DETERMINATION OF NEEDS IN GUIDANCE FOR A GROUP OF GYPSY/ROMA CHILDREN

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The purpose of this pilot study was to determine demographic features and developmental needs of a group of Gypsy/Roma children between 10 to 14 years old (n=46). The aim of the study was centered on the process of helping by determining these features and needs for a semi-structured psycho-social support program which was designed for Turkey within the leadership of Ministry of Education (MEB) and the technical support of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Keywords: Guidance, Elementary Education, Gypsy/Roma Children.

Introduction

Our sample group was the Gypsy/Roma students who continue to 6th, 7th and 8th classes in 8-year compulsory elementary education program. These students voluntarily participated in the study. For the identification of developmental needs, (1) Socio-demographic information form which is developed by researchers for this study and (2) O-form of Problem Scanning Test which is developed for 6th, 7th and 8th classes, were implemented. The implementations based on the data collection tools were completed within a period of four weeks. Socio-demographic information form consists of 20 objective questions which were intended to recognize students' personal, social, family and school status and conditions. O-form of Problem Scanning Test contains 150-items about child’s personal (physical and psychological) health, family, school (teachers’ attitude, lessons and exams), friends, career choice and future which reflect what Gypsy/Roma children perceived as a problem.

Education is the most prominent component that forms societies, provides gaining of national identity, actualize rapid and planned development. The primary objective of education is to develop knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals, and to help themselves for becoming healthy and productive citizens to their societies. Primary schools which were founded with this objective are the institutions responsible for the education of children between the ages of 6-14. Until 1997, compulsory education in Turkey is extended to eight years which was formerly five years. This year, individuals are obliged to go on those schools by law. Also, a reform to reduce the size of classes was introduced as an average of 30. More teaching hours were allocated to foreign languages and computer training. In 2000, the rate for primary school attendance was reported around 85.7% (SPO, 2000). Despite these achievements, considerable regional and urban-rural differences in educational attainment continue to exist in the country (FAO, 2001). One of the main majorities in Turkey is Gypsy/Roma
people who defined as “A person or persons who have a traditional cultural preference for living in caravans and who either pursue a nomadic habit of life or have pursued such a habit but have ceased travelling, whether permanently or temporarily for social or economic reasons, but does not include members of an organized group of travelling show people or circus people, travelling together as such.”. The population is officially about 500 thousand and unofficially is closer to 2 million. They might migrate to cities and lands in order to find seasonal jobs and may close their homes temporarily.

As far as Gypsy/Roma people are concerned, may be the most important issue appears regarding child adaptation to school. One of the most important problems in Turkey is to gain the Gypsy/Roma children to education. Kołukirik (2006) reported that 25.6% of Gypsies in Izmir were non-literate, 17.8% were elementary school drop-out, 37.8% of them were only graduated from elementary school, and 12.2% of them were able to study after elementary school. The findings from previous researches also revealed that local administrations and schools have been facing with difficulties related to the Gypsy/Roma children who are not registered or registered but not being regular participants to the schools. The main difficulties in attending school for Gypsy/Roma children may summarize as; the lack of basic skills and knowledge in order to cope with school difficulties and the inappropriateness of their ages and levels of developments to the classmates. In addition to these individual problems the lack of necessary support from public authorities plays an important role in Turkey.

With the aim of contributing a solution of this problem, a class teaching program has been designed within the leadership of Ministry of Education (MEB) and the technical support of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The program was later named as Yetiştirici Sınıf Öğretim Programı (YSÖP) (in English: Breeders Class Teaching Program). Based on the frame of 2005 yearly study plan, YSÖP has officially been decided for applying to schools between 7-14 ages in Turkey until 2012. The main aim of YSÖP is to gain children, who are registered but not going to school regularly, to education. There were three dimensions of the semi-structured guidance program; (1) Based on the developmental needs of Gypsy/Roma children some activities were included in the first dimension and these were; setting up effective interaction and healthy human relations, creative thinking, problem solving, issues like reaching to information, expressing emotions and ideas, saying “no”, acquiring living skills, working in collaboration, negotiating. (2) In the second dimension there were activities towards the development of academic success which is processed in leadership of educative administrators and teachers. (3) Activities in the third dimension, there were activities toward the family training.

The objective of this study was to clarify: How can we educate Gypsy/Roma children better? We aimed to provide information for a governmental program based on determining developmental needs and demographic features of Gypsy/Roma children in one of the public schools in Kocaeli in Turkey.
Methods

Sample. In this study, all Gypsy/Roma children who were registered to 6th, 7th and 8th grades of their 8 year compulsory in schools in Kocaeli are concerned. The students in our sampling group (n=46) were chosen randomly and they were all participated voluntarily.

Data Collection Tools. The tools which were used in the determination of developmental needs were:

1. Socio-demographic Information Form was designed by the researchers to obtain socio-demographic and family information.
2. “O form” of Problem Scanning Test designed for 6th 7th and 8th grades.

The implementations based on the data collection tools were completed within a period of four weeks. Socio-demographic Information Form consists of 20 objective questions which were intended to recognize students' personal, social, family and school status and conditions.

O-form of Problem Scanning Test contains 150-items about child’s personal (physical and psychological) health, family, school (teachers’ attitude, lessons and exams), friends, career choice and future which reflect what children perceived as a problem.

Interpretation of the Data. The findings which were obtained by data collection tools from the sampling group were interpreted as percentiles (frequency).

Results

The findings obtained through Socio-demographic Information Form and O-Form were reserved identically. The main findings were listed below.

Demographic Findings. 52% of the students was males. The students who composed 12-14 age group were 76% of all students. 65% of all the students in the study were at 5th and 6th grade. 50% of the students had got (1-3) and the rest %50 had got (4-5) brothers and sisters. 76% of students’ parents had no financial income. The majority of the parents’ bread-winning way was salespeople. 24% of students reported that their families were migrants. 90% of students’ parents was not step mothers/fathers. 98% of the parents stayed at shelters. 63% of students’ houses had no basic appliances like television or washing machine. 70% of students were not interested in music. 45% of students committed no crime. 34 of students pointed out that they did not have breakfast before coming school.

Findings Related with Problem Scanning List (O Form). Health: 45% of students complained about stomachache, 43.4% about catching cold or flu, %41.3 about frequent headaches. Schooling: 65.2% of students complained about not succeeding at foreign languages, 45.6% about not being able to like some courses, 43.4% about not succeeding at Math’s. Family: 58.6% of students reported that their families are poor. 47.8% told that their families are crowded and they have no private rooms for self-study as their houses are small, 50% of the students remarked that their brothers or sisters prevent themselves from studying. Friendship: 39% of students reported that male-female friendship is not acceptable. 34.7% said that also their families do not regard male-female friendship as acceptable. 32.6% complained about not being able to talk with anyone freely. About Future: 34.7% of students pointed out that they have to work after they graduate from primary school. 28% mentioned about the fact that their
parents do not want children’s future education. 26% of students want to be officers.

Psychological Problems: 58.6% of students said that they were extremely nervous. 54.3% told that they are sad for being poor. 50% of students told that they want to wear stylish.

The highest three findings related with developmental stages were taken into consideration. It was also observed that students do not take any academic support from their parents while they are doing their homework.

Discussion

It’s believed that if we apply real life like guidance to those children they will go on their schools. Children learn social, economic, language and moral codes better in all social facilities by watching at home imitating, listening and observation. By this way they become more and more social. The biggest obstacle for a Gypsy/Roma child is irregular discontinuity or low continuity to school. It’s believed that these problems may be caused by cultural impacts and values may affect the children negatively, therefore they cannot display the behaviors expected from them. On the other hand, in order to make learning attractive, teaching process should not be limited with what teacher knows and what teacher wants, creativity of children should also be taken into account. Besides, the environment learning takes place should be active and child-centered. Topics like decision making and contacting, critical and creative thinking should be added to course program, where necessary, adjustments should be made.

If there is a close bond between schools and family it helps for a child to develop positive feelings and attitudes towards school and teacher. Because parents see what is happening at school and if they do so, they encouraged their child positively. When the reasons why a child does not want to go to school are analyzed, it is seen that parent attitudes affect their child’s attitudes and motivations in the wrong way. The girls who are getting prepared for marriage and the boys who are motivated to make money and attain a job have both lost their belief for the necessity of schooling. First of all we should make those children comprehend the importance of education. In order to reach that aim planning skills should be gained for them to acquire objectives and plans to make them real.

For the YSÖP implementation, we witnessed grade efforts of teachers and administrators to be met children’s school materials, to encourage them for regular continuity to school, to give attention on forming mix groups at the activities and on collaboration in their studies, to entertain them by music and dance shows in saloon and school garden. However the YSÖP or other projects have to be constructed to maintain all children in school and to ensure that they are motivated to achieve their highest potential. On the other hand, traditionally, since Gypsy/Roma people are seldom included themselves as a part of local community, it makes us difficult to see how their specific needs will be met even within such projects. Still it is an instructional material that can be made use of by educators, politicians, educational administrators, and other dealers.
References

