

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIALS AND THE CURRICULA TOWARDS WRITING PREPARATION STUDIES USED IN AMERICA AND TURKEY PRE-SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine and to compare preschool classroom writing materials and the use of curriculum in class between Turkey and USA. This study was conducted with 4 and 5 year old children in classrooms in each country. Four classrooms were selected randomly from two countries, two classrooms in Ankara, Turkey and two classrooms in East Lansing, MI, USA. Document analysis was used for examining writing materials and curriculum. We took pictures of writing materials in both countries' classrooms for identifying materials. The results showed that the USA preschool classrooms had more writing materials than Turkey preschool classrooms. Also, USA classrooms had a writing center, but Turkey classrooms didn't have any writing area. Looking at the curriculum, while USA curriculum had direct objects about writing, Turkey curriculum didn't have any. Findings revealed USA preschool classrooms had more opportunities for children developing writing than Turkey preschool classrooms. Implications for future research and educators are discussed.

Keywords: Preschool, Writing center, Curriculum, Writing Materials

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a developmental process. The writing skill of the young children can be observed in many different ways such as recording messages or ideas for himself/herself or for others, doing the physical action of handwriting or imitating it, making letters or shapes like letters, copying words or letters, writing words. The basic aim of writing is communication. Children learn this basic aim of writing from the adults that they observe while writing and talked about writing (Ranweiller, 2004). Pre-school children show their literacy progresses by passing to the stage of forming regular letters and words from the various signs that they make. Writing early is accepted as a child's sign of alphabetical and phonemic knowledge (Sayeski et al., 2001). Pre-school children make attempts on writing by scribbling, drawing lines in different shapes, and making shapes similar to letters. These symbolic writing attempts are regarded important for their learning of writing and the system of written language (Yaden and Tardibuono, 2004). Before resolving the words in texts, they form concepts about the characteristics of the written language; as a result of their communication with their environment, they recognize that reading has different aims; the meaning is constructed with writing not with pictures; the words which are told them in a story are represented with written symbols; the words consists of letters; the letters from different words by aligning in different shapes (Kerem, 2001).

The pre-school children must be given opportunities that will help them discover the writing is a meaningful activity in daily activities, by creating a writing corner they must be aided to use different types of writing tools such as paper, pencil, and chalk, and they must be

supplied with the possibility of using writing in their games (Fogo, 2008). Besides, the teacher must give feedback to them and must support their writing by being a role model. The interactions that the teacher have with children affect the writing skill of the children in a positive way and help them learn the aim of the writing and gain the mechanic features of writing such as holding the paper and the pencil and standing (Mayer, 2007). The teacher must take the attention of the children to writing in every possible situation. They must be explained why they need to use a paper and pencil. They must be asked for help while writing a birthday card or a shopping list. With all these, the children must be aided to see that letters form meaningful expressions when they come together, comprehend that the signs that you use are similar to the signs in their books, and grasp that writing has a big function in conveying information to others, regulating and completing our duties (Bennett et al., 1999). Creating a rich stimulant environment at their homes and schools, being a role model, and directing them properly are all important. Studies based on developing and supporting their writing skills at home or in school will be effective on their future academic achievements (Tural, 2002).

Conducted studies show that the quality of the literacy environment supplied for children has been efficient on their literacy skills (Coviello, 2005; Guo et al., 2010; Haynes, 2010; Weigel et al., 2006;). Therefore, the children must be encouraged to use materials such as pencil, paper, coloring materials, handiwork papers, scissors, adhesives, modeling clays and toys such as wood cubes, and jigsaw puzzles (Kılıçarslan, 1997).

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

A rich literacy environment includes reading materials, writing materials, displaying the written works of the children, associating the materials with writing, applying literacy activities in the daily activities (Henniger, 2005). The teacher needs to select materials which can be used to increase the literacy skills of children. The children need to encounter materials which are both towards writing and reading such as pencil, paper and book, they need to be given areas to use these materials, and they must feel comfortable in these areas (Ball and Gettiner, 2009). Hence, research conducted show that the possibilities given to children at home or in school contribute their reading and writing skills (Coviello, 2005; Haynes, 2010; Weigel et al., 2006). Dunn et al (1994) confirmed that the quality of the literacy environment has been efficient on the language development of the children. Cunningham (2008) determined that there is a relation between the attitudes of pre-school children towards reading. Guo and colleges (2010b) find out that the quality of the materials given to the children in kindergarten classes has been influential on their acquisition of the writing skill. There are writing-based empirical studies conducted in pre-school teaching, as well. In those studies, and when compared with the reading-based ones, it has been found out that writing-based studies have been more efficient (Matera, 2008; Pierce, 2003; Aram and Biron, 2004).

Research show that the curricula and the materials used in pre-school years are effective in the literacy development of the children. During the review of the literature, no study based on a comparative analysis towards the investigation of the curricula and materials of the writing preparation studies in the USA and Turkey has been encountered. Findings of this study are regarded important in terms of revealing the similarities and the differences between the curricula and the materials used in the two American and Turkish kindergartens. It is thought that the study will contribute to the body of the literature and will be useful in forming and using the curricula and materials.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to make a comparative analysis of the materials and the curricula towards writing preparation studies used in the USA and Turkey university kindergartens. To reach this general purpose, there are two sub-purposes. The first sub-purpose of the study is to investigate the target achievements of the teaching programs in the scope of writing preparation studies applied in the kindergartens in the study group of the study. The second sub-purpose of the study is to analyze the writing preparation materials used in the four and five year olds groups in the kindergartens of the study group in terms of variety and number.

METHODS

Document analysis which is one of the types of qualitative research was used in the study. Document analysis includes the analysis of the written materials which give information about the targeted facts and events. In addition to written materials, visual materials such as film, video and photographs can be also used in qualitative research. These types of materials – besides being the data collection tool of the research alone – can be used as additional data collection tools together with the data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis, as well (Yıldırım and Şimşek,2006).

In the study, curricula implemented in two university kindergartens (one in the USA and one in Turkey) and the materials aimed at the writing skills of the 4 and 5 year-old children in their classes were analyzed. Four classes - two classes from each of the kindergartens – were analyzed. Writing preparation materials which were constantly available in the classrooms were revealed with the pictures. The pictures were analyzed by three researchers and the materials were described.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Curriculum

In the Turkish kindergarten “Ministry of Education (2006) Pre-school Curriculum for 36-72 Months-Old Children” which was prepared by the Ministry of Education is applied. In this curriculum, there are objectives and achievements in psychomotor, social emotional, language, cognitive development, self-care skills areas. There are 5 objectives and 46 achievements in psychomotor area, 15 objectives and 58 achievements in social emotional development area, 8 objectives and 37 achievements in the language area, 21 objectives and 88 achievements in the cognitive area, and 5 objectives and 26 achievements in the self-care area. The writing preparation studies in curriculum are as follows:

Visual Perception Studies

Hand-Eye Coordination, Shape-Ground Differentiation, Shape Constancy, Subject-In-Space Spatial Relationship.

Auditory Perception

Listening, Speaking, Differentiation Of The Sounds, Associating The Sounds With Objects Or The Objects With Sounds.

Caution and memory studies, basic concept studies, problem-solving studies, handcraft studies (drawing, painting, folding), self-care development studies, confidence and independent behavior developing studies. On the grounds of these studies, some target achievements are identified. Objective 2 in the psychomotor area: 15 achievements on the grounds of making particular actions that require hand-eye coordination are thought to be oriented to writing preparation. Again, objective 4 in the psychomotor area: There are 5

achievements on the grounds of “to be able to make actions that require some strength using fine motors”. These achievements are thought to be not directly oriented to writing but indirectly support the writing preparation. In the other development (language, social-emotional, cognitive) and skill (self-care) areas of the curriculum, there is no objective or achievement in terms of writing preparation.

In the Ministry of Education (2006) Pre-school Curriculum for 36-72 Months-Old Children, it is stated that the pre-school teacher needs to know the must-have competencies of the children who are going to start the primary school in order to plan the reading and writing preparation studies efficiently; and in order to make children have these proficiencies, s/he needs to plan the primary school preparations in different aspects while setting the curriculum at the beginning of the year. In the primary school preparation studies, s/he needs to plan the hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills in these aspects:

- a. Manipulating the objects (transmitting from one pot to the other, holding scissors, etc.)
- b. Holding the pencil properly
- c. Combining the lines
- d. Copying the lines

It is stated in the curriculum that the teacher is supposed to make studies for children to help them hold and use the pencil properly and apply the studies which are preparative for hand-writing and will help the wrist muscles work. The teachers may give instruction to the children to draw horizontal, vertical and circular lines during these studies; however, it is also stated that before implementing these exercises, they must examine the related sections of the “First Reading-Teaching” of the Primary School Turkish Language Curriculum which became valid in 2005, and it is suggested that they should collaborate with the primary school teachers of their schools or the schools nearby them.

In the kindergarten in Ankara province in Turkey, materials that develop the creativity are exemplified under the heading of toys and materials that develop creativity. Besides, some information about the regulating of the activity corners under the heading of organizing the education settings is included. Therefore, some materials that curriculum practitioners can use to support the children’s writing skill are also exemplified.

When “Program Philosophy and General Objectives in the Domains” used in the kindergarten in Michigan, USA is analyzed, it is observed that target achievements are identified in 8 areas. These are Aesthetic Development, Affective Development, Cognitive Development, Language/ Communication Development, Physical Development, Social Development, Construction Development, Pretend Play.

Among these areas, the target achievements that are directly related to writing studies are given in the Language/Communication Development area. In this area, 15 target achievements that are directly related to writing studies among the 60 target achievements are listed below:

- i. Generate graphemes
- ii. Recognize that they can convey messages to others through written symbols (drawing and writing)
- iii. Understanding that there is a system, pattern, and organization for print.
- iv. Put their thoughts on paper, first through simple pictures and then incorporating print into their drawings.

- v. Use their own contemporary versions of writing, working, gradually toward conventional spelling, punctuation, and format.
- vi. Expand their writing vocabulary.
- vii. Select topics to write about.
- viii. Begin to use writing strategies such as mapping, webbing, and clustering to organize and plan writing.
- ix. Improve their ability to evaluate and edit their writing, preparing rough and final drafts.
- x. Use reference materials, including electronic sources, to help them improve their writing.
- xi. Use the writing process to create original story poems and informational pieces.
- xii. Respond to written symbols in the environment (e.g., their name and other's names, signs, advertisements, labels).
- xiii. Create new endings for stories, drawing on logical elements of the original stories.
- xiv. Distinguish between real and make-believe, fact and opinion, in written materials.
- xv. Read their own writing.

When the curricula applied in the kindergartens in Turkey and the USA are analyzed, it is seen that the objectives and the achievements of the curriculum in Turkey are mainly about reading and writing studies and it is not directly related to writing skill. When the curriculum in American kindergarten is analyzed, it is seen that there are target achievements that are directly related to writing skill.

When the objectives and the achievements of the curriculum applied in Turkey is examined, it is spotted that there are objectives and achievements related to general reading and writing studies and the number of the achievements supporting the writing preparation is few. The present achievements are mainly about fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. The studies that are conducted on the basis of teacher competencies in Turkey reveal pre-school teachers' tendency in supporting the writing preparation studies by making exercises on sitting properly, holding the pencil, etc. (N. Bay, 2008). Another study revealed that while getting a pre-school education before primary school did not create a significant variation in the pace of the reading and writing of the 1st graders of the primary school children, it created a significant variation in the aspects of picturing a part of the story that they find interesting about the reading comprehension, writing sentences, and writing a new story using the words in the story in favor of those who got a pre-school education before primary school (Y. Bay, 2008). This case is important as it shows the pre-school curriculum in Turkey supports the fine motor skills of the children. On the other hand, there are some studies showing different results of the pre-school children's writing preparation skills in kindergarten. Yangın (2007), as a result of the study that he did to identify whether the 6 year-old children in pre-school teaching institutions were ready to write or not, he found out that the they were not ready. However, Çelenk (2008) detected that pre-school education bring experience and accumulation in children for primary school education and it affects the reading and writing readiness levels of the students in a positive way. There is no study regarding the writing materials and their effects on children's writing skills in Turkey. There are some studies oriented to support the writing skills of the children which were turned out to be successful (Duran, 2009; Şimşek, 2011). These empirical studies show that when the pre-school children are aided with writing materials and activities, their writing readiness level increases. Therefore, the curriculum needs to be supported with the achievements supporting writing preparation and with knowledge about material usage.

In accordance with the curricula, the data about 4 and 5 year-old classes were given below.

4 Year-Old Classes

The pictures of the writing preparation materials of the 4 year-old class in Turkish kindergarten are shown below.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

The materials are in the closed cupboards or in open shelves (some of them are as high as children can reach but some of them are at a higher place than the children's reach).



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6

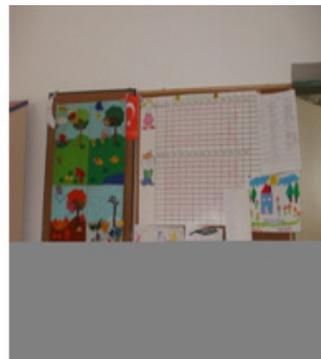
These materials are oriented to prepare the children for writing skills but are rather used for visual art activities.



Picture 7

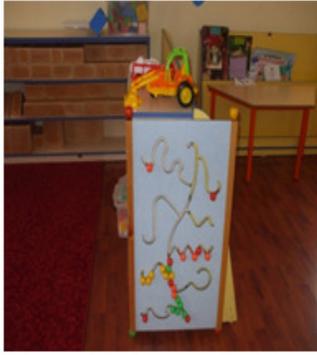


Picture 8



Picture 9

There are a limited number of materials which are not directly related to writing but may be aimed at supporting the writing awareness. There are few printed materials such as letters or writing samples.



Picture 10



Picture 11



Picture 12

It is observed that there are materials which can be used to aid the fine motor skills of the children in the class. There is a computer to support the writing awareness and writing skills of the children.

The general view of the 4 year-old class in the USA is given below.



Picture 13

It is seen that there are different corners in the class and they are separated from each other via the cupboards. The materials of the separated cupboards are in those corners and the cupboards are open and were designed suitable for children's reach.



Picture 14

When analyzed from the aspect of writing preparation, all the materials in the class are labeled and there are many written posters around the class. The program of the daily activities is hanged to the board of group activity area both in visual and written versions. Besides this, it is possible to see the prints all around the class. This case is thought to provide children writing awareness.

The picture of the writing corner is given below.



Picture 15

In the picture, there is a cupboard which includes writing materials and there is a table with 4 chairs in front of it.



Picture 16

When we have a look at the cupboard where the writing studies are kept, we see that it has 3 shelves and 5 closed drawers.

When the materials in the cupboard shelves are examined, it is seen that there are chinks, writing boards, and erasers.



Picture 17



Picture 18

There are numerous coloring materials, board markers in baskets and colorful glasses.



Picture 19



Picture 20

There is a basket including scribbling pads, on which the photographs of the children are stapled, and envelopes.



Picture 21



Picture 22

There are 3 illustrated alphabet books in the shelf. Besides, there are lots of blank papers and some papers on which various shapes are drawn.



Picture 23



Picture 24

The cards on which the names of the children with their photographs are written are hanged to the side of the cupboard so that they can take them. A caterpillar-shaped alphabet (Aa, Bb,) is pasted at the back of the cupboard near to the table.



Picture 25



Picture 26

It is observed that the papers that they can write and put in files, a material, under which there is a spinning panel and on which there are various pencils and coloring stuff, are placed on another cupboard in the writing corner of the class.



Picture 27



Picture 28

When the materials, which are directly oriented to writing in the other corners apart from the writing corner, are examined, a white medium writing board, stamp prints, colorful ink boxes, punches for that publish animal figures and used with fingers, punches that are used in the palms, and an illustrated alphabet are observed.

When the 4 year-old classes in both kindergartens are analyzed, it is seen that the one in Turkey does not have a writing corner and has limited materials but the one in the USA has a writing corner and more various materials aimed to develop the writing skill. Writing corner is an area intending to support the writing development of the children in all parts. Children start to use the pre-writing stages such as drawing, revision, and explanation and to use writing strategies in this area (Leuenberger, 2003). Therefore, writing corner is important on the grounds of improving the writing skill.

Five-year-old classes

The photos of the materials at the five-year-old class that are to prepare the students for writing skill of the Turkish kindergarten are given below.



Picture 29



Picture 30



Picture 31

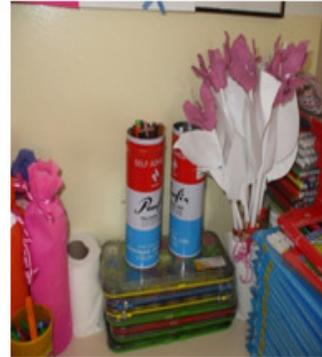
It has been observed that the materials for preparing students for writing skills at five-year-old class are in drawers that are closed and within the students' grasp. Besides this, there are also tables and chairs at a reachable height for the students.



Picture 32



Picture 33



Picture 34

While analyzing the writing materials at the five-year-old class, it has been observed that there are no writing corners. Some kind of coloring materials (water color, dry paint, oil paint, felted pencils) have been observed.



Picture 35



Picture 36



Picture 37

It is salient that there are writing-supportive materials that are used for artistic and visual activities and supportive for fine motor skills and eye hand coordination at the five-year-old class.



Picture 38



Picture 39



Picture 40

It has been observed that there are very few materials for raising the children's awareness of writing at the five-year-old class just as at the four-year-old one.

At the kindergarten having been observed in the USA, it has been observed that there is a writing corner and all the materials and the corners are tagged at the five-year-old class just as the four-year-old one.



Picture 41

Moreover, it has been observed that there are writings on the board and the place is divided into smaller areas with cupboards.



Picture 42

To analyze the writing corner, there is a table with a cupboard and there is one more table and four chairs.



Picture 43

It has been seen that a colorful alphabet and some geometric figures are pasted on the table engrossingly.



Picture 44



Picture 45

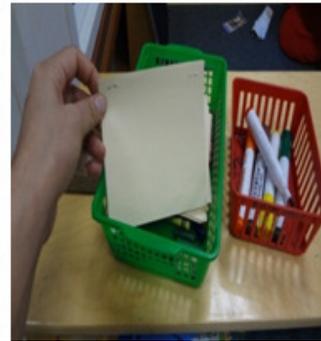
It has been observed that there are different types of coloring materials and papers in the baskets.



Picture 46



Picture 47

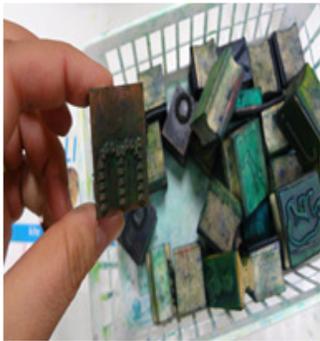


Picture 48

Letter-writing molds, animal drawing molds, geometric figures drawing molds, printing materials and ink have been observed. The pictures of the materials are given below.



Picture 49



Picture 50



Picture 51



Picture 52



Picture 53



Picture 54

Just as in the four-year-old class, there are writing files, a cupboard and board erasers in the five-year-old class.



Picture 55



Picture 56



Picture 57

There is a spinning material that provides the children the chance of making three-letter words, a basket with letter cards in it, and word cards one can derive new words from. There are also letter cards in another basket too.



Picture 58

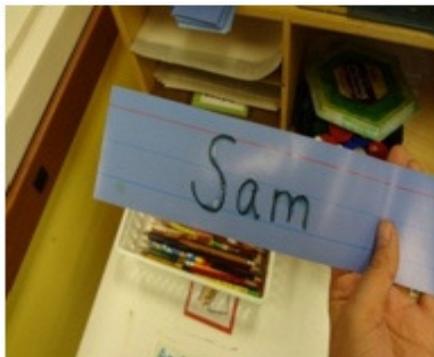


Picture 59



Picture 60

Besides, there are two big dictionaries and the cards the names of the children written on one of the shelves.



Picture 61



Picture 62

Comparing the five-year-old classes of the research group with the four-year-old ones, similar results have been obtained. It is salient that there isn't a writing corner at five-year-old classes in Turkey and the number and the variety of the writing-preparing materials are very limited in comparison with the USA.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the curricula of the four and five-year-old children of the two university kindergartens of Turkey and the USA have been analyzed on the basis of writing skill and the related materials of writing skills have been evaluated. It has been observed that general objectives and achievements take place in the pre-school curriculum applied in the pre-schools of Turkey, but there aren't more specific objectives and achievements. It is possible to say that in the curriculum applied, achievements and statements related to the preparation for writing skills are reflected to the practice. Because, when we look into the classes of four and five-year-old children, it has been observed that in accordance with these objectives and achievements there hasn't been created any corner or special area. Thus, very limited materials related to the writing skills have been observed. However, in the USA in the curriculum analyzed it has been observed that there are more specific objectives and achievements and in accordance with them is a writing corner in both of the age groups. Besides, in the classroom environment it has been observed that there is a good range of writing materials and children often have the chance of coming across to the written forms thanks to the labeling. Although the children are not expected to read in a formal way in the pre-school period, they are expected to gain the concept of writing and become aware of it (Ezell and Justice, 2005). The studies conducted with the children detected that the strongest skill in predicting the future reading skills of the children in writing awareness (Farver et al., 2007; Kelman, 2006). Durkin (1993) listed the skills that pre-school children should have related to the writing awareness as understanding the difference between words and non-word graphical presentations, noticing that writing is done using a tool (pencil, chalk, coloring material, sand, etc.), reasoning that the print can be on different surfaces (paper, metal, fabric, etc.), discovering that the print is read in words, comprehending that the words are written in a regular format, there are spaces between the words and those spaces have a function, the print is read from left to right and from up to down (Lesiak, 1997). Children's noticing these features of writing awareness is closely related to noticing the ambient print (McGinty et al., 2006). Reutzler and colleagues (2003) detected that there is a correlation between the writing awareness of the children with their reading the ambient print. Similarly, Berry (2003) found out that there is a relation between the children's writing awareness and letter knowledge skills with ambient print. In his study that he carried out to find the effects of daily writing activities on the development of reading, Pierce (2003) concluded that the children learn reading more easily if they are supported with the writing activities. Thus, it has been regarded essential that teachers include preparation activities for writing and use related materials for preparation for writing. In accordance with these results, including more detailed objectives and achievements for writing in the curriculum that is applied in Turkish preschools and creating a corner containing various and sufficient materials in classrooms can be suggested.

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