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How is a research that children want? Hearing the children's voices during the research process!

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Abstract

It is important to get the views of children during participation in the research process. The Committee on the Rights of the Child mentions the aspects to be conveyed to children who participate in research processes. A 'symmetrical approach' must be adopted for getting children's own consent, and informing them about the research and participatory methods. This study aims to utilise children's voices for research processes, and their participation and the participatory methods they prefer are the main goals. Children's views on their research processes, their needs and their interests are investigated and the data collected via semi-structured interviews from seven male and seven female children by sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The majority of the children were found to be keen to participate in the research and they wanted a positive approach; they also have different expressions according to their contextual characteristics, like the place to conduct the research.

Keywords: Children's voice, research, researcher.

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1. Introduction

The traditional approach to working with children is a sceptical conception of the credibility of information received from children and the abilities of children. Children seem incompetent and miniature adults. Up until recently, information about children was reached through parents, teachers and other professionals. Attention was not paid to consulting children or giving importance to their participation. As one of the developing approaches, the idea of seeing 'children as subjects of work' was the basis of child-centred research (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

With the impact of The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, this approach to children has gained a different dimension in the research process that goes beyond the idea of seeing children as subjects of work. It is believed that the full understanding of childhood by researchers can only be achieved through participatory studies that hear children's voices. This framework emphasises the need for children to explain their own experiences and their participation (McKechnie & Hobbs, 2004).

The importance of participation in childhood research is seen as one of the most important elements determining the quality or property of work. The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child defines the right of children to report their views of themselves and expresses that their opinions should be taken in all processes that concern them. The general interpretation of Article 12 describes in detail the qualifications of this process and of participation. Accordingly, studies on children are considered to be an indispensable requirement for ensuring child participation. It is also stated that adults should respect children's rights and that children have the right to be consulted, have access to information, have the freedom to speak and choose and change their own decisions (Hart, 1997; Alderson, 1995; O'Kane, 2000).

Nowadays, we have gone beyond the idea of researching children. The idea of involving children in research has begun to come to the forefront. In this way, children can be seen as social actors who take an active role in the research about themselves rather than being the subject or object of the research. Thus, they will be able to engage in their research as a participant in the research itself. Researchers should consider individual characteristics as children's geographical, historical and social status (James & Prout, 1990).

When children's understanding of participating in the research is combined with Hart's (1979) accession lane, it will be the case that the research process involves participation levels and qualifications of participation. Therefore, it can be said that children are active participants in the methodology of childhood research and put forward methods and approaches that are related, respectful, inclusive and volunteering. In addition to data collection methods like the traditional survey interviews, it emphasises approaches that respect the diversity of expression involving the active participation of children. For example, Clark and Moss (2001) suggest the joint use of the concept of 'Mosaic Approach' with data collection methods such as mapping, photography, role playing, collage, model, story telling, print journalism and electronic publishing, radio production, theatre, puppetry, music, dance, daily and story writing and spider diagrams (Barker & Weller, 2003; Burke, 2005; Greenfield, 2004; Punch, 2002). These methods can be varied in the Loris Malaguzzi's 'face-to-face' view of the child (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998) as a way of using the child's own expressive pathway in many different verbal and non-verbal ways.

2. Purpose

According to James (1997), seeing children as social actors is the heart of their childhood work. We can get the unique experiences of children that we need to know, with the acceptance that they are social actors. In this study, it is aimed to listen to children's voices and announce their voices during the research process. It is also the main goal of the study to involve children in research processes and to think about participatory methods in childhood research, such as how children seek research. While

working on participatory methods, it is aimed to investigate the opinions of children about the research processes regarding the development of children, their needs and their interests.

3. Method

This study is designed as a basic qualitative research. Qualitative research explores how people generally feel, react and deal with real problems, and take into consideration the subjective nature of human nature in doing so. When dealing with such complex issues, the softer methods such as interview, observation (e.g. examining one's body language) and text analysis (e.g. examination of a speech or a letter) are utilised. Qualitative methods are quite useful when we can understand the ideas and meanings that people make in their minds based on the experiences they get from their everyday life (Spyrou, 2015).

3.1. Participants

Seven male and seven female children were selected by the appropriate sampling and snowball sampling techniques of participant sampling method. In qualitative studies, each situation is chosen for a purpose (Patton, 2014). In order to ensure participatory diversity, people with different age, gender, ethnicity and cultural characteristics have been reached and who are experienced in participating in research processes and who are not.

Table 1. participating in research processes and who are not

Name	Age	Participation in the research process
Ahmet	9	Participate
Kuzey	13	Did not participate
Hakan	10	Did not participate
Ezgi	8	Participate
Tanem	7	Did not participate
Ege	7	Participate
Ayse	9	Did not participate
Ozkan	7	Did not participate
Poyraz	12	Did not participate
Selin	9	Did not participate
Merve	8	Did not participate
Melih	10	Did not participate
Tugba	8	Did not participate
Nergiz	10	Did not participate

3.2. Collection of data

The data were collected with semi-structured interviews. Open-ended and exploratory questions enabled participants to express their perceptions with their own thoughts. The investigator can influence the flow of the interview with different side or sub-questions according to the viewers and can open up the answers of the person in detail (Merriam, 2013).

Interview questions:

- An investigator is curious about some things about children and wants to investigate. He wants to work with children because he is interested in children. Do you want to support this researcher by participating during the research period?
- How would you like your researcher to treat you?
- Where do you want to work with your researcher?
- In which ways do you want the researcher to work with you other than interviewing?
- Do you want to have someone other than the researcher and you in the research environment?

3.3. Problem statement

The fact that children's ideas about data collection methods are not taken and these methods are determined by researchers is considered as an important ethical problem that is ignored by the participation of children in research processes (Anderson, 2004).

3.4. Ethical rules in working with children

Measures were taken within the framework of ethical principles (Miles & Huberman, 1994) during the data collection. It is based on the principle of high benefit for the child (United Nations Children's Rights Act (UNCRC, 2008)) and parents informing children about the work in question. Children are given information about what the 'research' is like, why they are done and what they aim for. First of all, children are approved for participation in the research process. The investigator will decide whether the children will support the process or not and gives an informed consent form to the parents of the children. Children are also told about the consent form and are asked to put their signature in it. Children who did not know or did not want to sign had drawn different shapes (birds, hearts, stars, etc.). In addition, permission was taken to receive voice recordings from children during the interview. In order to protect the privacy of children, the name of each has been changed in the course of transcribing voice recordings (Glesne, 2013). General Comment number 12 also states that children can choose to terminate their participation freely in accordance with the principle of respect for children.

3.5. Analysis of data

Analysis of the research data was carried out by content analysis method. Before the analysis of the data, the steps of the analysis of the data, the pre-analysis preparations and then the inductive analysis were followed (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2013; Merriam, 2013). The writing of the data was carried out by researchers after the interviews were completed. After the written data of the interviews, possible codes, categories and themes were extracted.

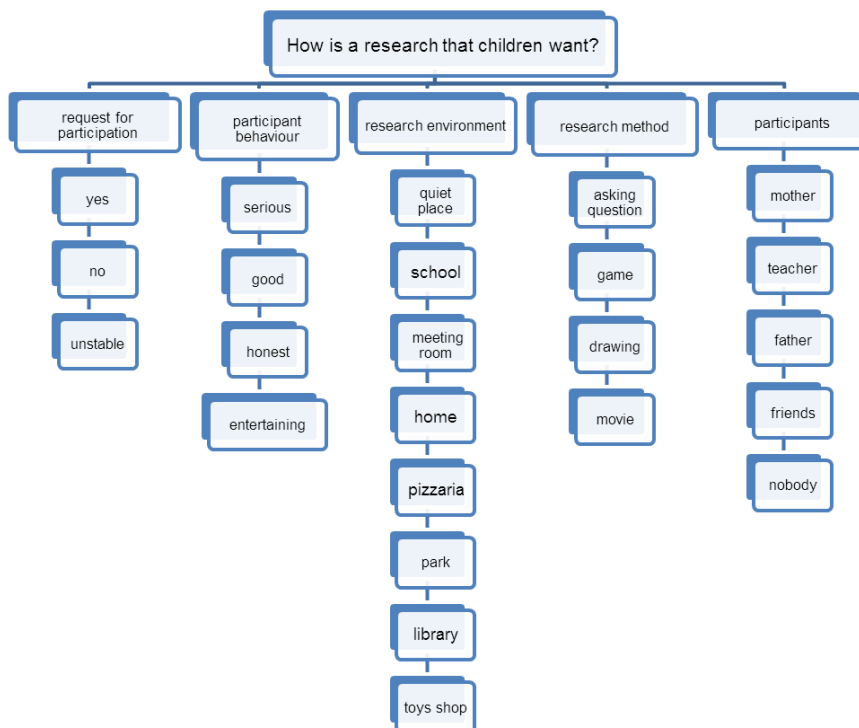


Figure 1. The themes and categories are listed below

4. Findings

Table 2. Opinions on whether or not they want to be included in the research process

Codes	Participants
I would like to participate	Ege, Ezgi, Ayşe, Ozkan, Nergiz, Selin, Merve, Tuğba
Unstable	Kuzey
I do not want to participate	Ahmet, Hakan, Melih, Poyraz

The majority of the children involved in the research stated that they wanted to participate in the research process. While 1 child was undecided, 4 children stated that they did not want to participate. Descriptive expressions of children who want to participate are listed below:

Ezgi (age 8) ‘I would like to join the research and help the researcher. Because I feel bad, if I do not help someone.’

Ege (age 7) ‘I would like to participate, if my photo is not taken.’

Selin (age 9) ‘I would like to participate, I had attended before but asked a few questions. I want you to ask more questions.’

Kuzay (age 13) ‘I want to know that what is the subject? so I can decide.’

Table 3. Opinions on the researcher’s behaviour

Codes	Participants
To be serious	Ege
Should behave well	Tanem, Poyraz, Ayse, Hakan, Ozkan, Ege, Melih, Kuzey, Tugba, Merve, Banu, Nergiz
To be honest	Ayşe, Selin
To be entertaining	Ozkan, Merve, Tugba, Ayse

Children's opinions about the researcher's behaviour reveal that they expect positive behaviours. They used expressions such as should behave well, should be entertaining, etc. They expressed their desire to be 'entertaining' while expressing the qualities that should be in the researcher, such as 'to be serious, to be good, to be honest'.

Table 4. Opinions on where they want the research to be done

Codes	Participants
Quiet place	Ezgi
School	Tanem, Melih, Ozkan, Banu, Tugba, Selin, Merve
Home	Ezgi, Ege, Poyraz, Ayse, Banu
Meeting room	Ege
Pizzeria	Melih
Library	Ege, Kuzey, Merve
Toys shop	Tanem
Park	Ozkan, Nergiz, Poyraz

The children involved in the research seem to prefer research environments in line with their interests and desires. This suggests that the interests and aspirations of the children need to be taken into account when setting research environments. In addition to the places that researchers generally prefer, such as 'a quiet place, a school, a house, a meeting room in a school', children seem to want to include places like 'fun fair, pizzeria, toy shop, library, park' in their research process. Descriptions of children's expressions are given below:

Ezgi (age 8) 'It must be a secluded quiet place. First, it can be my own home, but no one should be at home.'

Melih (age 10) 'It should be a pizza shop so I can answer better while eating.'

Ege (7 years) 'I want a quiet place where I will not be disturbed. The meeting room in the school is very suitable for me.'

Tanem (age 7) 'I prefer to be in toys shop because my favourite place is there.'

Table 5. Opinions on which methods they want the research to be done

Codes	Participants
By asking questions	Ezgi, Merve, Tugba, Ege, Selin
Game	Hakan, Poyraz, Tanem, Ezgi, Ayşe, Ozkan, Nergiz
Drawing	Ayşe, Ozkan, Selin
Film	Ozkan
Design	Merve

Given the expressions of how children want the research to be done, they expressed that children want to be included in the research process in different ways such as 'game, making design and talking about the design, thinking by watching a movie' as well as traditional expressions such as 'asking questions, drawing pictures'. Descriptive descriptions of children's expressions are given below:

Hakan (age 8) 'The questions should not be serious, should be more suitable for children and should be childish. It should start by saying that 'we are going to play a game with you'. There should be a question wheel and questions must be answered by the researcher.'

Ayşe (age 9) 'By drawing or by playing or by telling me to do through painting.'

Merve (age 8) 'By making design and talk about it.'

Ozkan (age 7) 'By watching a movie, you can ask what you want about the movie.'

Table 6. Opinions about the existence of another person in the research environment

Codes	Participants
Mother	Poyraz, Tanem, Nergiz, Tuğba
Teacher	Poyraz, Tanem, Selin
Father	Tanem
Friends	Ozkan
Nobody	Ege, Kuzey, Ezgi, Hakan, Nergiz, Ayşe, Selin, Merve, Tuğba, Melih

When we look at the opinions of the children on the existence of another person other than the researcher in the research environment, four of them want their mother, three of them want their teacher, one of them wants her father, one of them wants his friends and ten of them do not want anyone.

5. Discussion and comments

According to the results of the research, it is seen that children want to be involved in research. Moreover, they want to work in ways that are appropriate to their interests and needs, unlike traditional data collection methods like the survey interviews. The children are in the expectation of a positive attitude from the researcher. Children also emphasised the fact that participant spaces were to be chosen in accordance with the interests and needs of children, rather than the traditional and researcher-selected places, as their views mentioned on the selection of space in the data collection and research process.

In the participatory approach, children are seen as 'social actors'. The researcher has to deal with issues such as the child's development, interests, experiences, values and daily routines. The child has equal rights in the research process as researchers and other participants in accordance with these contexts. This supports the understanding of 'ethical symmetry'. This is valuable for everyone involved in the research to benefit from the same ethical principles (Christensen & Prout, 2002). In addition to the traditional methods used in the research process, it is very important for the researcher to consider the interests and needs of children (Morrow & Richards, 1996).

According to the research ethics, children's consent is more important than the ethics committee, the institution and the parental consent. Attention should be given to the participation of children in the research process. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) states in Article 12 that children should be listened to and that all the processes they attend should be carried. According to the voluntary nature of Article 12, children should not be forced to express their opinions other than their will and should be informed about terminating their participation in the course of their wishes. It is seen that they attach importance to the issue of confidentiality, such as informing the children about their work and not taking photographs. In accordance with the 'Transparent and Informative' understanding of the qualifications of participation, it is necessary to give the children the necessary insight to express their opinions independently. Holmes (2005) states that a successful research can be achieved by clearly describing the roles and research for children, and by preparing the method and process appropriately for children.

The opinions of children about where they want their research to be done also differs. According to the qualities of 'child-friendly' participation, appropriate environments and working methods should be determined for children's capacities (Clark, 2010).

Professionals working with children need to have an attitude that includes the language addressed to the child and an approach appropriate to the nature of the child. As regards the characteristics of the researcher, the children made statements such as 'good, entertaining, serious, entertaining'. The characteristic of researchers working with children are expressed by their qualities of 'compassionate, respectful, actor, determined, willing, busy, focused, listening, learning, knowledgeable, effective and

patient'. Some of the children may be of the expectation that the researcher should be a player while some expect that the researcher should be serious (Bredekamp, 2015). It can be said that this situation may also vary according to the interests, wants and needs of the children.

In working with children, it is important to understand them by working with different ways of collecting data, other than the traditionally used surveys and interviews (Thomson, 2008). In this context, early childhood research suggests the use of multiple methods that bring together verbal and non-verbal means of communication so that children can express themselves. According to Holmes (2005), the use of different methods in which children can hear their voices is important in terms of ethical values. Clark (2010) argued that many methods had to be used in the data collection process and called this process the mosaic approach. The multi-methodology described in this study of early childhood and physical environment involvement is considered valuable in terms of allowing children to express themselves. In his research methodology, which he describes as a mosaic approach, he has brought together different methods, with the goal of allowing children aged three and four to evaluate their own learning environments. Participatory methods generally have a broader repertoire, including activities such as methods involving their everyday writing skills, including diaries, story writing and spider diagrams as well as collage, model, storytelling, print journalism and electronic publishing, radio, theatre, dance, puppetry and music (Barker & Weller, 2003; Hart, 1997; Lancaster & Broadbent, 2003; Punch, 2002; Weller, 2006). Looking from a perspective appropriate to the expression of 'the child's face language' of Loris Malaguzzi, which revealed the approach of Reggio Emilia, has tried to understand in verbal and non-verbal ways. Instead of asking only questions to children in the traditional way, it is important to work with them in terms of ethical values in order to determine participatory methods appropriate for their way of expression. Participatory methods view children as participants who produce more 'authentic' information about their subjective reality (Grover, 2004). Children have more knowledge about childhood than adults. It is stated that in the early childhood period, children between the ages of 3 and 6 can make correct evaluations on their own lives. According to Thomson (2008), children in these years have unique and specific expectations about their daily lives, their living spaces and their future. Holmes (2005) and Clark (2010) define children in this age group as socially competent and specialists in their own lives and it is important to note that their voice must be heard and information should be obtained during the working process.

In the research process, the views that children have about another person also differs. When children's decision-making authorities are considered, it is important that children declare their own ideas in this regard. Considering a childhood image that children cannot express their views correctly on their own, it was thought that children should be accompanied by adults. It can be said that most children do not need an adult partner. It was thought that children can take part in the research process as independent and participatory individuals.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Having a participating child image gives the opportunity for the children to be seen as social actors during the research process. When children are seen as social actors and have the same rights as the other participants involved in the research, it will be possible to understand the world of children and to announce their voices (Christensen & Prout, 2002; James & Prout, 1990; Sorin, 2005; Woodhead, 2005).

Professionals working with children within this frame should try to understand the ethical processes such as ethics committee, institutional consent and parental consent before starting the research, as well as the children who will form the research group. Understanding children involves making arrangements for different ways of collecting data and taking into account children's self-expression languages (100 Dili) as expressed in the childhood image of the Reggio Emilia approach. The children should be informed in detail about the research process and ways of providing their participation should be sought. It should be ensured that children use their authority to make decisions in all processes in accordance with their volunteer, informative, entertaining, relevant, respectful and

voluntary participation qualifications. It should be emphasised that the children should be involved in a process of participation in all kinds of issues affecting themselves (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Landsdown, 2005).

In addition to the image of the participating child, Spyrou (2011) emphasised that children may also exist as researchers in the research process, and that such studies are still limited, but that they have added value to the empowerment of children and are gaining popularity in support of their participation in social life. Children should be given opportunities to explore the world rather than to offer opportunities based on adult agendas and priorities (Spyrou, 2011). It was thought that researchers will internalise the idea of working with children more, when they create environments and opportunities that allow children to be involved in the research process.

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