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The determination of primary school first year students' phonological awareness skills

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the phonological awareness skills of students starting the first year at primary school. In the study, descriptive model was used as the aim of the study is to present the current situation as it is. The study was carried out with 276 students who started first year at two primary schools and received preschool education in Ankara in 2008-2009 educational year. In the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data obtained in the study, quantitative research method was used. In the study, “Yangın, Erdoğan and Erdoğan Phonological Awareness Scale” was used to determine the phonological awareness skills of the students. The results of the study indicated that the points students got from phonological awareness skill scale dimension and in total were at medium level.

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Keywords: Phonological awareness, first reading and writing, first year students.

1. Introduction

In Turkey, the programs for elementary education were modified by the Ministry of Education with a study carried out in 2004. One of the courses of which the program was modified in program modification studies was Turkish language teaching course. The program for Turkish language teaching course (1-5 grades) was designed taking the constructivist approach as the basis. In this context, method for teaching first reading and writing was also modified in accordance with the approach taken into consideration. In the new program, the method for teaching first reading and writing was determined as Phoneme Based Sentence Method (MEB, 2005).

In order to accomplish reading-writing activity through Phoneme Based Sentence Method, the letters should be made meaningful at phoneme level. Thus, seeing the similarities between writing and speaking, students figure out that writing is the combination of the letters and speaking is the combination of phonemes. The analysis of speaking at the level of phonemes is explained with the phonetic awareness skill.

Phonological awareness is to be aware of phoneme units which compose a word (Goswami and Byrant, 1990). In other words, phonological awareness is defined as the skill for analyzing words in spoken language into their syllabi and phonemes and the skill for carrying out mental processes related to the phonemes in spoken language (Denton,

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Hasbrouck, Weaver and Riccio, 2000). In this context, phonological awareness is a verbal language skill which a prerequisite for understanding the relationship between phonemes and letters (Torgesses and Wagner, 1998).

Studies related to phonological awareness skill revealed that this skill is a skill which started to develop in preschool period, predicted reading and writing achievement in the future, which could be developed and taught, which was the determinant of reading problems and included a step by step process. (Roskos, Christie and Richgelds, 2003; Phillips, Menchetti and Lonigan, 2008; Torgesen, Wagner and Rashotte, 1994; Share, 2004; Chard and Dickson, 1999; Rubba, 2004; Phillips, Menchetti and Lonigan, 2008; Allor, 2002). Studies which provide the general developmental order of phonological awareness indicated that children were more sensitive to smaller parts of words when they became older and they analyzed the similar and different phonemes before they manipulate the phonemes of the words (Anthony and Francis, 2005; Chard and Dickson, 1999). When the studies related to the development of phonological awareness of preschool children were examined, it could be seen that children in this period were able to complete tasks like analyzing words into their syllabi and recognizing the rhymed words; however they had difficulty in tasks related to phonemes. This situation indicates that phonological awareness is a skill which develops step by step (Goswami and Bryant, 1990).

In order to implement Phoneme Based Sentence Method effectively, students should have phonological awareness skill at an adequate level in preschool ages. The phonological awareness skill that students have enables them to move to formal reading-writing process more easily (Pullen and Justice, 2003). In this context, the phonological awareness levels of the students starting the first year at primary school are gaining importance.

1.1. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the phonological awareness skills of students starting the first year at primary school.

2. Method

In this study, descriptive model was used as the aim of the study is to present the current situation as it is. In the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data obtained in the study, quantitative research method was used. The study was carried out with 276 students who started first year at two primary schools and received preschool education in Ankara in 2008-2009 educational year. In the study, “Yangın, Erdoğan and Erdoğan Phonological Awareness Scale” was used to determine the phonological awareness skills of the students. The scale is composed of five dimensions related to phonological awareness skills that the students starting first year at primary school have as “realizing that sentences are composed of words”, “realizing that words are composed of syllables”, “realizing that words can be rhymed”, “realizing that words can start with the same phoneme” and “realizing that words can end with the same phoneme”. There are 35 items in the scale as seven items in each dimension. In studies, the KR-20 reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .74. Data obtained in the study were analyzed using SPSS 11.5 software. The average and standard deviation values related the scores students get in phonological awareness scale dimensions and in total were presented in the study.

3. Findings and Comments

3.1. Findings Related to the First Sub-problem

The first sub-problem of the study was “What is the average and the standard deviation of the points students enrolled in at first year of primary school get from phonological awareness scale “recognizing the fact that sentences are composed of words” dimension?” The average and the standard deviation of the points students got from the related dimension in phonological awareness scale are given in Table 1.

Table 1. The Average and the Standard Deviation of the Points Students Get from Phonological Awareness Scale “Recognizing the Fact that Sentences are Composed of Words” Dimension

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Recognizing the Fact that Sentences are Composed of Words	276	3,80	1,91

When the data in Table 1 were examined, it was seen that the average of the points students got from the dimension “recognizing the fact that sentences are composed of words” was 3,80 and the standard deviation was 1,91. According to this, the points of students related to the dimension “recognizing the fact that sentences are composed of words” was at medium level.

3. 2. Findings Related to the Second Sub-problem

The second sub-problem of the study was “What is the average and the standard deviation of the points students enrolled in at first year of primary school get from phonological awareness scale “recognizing the fact that words are composed of syllabi” dimension?” The average and the standard deviation of the points students got from the related dimension in phonological awareness scale are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The Average and the Standard Deviation of the Points Students Get from Phonological Awareness Scale “Recognizing the Fact that Words are Composed of Syllabi” Dimension

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Recognizing the Fact that Words are Composed of Syllabi	276	5,10	1,57

According to the data in Table 2, it was seen that the average of the points students got from the dimension “recognizing the fact that words are composed of syllabi” was 5,10 and the standard deviation was 1,57. According to this, it was observed that the points of students related to this dimension were at almost high level.

3.3. Findings Related to the Third Sub-problem

The third sub-problem of the study was “What is the average and the standard deviation of the points students enrolled in at first year of primary school get from phonological awareness scale “recognizing the fact that words can be rhymed” dimension?” The average and the standard deviation of the points students got from the related dimension in phonological awareness scale are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The Average and the Standard Deviation of the Points Students Get from Phonological Awareness Scale “Recognizing the Fact that Words Can Be Rhymed” Dimension

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Recognizing the Fact that Words Can Be Rhymed	276	4,07	1,64

According to the data in Table 3, it was seen that the average of the points students got from the dimension “recognizing the fact that words can be rhymed” was 4,07 and the standard deviation was 1,64. According to this, it can be stated that the points of students related to this dimension were at medium level.

3.4. Findings Related to the Fourth Sub-problem

The fourth sub-problem of the study was “What is the average and the standard deviation of the points students enrolled in at first year of primary school get from phonological awareness scale “recognizing the fact that words begin with the same phoneme” dimension?” The average and the standard deviation of the points students got from the related dimension in phonological awareness scale are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The Average and the Standard Deviation of the Points Students Get from Phonological Awareness Scale “Recognizing the Fact that Words Can Begin with the Same Phoneme” Dimension

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Recognizing the Fact that Words Can Begin with the Same Phoneme	276	3,62	1,56

When the data in Table 4 was examined, it was seen that the average of the points students got from this dimension was 3,62 and the standard deviation was 1,56. According to this, it can be observed that the points of students related to this dimension were at medium level.

3. 5. Findings Related to the Fifth Sub-problem

The fifth sub-problem of the study was “What is the average and the standard deviation of the points students enrolled in at first year of primary school get from phonological awareness scale “recognizing the fact that words can end with the same phoneme” dimension?” The average and the standard deviation of the points students got from the related dimension in phonological awareness scale are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The Average and the Standard Deviation of the Points Students Get from Phonological Awareness Scale “Recognizing the Fact that Words Can End with the Same Phoneme” Dimension

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Recognizing the Fact that Words Can End with the Same Phoneme	276	3,11	1,52

When the data in Table 5 were examined, it was seen that the average of the points students got from this dimension was 3,11 and the standard deviation was 1,52. According to this, it can be stated that the points of students were at medium level.

3. 6. Findings Related to the Sixth Sub-problem

The sixth sub-problem of the study was “What is the average and the standard deviation of the total points students enrolled in at first year of primary school get from phonological awareness?” The average and the standard deviation of the points students got from the related dimension in phonological awareness scale are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The Average and the Standard Deviation of the Total Points Students Get from Phonological Awareness Scale

	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Phonological Awareness Scale in Total	276	19,69	5,21

When the data in Table 6 were examined, it was seen that the average of the total points students got was 19,69 and the standard deviation was 5,21. According to this, it can be stated that the points of students were at medium level.

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to determine the phonological awareness skills of students starting the first year at primary school. The findings of the study revealed that the points students enrolled at in first year of primary school got from phonological awareness scale “recognizing the fact that sentences are composed of words”, “recognizing the fact that words are composed of syllabi”, “recognizing the fact that words can be rhymed”, “recognizing the fact that words can begin with the same phoneme”, “recognizing the fact that words can end with the same phoneme” and in total were at medium level. The fact that students’ phonological awareness skills are at medium level

indicates that students do not have enough experience related to this skill in their preschool period. In other words, it can be stated that the education students received in preschool period is not enough.

In addition to this, it can be observed that the points students got from the dimensions “recognizing the fact that words are composed of syllabi” and “recognizing the fact that words can be rhymed” were higher than the other dimensions. This finding of the study is consistent with the studies carried out by Kameeni (1996) and Goswami and Bryant (1990). In these studies in which the phonological awareness of preschool children were examined, it was observed that children could complete tasks like analyzing words into their syllabi and recognizing rhymed words; however, they had difficulty in tasks related to phonemes. It is important whether the phoneme is at the beginning, at the end or in the middle. Recognizing the beginning phoneme is much easier than the recognizing the ending phoneme (Kameenui, 1996).

The following recommendations can be suggested in the light of the findings of the study:

1. Activities should take place in preschool education in order to develop children’s phonological awareness skills.
2. Similar studies should be carried out with more students.
3. Similar studies should be carried out with students who do not receive preschool education.

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