on restructuring guidance services in early childhood education.

Table 2. Themes, Categories and Codes Concerning Views on Restructuring Guidance Services in Early Childhood Education

Theme	Category	Code	f
Suggestions for restructuring guidance services in early childhood education	Necessity	Necessary	70
		Unnecessary	3
	Administrative Issues	Separate assignment	6
		Task description	2
		Guidance program	2
		Guidance hours	1
		Student files	1
	Intervention plan	Family-oriented	16
		Personal-social	4
		Consultation	2
		Guiding	2
	Intervention methods	Play	5
		In-class	1
		Observation	1

Considering the analysis results on the respondents' answers to the question "How do you think guidance services should be restructured in early childhood education?", very few held the view that there is no need for restructuring. Example expressions are as follows:

"Since the nursery class is part of the school, the guidance teachers here should also take care of the nursery class. I think there is no need for a separate department" (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

"Guidance services can also be served by early childhood education teachers. Scales should be prepared for children of that age. Guidance teachers who will work in this area should get relevant education. Psychologists can also serve. There should be special courses in major cities. There was a special course in Istanbul. With the help of psychologists and special courses, teachers should educate themselves. Counseling and guidance services are dispensable" (a female respondent with a degree in classroom teaching).

The respondents' views on the fact that guidance services should be restructured in early childhood education are grouped under three categories including administrative issues, intervention plan, and intervention methods. These categories and relevant expressions are presented below.

Administrative Issues

Under this category, some respondents mentioned the need to assign separate guidance staff for early childhood education. Below are given example expressions.

“Perhaps guidance teachers can be employed to take care of only nursery classes in primary schools. Because primary schools have both preschool students and primary school students. Perhaps we can improve this process by employing an adequate number of teachers” (a male respondent with a degree in educational sciences).

“In order to maintain guidance services in early childhood education, first, at least one guidance teacher should be assigned to schools. This need should be satisfied. There is no need for anything else in terms of restructuring. Those teachers are doing all the work that needs to be done there” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

A male respondent with a degree in educational sciences noted the necessity for separate staff in early childhood education institutions and described the qualities of the person holding this post as follows: *“Teachers can be trained. Not every guidance teacher, but those who will work in early childhood education, those who are voluntary and willing. Because professionals who will work with younger age groups should be trained through a different curriculum. These teachers can be provided with additional training in early childhood education”*.

Another highlighted situation under this category is clear task descriptions. A female respondent with a degree in counseling and guidance expressed this view as follows: *“The guidance teacher should be aware that there is a separate unit. Everyone should know what their post is. Teachers should not act like a principal and custodians should not act like a teacher. Such things can happen in schools and they should be circumvented”*. A male respondent with a degree in philosophy highlighted the necessity of guidance hours by stating that *“I think a planned and scheduled implementation and the practice of guidance hours will be helpful”*.

Some respondents suggested the need to design a separate guidance program for early childhood education. An example expression is as follows: *“In 2011 or 2012, word has it that early childhood education like other levels of education should have learning outcomes for guidance, but I do not know if it was implemented. Such a thing can be done, and activities can be provided by the guidance teacher”*. (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance). A male respondent with a degree in educational sciences explained this view situation as follows: *“Early childhood education guidance programs can be developed. Especially game-oriented activities can promote children’s socialization, personality development, and care skills in a sounder way”*.

Few respondents pointed to the need to keep student files. An example expression is as follows: “Every child used to have an observation file starting from early childhood education. These files were abolished. I think they should be brought back, of course, provided that they will be kept confidential. These documents were guiding us” (a male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

Intervention plan

Under this category, most respondents pointed to the need for family-oriented work in early childhood education. Below are given example expressions.

“As I said, we can communicate with parents” (a male respondent with a degree in psychological services in education).

“Formerly, an education program for families of students aged 7-19 years used to be implemented. It was good. Family education will now be held for the ages of 0-18. We can be successful especially by working with families” (a female respondent with a degree in special education).

“Work should focus on families and games. In early childhood, more work should be done with families especially concerning behavior disorders. Therefore, guidance teachers who will work in early childhood education should be well equipped with adult education, family interviewing techniques, and family and marriage relations” (a male respondent with a degree in philosophy).

“I think work should focus on parent education. Because parents can break their links with teachers and schools starting from primary school, but this is not the case in early childhood. Most of the society can be reached through parent education and parent information seminars” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

Some respondents suggested that personal guidance should be given importance in early childhood education. A male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance explained this view as follows: *“I think that guidance services should be employed to improve children’s personal and social aspects. Besides, efforts should be taken to ensure that children adjust to the school”*. A female respondent with a degree in psychological services in education stated that *“There must be a guidance teacher in the period of early childhood education. In fact, many abnormal behaviors are exhibited in early childhood. Possibly pathological situations are beginning to exhibit symptoms. If there are children in need of special education, they can be identified beforehand. This also applies to language and speech problems. Therefore, a person who has received psychology education will be really helpful for preschool children”*.

Few respondents pointed to the guiding or referral process. For example, a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance noted that *“We, guidance teachers, only offer guidance because parents have a tighter relationship with teachers during the preschool and the first four years of primary school. We intervene when needed. For example, we can better explain it to parents when children need to be referred to the hospital. Early childhood education teachers may ask for our help in this regard”*. Again, few respondents pointed to consultation or counseling work in early childhood education. A male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance stressed the importance of consultation as follows: *“First, there should be good communication between families and teachers. Here consultation efforts are of great importance”*. A female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance also stressed the importance of consultation by stating *“There must be developmental support. Experts need to tell teachers what to allow children to do”*.

Intervention Methods

The last category covers intervention methods. Some respondents highlighted the role of play as an intervention method. Below are given example expressions.

“Guidance activities should also be play-oriented because students are at play age. Activities should be performed through plays and should be at a level that students can understand” (a male respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

“Young children are often unaware of their problems or cannot express themselves. You can work with them by playing or painting” (a female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance).

A female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance noted that *“Activities should be carried out in classrooms. If we are working in early childhood education, we should focus more on classroom activities. Because it is not functional to take a little child and get him or her to the counseling department. Children feel more secure in classroom activities. That is why we perform activities in classrooms”*. A female respondent with a degree in psychological counseling and guidance noted that the observation technique should be utilized while working in early childhood education. She further stated that *“I think early childhood guidance should be based on observation. For example, I have a student who doesn’t eat. I have to observe this student for hours to solve the problem and to understand why. By observing the behavior of children at that age, you have some information about the problem”*.

Discussion and Suggestions

Considering the guidance teachers' views about psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood education, the majority thought these services necessary, although few guidance teachers thought them unnecessary or expressed that the need for these services varies according to the situation. This result may be due to guidance teachers' lack of subject-matter knowledge since undergraduate programs have no course on psychological counseling and guidance services for early childhood (Akalin, 2014; Aktaş & Demirtaş-Zorbaz, 2018; Aliyev et al., 2012). Similarly, few guidance teachers referred to plays as a method that they can use in early childhood education, while most of them pointed to the importance of parental education rather than child intervention. This may also arise from a lack of knowledge. Under this perspective, the quality of the services offered can be improved by incorporating into undergraduate programs courses that highlight the importance and preventive role of psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood and by organizing in-service training that eliminates shortcomings on guidance teachers' part.

Some guidance teachers emphasized the developmental and preventive role of early childhood services, which is consistent with their developmental and preventive guidance functions (Demircioğlu, 2016; Doğan, 2000; Korkut-Owen, 2011). Additionally, those who highlight the interventionist role of early childhood services point to early diagnosis and orientation. This result runs in parallel to previous research (Odom & Wolery, 2003; Zigler, 2000) that emphasizes the necessity of early intervention in early childhood. Additionally, considering that school counselors feel most competent in school adjustment practices (Aktaş & Demirtaş-Zorbaz, 2018), it is an expected result that the guidance teachers put an emphasis on orientation practices. In fact, children have to adjust to school life and rules, a new environment and so on during the early childhood education period. This adjustment process can lead to various problem behaviors. Research has shown that early childhood education teachers are unable to cope with problem behaviors on their own and need counseling and guidance (İkiz et al., 2016).

Among the guidance teachers' views, the most prominent was that psychological counseling and guidance services offered in early childhood education should focus on parent education. This result is consistent with Akgün (2010) reporting early childhood education teachers' view that guidance services should organize parent education programs. Previous research has proven the effectiveness of education given to parents of preschool children in reducing behavioral problems (Cicchetti et al., 2000; Lieberman, 1992). In this study, some guidance teachers defined early childhood services only as family-oriented. Thus, it seems that they may not be familiar with psychotherapy techniques with young children such as play therapy or that they may not know the

benefits of such techniques. Accordingly, a variety of in-service training may be organized to improve guidance teachers' competence in counseling with children.

All in all, this study has found that guidance teachers who are likely to work in early childhood education institutions have serious shortcomings concerning the provision of psychological counseling and guidance services in early childhood. Guidance teachers considered early childhood education services to be provided primarily to parents and spoke very little of other guidance activities such as psychological counseling with children and consultation with teachers. As a result of this, they were unable to offer comprehensive suggestions for restructuring guidance services in early childhood education. A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be that counselor educators can offer elective courses or revise existing courses to inform pre-service counselors and guidance teachers about counseling services that can be offered to young children.

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