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## The role of parents on Turkish students' reading achievement

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### Abstract

How parents can help students to active on their education inside and outside of school is a necessary issue to research. The aim of the study is to determine the parents' participation of reading activities' features by information which is gained by parent questionnaire. Accordingly, PISA 2009 parent questionnaire is translated to Turkish and implicated. This survey study group comprised of 10<sup>TH</sup> graders' parents in Ankara during 2012-2013 academic years. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Accordingly, needs for enhance students success which is meet by themselves, their parents, and school administrator are detected.

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### 1. Introduction

Student's achievement is related to a lot of variables. Parental factor is an important one among these variables. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) emphasizes how parents can help students to make them active on their education inside and outside of school and gathers information about not only student's cognitive skills but also their family life by parent questionnaire. Turkey participated to PISA 2009 implication but Turkey did not get the parent questionnaire (MEB, 2010). Plenty of researches (Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan, 2002; Griffin and Morrison, 1997; Park, 2008; Schmitt, Simpson and Friend, 2011; Tarelli and Stubbe, 2010) point out that reading environment at home is related to academic achievement. Accordingly, because PISA 2009 parent questionnaire did not implicated in Turkey and parental characteristics on improvement of reading skills have not been researched, the research problem of this study based on this. The aim of the study is to determine the parents' participation of reading activities' characteristics by information, which is gained by parent questionnaire. Whether parental characteristics are related to students' reading achievement is attempted to determine by using selected items from the questionnaire. This study has importance in terms of gathering information about students' family life and it's relation with students' reading achievement.

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## 2. Method

This survey study group comprised of 10<sup>TH</sup> graders' parents in Ankara during 2012-2013 academic years. For this purpose, firstly PISA 2009 parent questionnaire was translated to Turkish, after that items were revised and corrected by considering experts opinion. Trial testing was conducted for clarity of questionnaire statements. There are questions about activities which parents join with their children (OECD, 2011). For example, "When your child attended the first year of primary school education how often did you or someone else in your home undertake the activities (read books, tell story, etc.) with her or him?", "How much do you agree or disagree with these statements (Reading is one of my favourite hobbies, I feel happy if I receive a book as a present, etc.) about reading?" The questionnaire was conducted to 228 parents.

PISA 2009 focus on types of activities which both students and parents participate in first year of primary school by using questions which were posed to student's parents. In addition to this, there are questions about activities which parents join with their children when they are 15 years old (OECD, 2011). The questionnaire items which researchers selected were categorical data. So, frequencies and percentages were used in data analysis.

## 3. Conclusion and recommendation

Determination of students' reading experience gives an opinion about how students' reading skills develops and which variables affects this development. Pre-school education is extremely important on students' reading performance. The students who took pre-school education are very discrete in terms of mental, social, emotional and psychical than students who did not take pre-school education (Adbelli, 2011). More than half of the students (57%) did not attend nursery etc. before pre-school education .

Fathers and mothers are aware of that spending more time with their children and participating their education life enable students get off to a flying start a life. Because many families have to struggle with demands of their job and house, it seems usually that they do not have enough time for their children. Furthermore they are not willing to help their children's educational tasks because they feel lack some of their skills that would make a difference to their children's achievement in school (OECD, 2011).

PISA 2009 results indicate that, there is close relationship between students reading performance and certain parent-student activities (OECD, 2011). Accordingly, due to importance of family activities related to reading, this study was focused on the activities which students and parents attended together at first year of primary school and results were given on Table1.

Table 1. Frequency of carrying out activities at home by family at their child's first year of primary school

	Never or hardly ever %	Once or twice a month %	Once or twice a week %	Every day or almost every day %
Read books	14,9	21,9	30,7	32,5
Tell stories	17,5	19,3	34,6	28,5
Sing songs	27,2	16,7	24,1	32,0
Play with alphabet toys	28,5	15,8	31,1	24,6
Talk about things you had done	5,3	9,2	22,4	63,2
Talk about what you had read	15,8	14,9	30,7	38,6
Play word games	26,3	17,5	36,0	20,2
Write letters or words	13,6	8,8	19,3	58,3
Read aloud signs and labels	18,9	12,7	22,8	45,2

If Table 1 was examined, it is shown that "talk about things you had done" activity was performed by 63% of parents and this activity was performed almost every day. That activity was followed by "write letters or words" activity. " Play word games " and "play with alphabet toys" activities were performed by parents hardly ever. To perform these two activities, more creativity was needed than the other activities. If "reading book" activity is

thought as very important, 15% of parents were performed that activity “never or hardly ever” and this finding should not be ignored because of its importance.

According to the aim of this study, parents spare time to reading as a hobby is one of the these variables. Only 6% of parents spared time on reading more than 10 hours. Besides, %21 of parents spared time 6-10 hours a week, 41% of parents spared time 1-5 hours a week and 32% of parents spared time less than 1 hour for reading. These findings indicate that the time for reading activities at home is quite insufficient. Parents have more responsibility than teachers on gaining of students’ reading skills. At that point, because parents do not read a book, they can not be a model for their children. It is not an expected situation that reading is not an important phenomena in students’ life, due to lack of the model.

Parents attendance to reading activity which is an other examined aspect of this study and findings were given at Table 2. According to Table 2, 82% of parents was strongly agree or agree with “reading is one of my favourite hobbies”, 87% of parents was strongly agree or agree with “I feel happy if I receive a book as a present” and almost 81% of parents was strongly agreed or agreed with opinion of “I enjoy going to bookstore or library”. 93% of parents was disagree or strongly disagree with opinion of “for me, reading is a waste of time”. If it is thought on that parents spare time to reading as a hobby, parents have positive attitude towards reading however they do not or cannot spare time to reading.

Table 2. Parent’s perception of reading

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	%	%	%	%
Reading is one of my favourite hobbies	26,3	55,3	15,4	3,1
I feel happy if I receive a book as a present	36,4	50,4	8,3	4,8
For me, reading is a waste of time	2,6	4,8	23,7	68,9
I enjoy going to bookstore or library	24,6	56,6	13,2	5,7

Home reading resources which affect reading skills is the another aspect of this study. According to data, most of the students, approximately 83%, had internet access, 79% of them had e-mail address and 77% of them had electronic media like MSN. More than half of the students had access to daily newspapers but approximately 28% of them had journal or newspaper subscription. All these findings indicate that home reading resources are not insufficient.

Plenty of studies (Karip 2007; Marks, Cresswell and Ainly 2006; Willms, 2000) point out that parent’s educational level has strong effect on reading than parent’s income. The students, who have more privileged socio-economic entity and easy access to books, show more success than the others (UNESCO, 2007). Yet another aspect of this study is parent’s educational level and percentages of them were given Table 3.

Table 3. Educational level of parent

	Mother’s Education Level		Father’s Educational Level	
	f	%	f	%
Bachelor/Master/PhD	31	13,60	62	27,19
Vocational School of Higher Education	6	2,63	16	7,02
High School/Vocational High School/Technical High School	72	31,58	71	31,14
Elementary School Education	47	20,61	37	16,23
Primary School Education	65	28,51	38	16,67
Not completed Primary School Education	7	3,07	4	1,75

When the parents’ educational background were examined, approximately 32% of fathers and 31% of the mothers were graduated from high school/ vocational high school/ technical high school. But only 27% of the

fathers and 14% of the mothers had bachelor degree /master degree/ Ph.d. The percentages of the parents who were not primary school graduate were extremely low.

Many researches conducted in Turkey show that reading habit of students and parents have not improved yet. According to Çocuk Vakfı (2006)'s research, 40% of Turkey population have never gone to library during their life, 70% of youth never read, 95% of adult population only watch tv. According to these findings, it can be concluded that regular reading habit of Turkey population is at extremely low-level.

According to all these findings, at first the number of students who took pre-school education is insufficient and it is required that the importance of pre-school education should be realized and awareness of parents about that issue should be raised. It was known that parents' educational level has effectiveness on students' achievement. Nevertheless parent's educational background cannot be changed, connection of them with school can be reinforced. If it is considered that proportion of parents' reading book is extremely low, teacher should be a director and supporter of parents about the developing activities which improve of students' reading experiences with their parents.

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