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Difficult Questions of Preschoolers' with Different Socio-Economic Conditions and Their Parents' Answers

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Abstract

The present is a qualitative study which aims to examine the difficult questions of preschoolers' children with different socioeconomic conditions to their parents and the answers of the parents. 60 parents with different socioeconomic conditions whose children continue to preschool education in a province located in the central part of Turkey participated in the study. An interview form consisting of structured interview questions was used to in data collection. The data were analyzed with the content analysis technique. The results of the study showed that the children asked their parents difficult questions about daily life, religion, science/nature and sexuality/birth. The frequencies of children's difficult questions by themes showed difference according to socioeconomic conditions. Parents answered to the children's difficult questions with explanations or leaving the questions unanswered. Parents who did not answer the children's difficult questions used the strategies of passing off, saying that they will look into it, saying that they do not know and offering to look into it together. The frequencies of the strategies used by the parents when they did not answer the children's difficult questions differed based on socioeconomic conditions.

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INTRODUCTION

Children show a constant curiosity about the world around them from a very young age (Was & Warneken, 2017). The said curiosity has an effect on their learning process (Engel, 2011). Through curiosity demonstrate a continuous learning effort that lasts throughout their lives. Learning occurs both through direct experiences of the environment and through learning from others (Was & Warneken, 2017). Many strategies such as observation, listening, discovery and imitation are used to learn (Ronfard et al., 2018). These strategies can make learning more effective. However, it is not possible for children to learn all things by experience, such as things that are difficult to observe like microscopic creatures, abstract concepts such as death (Harris & Koenig, 2006), internal characteristics, cultural traditions (Was & Warneken, 2017), scientific phenomena or future events (Harris, 2012). Also, some problems cannot be solved alone. In these situations, the help of others is needed (Mills et al., 2010). Children can obtain information from others in the following ways: by commands (for example, tell me about the stars), by verbal expressions (for example, I cannot open the game on the tablet), by their gaze, by their signs, by gestures and facial expressions, and by asking questions. It has been accepted that children's asking questions to people who are more knowledgeable than themselves is an effective strategy for obtaining information (Ronfard et al., 2018).

Children's questions are related to their age. Children who have not yet developed the ability to speak can do questioning by pointing at unfamiliar objects or showing them to their parents (Chouinard, 2007). Around the age of 1.5-2, “who”, “what” and “where” questions start to be used (Havigerová & Juklová, 2011). These questions are related to the immediate environment and refer to the names and locations of objects and people. In later periods, “why”, “how” and “when” questions are used in chronological order. In order to use these questions, one must first become familiar with more difficult concepts such as causality and time. All question forms can be used around the age of 3, but this usage is still narrow. A great increase in the use of different questions occurs around the age of 4 (Tyack & Ingram, 1977). Preschoolers can use questions quite effectively to obtain information (Kemler Nelson & O’Neil, 2005; Mills et al., 2010).

It is possible for children to have questions for different reasons other than obtaining information. Children may ask questions because of their innate motivation (Callayan & Oakes, 1992), to attract attention, to pass time (Engel, 2011), to interact (Mills et al., 2012), to solve problems (Mills et al., 2010; Was & Warneken, 2017), because of their curiosity (Riihelä, 2003), because of their interest (Hedges & Cooper, 2016) and for teaching (Yu et al., 2017 cited in: Ronfard et al., 2018). The content of the question is as important as the reasons for asking. Studies show that preschooler' ask questions with very different contents. It has been stated that children ask questions about such subjects as death, religion, science-nature, daily life (Sak, 2020; Samuelsson et al., 2000), culture, social order, natural events, objects (Ronfard et al., 2018), birth, shape of the world, goodness, evil, danger, power, generosity and adventure (Bereiter, 2002; cited in: Hedges & Cooper, 2016). Piaget (1967) divided the content of children's questions into five categories: causal explanation, reality and history, human actions and intentions, justification and classification, and evaluation. Sak (2015; 2020) and Sak and Şahin Sak (2020a) used the concept of "difficult questions" for children's questions that are difficult to answer. The authors stated that difficult questions are related to religion, sexuality, science and daily life. In the present study, the term "difficult questions" was preferred for the questions that parents had difficulty in answering.

Children's questions make important contributions to them, regardless of why they are asked or what subject they are asked about. Children's questions have important functions, including the development of problem solving skills (Legare et al., 2013; Mills et al., 2010), retention of information (Chouinard, 2007; Ross & Killey, 1977), the development of thinking skills, the discovery of information sources (Riihelä, 2003), their motivation to learn (Sak & Şahin Sak, 2020b), rapid learning/collecting of

information, and their access to information that cannot obtained on their own (Ronfard et al., 2018; Was & Warneken, 2017), increasing the quality of social learning (Chouinard, 2007), helping become questioning, autonomous and reflective learners (Agar et al., 1999), establishing high quality interactions (Mills et al., 2012; Riihelä, 2003) and developing empathy and communication skills (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998; cited in: Sak & Şahin Sak, 2020a). Children's questions significantly contribute to parents as well. Children's questions provide important information to parents about development (Engel, 2011), readiness to learn (Martin & Torres, 2013), problem-solving skills (Legare et al., 2013), interests (Hedges & Cooper, 2016), misconceptions (Vygotsky, 1978), cognitive skills (Tizard et al., 1983) and their developing understanding of the world (Harris, 2012). In addition help the parents' self-confidence increase, as they think that they provide their children the support needed (Birbili & Karagiorgou, 2009).

Children's questions are also considered important by sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky (1978), early learning experiences are mostly shaped by interaction with the social world. Vygotsky explained learning with the concept of “Zone of Proximal Development”. Zone of Proximal Development is defined as the difference between the problems that children can solve on their own and those that they can solve when they get help from more knowledgeable or talented people (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, it can be accepted that parents are talented and knowledgeable people who can answer children's questions.

The effectiveness of the questions is related to the parents' approach to questions and the quality of their answers. The qualified answers of the parents have an effect on filling the knowledge gaps (Chouinard, 2007), courage to ask different questions (Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018) and asking more questions (Frazier et al., 2009). In addition, there is a relationship between the modeling of questioning by parents and the types and frequency of questions asked by children (Birbili & Karagiorgou, 2009). Ignoring questions can cause anger, frustration, and anxiety that can hinder knowledge acquisition (Ross & Killey, 1977). Failure to answer appropriately to questions can put children at a developmental disadvantage (Tizzard et al., 1983). In addition, this situation may cause the development of fears, obsessions and misconceptions that may negatively affect personality development (San Bayhan & Artan, 2011).

There are studies investigating the questions of preschool children in the literature. Studies have examined children's questions from the following aspects: use to obtain information (Callanan & Oakes, 1992; Chouinard, 2007), the effect on conceptual structure (Callanan & Oakes, 1992), the effect of demographic characteristics on the frequency, form and function of the questions (Smith, 1933), question types and adults' reactions to answers (Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018), questions about sexuality (Heller & Johnson, 2010; Martin & Torres, 2013), questions about seeking explanation and reactions to the given answers (Frazier et al., 2009), mistakes in questions (Rowland, 2006), frequency and type (Tizard & Hughes, 1984), difficult questions (Sak, 2015) and difficult questions asked by gender (Sak & Şahin Sak, 2020a). In addition, there are also studies investigating the answers of parents to their children's questions (Callanan & Oakes, 1992; Chouinard, 2007; Frazier et al., 2009; Kemler Nelson & O'Neil, 2005; Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018; Martin & Torres, 2013; Sak, 2015; Tizard et al., 1983).

Although the questioning performances of children of the same age are similar, Ronfard et al. (2018) states that differences such as socio-economic condition (SEC), parent attitude, parents' stress levels and spoken context may cause this performance to vary. In addition, several previous studies showed that the differences in speech of both parents and children are related to SEC (Hart & Risley, 1992; Huttenlocher et al., 2007). Studies have shown that children's speech patterns (Heath, 1983), their use of open-ended questions as an information seeking strategy (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), their frequency of asking questions (Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018; Tizard & Hughes, 1984) and their use of questions to get explanations (Heath, 1983) differ according to the SEC of the parents. Similarly, the number of questions parents ask (Hoff et al., 2002) and the way they talk to children (Valle, 2005) also differ according to the SEC. Although there are different studies on children's questions in the

literature, no study has been found on the relationship of children's difficult questions and parents' answers with SEC. Thus, the aim of the present study is to examine the difficult questions of preschool children with different SEC to their parents and the answers of the parents to the children. In this context, answers to the following questions were sought:

- What questions do preschool children ask their parents more often?
- What questions do preschool children ask their parents more often that are difficult to answer?
- How do parents answer children's difficult questions?

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study was designed as a qualitative research with a case study pattern. Qualitative research allows perceiving the environment, experiences or phenomena, to reveal interpretations of them, and to collect broader and more flexible data. Case studies refer to examining a phenomenon or event in depth and making contextual explanations (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2013).

STUDY GROUP

The study group of the research consisted of 60 parents who voluntarily participated in the research and whose children attend preschool education in a city located in the central part of Turkey. The study group was determined using "criterion sampling", which is a purposive sampling method. Criterion sampling refers to the study of all cases that meet a predetermined set of criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Therefore, 20 participants from low SEC parents, 20 from middle SEC parents, and 20 from high SEC parents whose children between 57-71 months of age attending formal preschool education institutions were included in the study. SEC has been determined according to the research data on the hunger and poverty line conducted by the Turkish Confederation of Trade Unions (Türkiş News Bulletin, 2021). In addition, the education level of the parents and the environmental characteristics of the school were also taken into account when determining the SEC. The personal information of the participants is given in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, most of the participants are between the ages of 33-37 (n=22), mothers (n=48), graduates (n=22) and live in a city center (n=38).

Table 1. *Personal Information of Participants*

		Low SEC (f)	*Middle SEC (f)*	*High SEC (f)*	*Total (f)*
Age	23-27	7	4	-	11
	28-32	5	6	2	13
	33-37	4	7	11	22
	38-42	4	3	7	14
Degree of affinity	Mother	16	17	15	48
	Father	4	3	5	12
Education level	Primary education	13	6	-	19
	Secondary education	5	4	-	9
	Associate degree	2	1	-	3
	Bachelor's degree	-	7	15	22
	Master's degree	-	2	5	7
Location	City center	10	14	14	38
	District center	9	6	6	21
	Village/Settlement	1	-	-	1

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In the study, data were collected with a personal information form and an interview form consisting of structured questions. The personal information form includes questions about the

participants' age, degree of affinity with the child, educational status, average monthly income of the parent and the parent's place of residence. The interview form consists of questions such as "What are the questions your child often asks you?", "What are the difficult questions your child often asks you?" and "How do you react to the difficult questions your child asks?" After the necessary official permissions were obtained, the data collection process started. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants, it was stated that the participation was on a voluntary basis and personal information would be kept confidential, and it was stated that the data would be used for academic purposes. Consent of the participants was obtained. The data obtained during the interviews were recorded.

DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis, one of the qualitative research data analysis methods, was used in the analysis of the data. Data is analyzed in depth and new themes, categories and dimensions that did not exist before are revealed in the content analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). An inductive approach was applied in content analysis. Inductive data analysis is a process that involves breaking data into units and creating categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Accordingly, data that are similar in meaning were gathered under the same code. The resulting codes were examined by an expert with a doctorate degree and the categories and themes that would form the research findings were created. Frequencies and percentages were used in reporting the themes obtained. Quotations from the participants were included while reporting the themes and categories. During the analyses, codes were created and presented as follows: LSEC1, LSEC2… for parents of children in the low SEC; MSEC1, MSEC2… for parents of children in middle SEC; and HSEC1, HSEC2... for parents of children in the high SEC.

VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND ETHICS

In qualitative research, the terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are used instead of validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant information, stages of the research, data collection tools, and data analysis process are explained in detail for credibility. In addition, the research was examined by an expert with a doctorate degree, whose feedback was taken into account. Direct quotations were included in the findings in order to increase transferability. For dependability, assistance was received from an expert with a PhD degree in the field in the process of creating codes and categories. The percentage of agreement was calculated using Miles and Huberman (1994)'s formula Percentage Agreement= [Agreements/ (Agreements + Disagreements) X 100] and it was found to be 90%. An agreement percentage of 70% and above means that the reliability condition is fulfilled (Şencan, 2005). For confirmability, the expert review and evaluation process was performed. Confirmability can be ensured by meeting and discussing the compatibility of raw data with findings with expert colleagues (Merriam, 2013). In this context, the present study was examined by an expert and the expert's feedback was taken into account. In addition, all information and documents collected during the research process were archived. Codes were given to the participants in the data analysis within the framework of ethical rules and these codes were used in the quotations. Ethics committee decision dated 16.03.2021 and issued 2021.04.99 was obtained from Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Türkiye.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented under three headings: questions asked by preschool children to their parents, questions asked by preschool children to the parents that are difficult to answer, and answers given by parents to questions asked by preschool children that are difficult to answer. Findings were shown in figures while frequencies and percentiles were used in the presentation of the findings.

FINDINGS REGARDING QUESTIONS ASKED BY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN TO THEIR PARENTS

Table 2 shows that the questions preschool children ask their parents are divided into four themes: daily life (n=40), religion (n=13), science/nature (n=11) and sexuality/birth (n=7).

Table 2. *Emerging Themes and Categories Related to Questions Asked by Preschool Children to Their Parents*

Theme	*Category*	*Low SEC*		*Middle SEC*		*High SEC*		*Total*	
		(f)	*%*	*(f)*	*%*	*(f)*	*%*	*(f)*	*%*
Daily life	Questions about general daily life	13	65	8	40	9	45	30	50
	Questions about current daily life	8	40	4	20	3	15	15	25
	Questions of permission/request	3	15	2	10	1	5	6	10
	Total	18	90	11	55	11	55	40	67
Religion	God	-	-	4	20	4	20	8	13
	Death	-	-	2	10	2	10	4	7
	Creation	-	-	1	5	1	5	2	3
	Other	1	5	-	-	-	-	1	2
	Total	1	5	6	30	6	30	13	22
Science/ Nature	Space	-	-	2	10	2	10	4	7
	Geography	-	-	2	10	-	-	2	3
	Mathematics	-	-	2	10	-	-	2	3
	Technology	-	-	1	5	1	5	2	3
	Body	1	5	-	-	1	5	2	3
	Other	1	5	1	5	2	10	4	7
	Total	2	10	5	25	4	20	11	18
Sexuality/ Birth	Sexuality/ Birth	1	5	5	25	1	5	7	12

Questions about daily life consists of questions about general daily life, questions about current daily life and questions of permission/request. Daily life questions were expressed by a total of 40 parents (18 LSECs, 11 MSECs and 11 HSECs). Children's questions about current daily life have been about the corona pandemic and its effects. Examples of children's questions about daily life are as follows: “Why don't I have a room?” (LSEC 1), “Why did you choose this profession?” (MSEC 18), “Why don't you let me put on makeup?” (HSEC 3), “Will the coronavirus end?” (LSEC 2), “When will we go to the park in peace?” (MSEC 7), “When will we go to school?” (HSEC 10), “Can I ride my bicycle tomorrow?” (LSEC 8), “Can I do it too?” (MSEC 6), “Can you help me with my homework?” (HSEC 4).

Questions about religion consists of God, death, creation and other categories. Religion-related questions were raised by 13 parents (one LSEC, six MSECs, and six HSECs). Examples of children's questions about religion are as follows: “Why can't we see God?” (MSEC 5), “How can God be everywhere?” (HSEC 16), “What happens to us when we die?” (MSEC 18), “How do we die?” (HSEC 1), “How were humans created?” (MSEC 18), “How were humans created? (HSEC 9), “Why do we fast?” (LSEC 3).

Questions about Science/Nature consist of space, geography, mathematics, technology, body and other categories. Science/Nature questions were raised by 11 parents (two LSECs, five MSECs, and four HSECs). Examples of children's questions about Science/Nature are as follows: “Can we go to planets?” (MSEC 17), “What is in the highest sky?” (HSEC 7), “Why isn’t earth shaped square?” (MSEC

16), “How is one kilometer calculated?” (MSEC 18), “How is this game played (for a game on Tablet)? MSEC 1), “How do computers work?” (HSEC 1), “How do we live?” (LSEC 16), “How do our eyes see?” (HSEC 5), “How the lemon becomes sour?” (LSEC 6), “Why can’t we fly?” (HSEC 7).

Questions about sexuality/birth were not categorized and presented under the same name. Sexuality/birth questions were raised by 7 parents (one LSEC, five MSECs and one HSECs). Examples of children's questions about sexuality/birth are as follows: “Mom, how was I born?” (LSEC 5), “How are babies born?” (MSEC 16), “Did I born from your belly?” (HSEC 6).

FINDINGS REGARDING QUESTIONS ASKED BY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN TO THEIR PARENTS THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO ANSWER

As can be seen in Table 3, the difficult questions that preschool children ask their parents are in four themes; difficult questions about religion (n=27), daily life (n=21), science/nature (n=5) and sexuality/birth (n=5).

Table 3. *Emerging Themes and Categories for Questions Asked by Preschool Children to their Parents that are Difficult to Answer*

Theme	*Category*	*Low SEC*		*Middle SEC*		*High SEC*		*Total*	
		(f)	*%*	*(f)*	*%*	*(f)*	*%*	*(f)*	*%*
Religion	God	5	25	5	25	4	20	14	23
	Death	1	5	6	30	6	30	13	22
	Other	3	15	-	-	1	5	4	7
	Total	7	35	10	50	10	50	27	45
Daily life	Questions about general daily life	8	40	2	10	5	25	15	25
	Questions about current daily life	2	10	2	10	-	-	4	7
	Questions of permission/request	3	15	-	-	-	-	3	5
	Total	12	60	4	20	5	25	21	35
Science/ Nature	Geography	-	-	1	5	1	5	2	3
	Technology	-	-	2	10			2	3
	Plants	1	5	1	5			2	3
	Other	1	5	1	5			2	2
	Total	1	5	3	15	1	5	5	8
Sexuality/ Birth	Sexuality/ Birth	1	5	3	15	1	5	5	8

Difficult questions about Religion consist of God, death and other categories. Difficult questions about religion were raised by a total of 27 parents (seven LSECs, 10 MSECs, and 10 HSECs). Examples of children's difficult questions about religion are as follows: *“Who created God?” (LSEC 19), “Why can’t we see God?” (MSEC 9), “Is God a girl or a boy?” (HSEC 16), “Will you die when you get old?” (LSEC 7), “What is death?” (MSEC 17), “Where do those who die go?” (HSEC 7), “What is fasting?” (LSEC 3), “If we pray, will our wish come true?” (HSEC 13).*

Difficult questions about daily life consist of difficult questions about general daily life, difficult questions about current daily life and questions of permission/request. Difficult questions regarding daily life were expressed by a total of 21 parents (12 LSEC, four MSEC and five HSEC). Children's difficult

current daily life questions are about the corona virus epidemic and its effects. Examples of children's difficult questions about daily life are as follows: *"Dad, why don't we have a car?" (LSEC16), "Why do people do evil things?" (MSEC 11), "Can't you go to work, please?" (HSEC 10), "Why can't we go out?" (LSEC 13), "When will we go back to normal?" (MSEC 7), "When will you buy it? (When I do not buy things s/he wants)" (LSEC 12).*

Difficult questions about Science/Nature consist of geography, technology, plants and other categories. Difficult questions on Science/Nature were raised by 5 parents (one LSEC, three MSEC and one HSEC). Examples of children's difficult questions about Science/Nature are as follows: "*Why is it cold in winter?" (MSEC 1), "Where does the sun go in the evening?" (HSEC 17), "How did this car come to existence?" (MSEC 14), "What do trees do?" (LSEC 17), "How did this flower come to existence? (MSEC 14), "Do aliens really exist?" (LSEC 17), "What materials are things (such as furniture or belongings) made of?" (MSEC 4).*

Difficult questions about sexuality/birth are not categorized and presented with the same name. Difficult questions regarding sexuality/birth were raised by 5 parents (one LSEC, three MSECs and one HSEC). Examples of children's difficult questions about sexuality/birth are as follows: *"How did I get into your belly?" (LSEC 5), "How did I come into existence in your belly?" (MSEC 18), "How did I come to Earth?" (HSEC 6).*

FINDINGS REGARDING THE ANSWERS GIVEN BY PARENTS TO QUESTIONS ASKED BY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO ANSWER

Table 4 shows that the parents' answers to the difficult questions asked by preschool children were discussed under two themes: giving explanatory answers and leaving questions unanswered. Giving explanatory answers are not categorized and presented under the same name. Giving explanatory answers were expressed by a total of 35 parents (nine LSEC, 10 MSEC, and 16 HSEC). Examples of parents' statements are as follows: *"I try to explain." (LSEC 3), "I try to explain according to his/her age." (MSEC 17), "I try to answer in a way that s/he can understand." (HSEC11), "I answer in an age-appropriate way." (MSEC 8), "I explain in a simple way." (HSEC 6).*

Leaving questions unanswered consist of the following categories: passing off, saying that they will look into it, saying that they do not know and offering to look into it together. The theme of leaving questions unanswered was expressed by a total of 25 parents (11 LSECs, 10 MSECs and four HSECs). Examples of parents' statements are as follows: *"I say you'll understand when you grow up." (LSEC 15-19), "I generally prefer to change the subject." (MSEC 6), "I pass it off." (HSEC 7), "I say I will look into it and share it with her/him as soon as possible." (LSEC 20), "I say I will answer after I look into it." (MSEC 5), "I say I will answer some of your questions by doing research." (HSEC 7), "I say that I do not know." (LSEC 3; MSEC 14), "I say I don't know but we can look into it and learn together." (MSEC 18), "I offer to look into it together." (HSEC 9).*

Table 4. *Emerging Themes and Categories for the Answers Given by Parents to Questions Asked by Preschool Children that are Difficult to Answer*

Theme	*Category*	*Low SEC*		*Middle SEC*		*High SEC*		*Total*	
		(f)	*%*	*(f)*	*%*	*(f)*	*%*	*(f)*	*%*
Giving explanatory answers	Giving explanatory answers	9	45	10	50	16	80	35	58
Leaving questions unanswered	Passing off	5	25	4	20	1	5	10	17
	Saying that they will look into it	2	10	3	15	2	10	7	12
	Saying that they do not know	4	20	1	5	-	-	5	8
	Offering to look into it together	-		2	10	1	5	3	5
	Total	11	55	10	50	4	20	25	42

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was conducted to examine the questions/difficult questions of preschool children with different SECs to their parents and the parents' reactions to the children's difficult questions. The results of the study showed that children's questions and difficult questions to their parents were related to daily life, religion, science/nature and sexuality/birth. There are previous research results similar to this finding. Previous research has revealed that children ask questions to their parents about daily life (Callanan & Oakes, 1992; Engel, 2011; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Tozduman Yaralı & Kara Eren, 2020), religion, science/nature (Callanan & Oakes, 1992; Tozduman Yaralı & Kara Eren, 2020) and sexuality/birth (Tozduman Yaralı & Kara Eren, 2020). The study by Sak (2015) and Sak & Şahin Sak (2020a) demonstrated that children's difficult questions are also related to daily life, religion, science/nature, and sexuality/birth. It is seen that the questions and the difficult questions of the children in all SEC groups are on similar topics. However, although the children asked questions on similar subjects, the socio-cultural characteristics of the children may result in the content of the questions to differ (Ronfard et al., 2018; Sak & Şahin Sak, 2020a; Ünlütabak et al., 2019). This was also found by the present study results, that is, the frequency of children's questions and difficult questions differed according to the SEC by themes and categories.

Questions and difficult questions regarding daily life were mostly asked by the children in the LSEC group. Children's questions about daily life may arise from their interactions with their parents (Vygotsky, 1978), they are mostly related to the family environment (Sak, 2020) and arise from reflections after a life event (Samuelsson et al., 2000). In this case, it can be said that parents in the LSEC group talk more about daily life in the family environment. The children in the LSEC group asked difficult questions about their own shortcomings and wishes, unlike the children in the other SEC groups (For example; “Dad why don't we have this?” (LSEC 16); “When will you buy me clothes?” (LSEC10). Since the parents in the LSEC group live in difficult conditions, it is possible that the children also have questions about these difficulties. Parents of children at LSEC may have a hard time answering these difficult questions.

Questions and difficult questions related to religion were mostly asked by children in MSEC and HSEC groups. Parents with higher levels of education give more priority to their children's curiosity (Hart & Risley, 1992; Huttenlocher et al., 2007). Parents in the MSEC and HSEC groups generally have higher education levels than parents in the LSEC group. The fact that children in the MSEC and HSEC groups have more curious questions and difficult questions about religion may be a result of this. Although parents in the MSEC and HSEC groups allow children to ask questions about religion, they may have difficulty answering children's questions on this topic. In Özdemir's (2019) study, most of the

parents stated that they could not answer their children's questions about religion. Questions about religion are abstract questions and require answers appropriate to the developmental level of the children. Thus, it can be concluded that parents in the MSEC and HSEC groups are not competent to answer their children's questions about religion in accordance with their developmental level. In addition, in most societies, religion issues are not discussed openly by adults (Sak & Şahin Sak, 2020a). It can be said that parents in the LSEC group do not discuss religion frequently with their children, and in turn, this causes children to ask less questions about religion.

While questions about science/nature were asked more often by children in the MSEC and HSEC groups, difficult questions were asked more often by children in the MSEC group. It is known that parents with higher levels of education give more priority to their children's independence and curiosity (Hart & Risley, 1992; Huttenlocher et al., 2007). The fact that children in the MSEC and HSEC groups have more curious questions about Science/Nature may be a result of this. In addition, children's questions are shaped by their interaction with their social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In connection with this, it can be said that parents in the MSEC and HSEC groups talk more about science/nature in the family environment. Since the parents in the HSEC group have a high level of education, they may have answered the children's questions about Science/Nature without difficulty. On the other hand, the education level of parents in the LSEC group is low. Thus, parents in the LSEC group may not have addressed children's questions about Science/Nature.

Questions and difficult questions related to sexuality/birth were asked by three children in the MSEC group, while they were asked by one child each in the LSEC group and one in the HSEC group. This may result from the education level of the parents. While the parents in the HSEC group could easily answer their children's questions about sexuality/birth, it is possible that the parents in the LSEC group did not address these questions. Parental attitudes may have an impact on children asking fewer questions about sexuality/birth. According to Acer and Artan (2000), parents in Turkish society do not have a comfortable attitude when talking about sexuality and they talk very little about it. By not talking about it, parents may have given children the impression that sexuality is taboo and should not be discussed.

About three-fifths of the parents gave explanatory answers to the children's difficult questions. There are previous studies stating that parents give explanatory answers to the questions of preschool children (Callanan & Oakes, 1992; Chouinard, 2007; Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018; Sak, 2015; Sak, 2020; Tozduman Yaralı & Kara Eren, 2020). Studies by Sak (2015) and Sak (2020) showed that parents gave explanatory answers to a limited part of children's difficult questions. However, these studies were carried out without considering the SEC factor. The difference in the results of the present study may be due to SEC differences. In Kurkul and Corriveau's (2018) study, parents with higher SEC levels gave more explanatory answers to children's questions. The same finding was obtained as a result of the present study, that is, parents who gave more descriptive answers to children's difficult questions are in the HSEC group. The higher education level of the parents in the HSEC group may be an indication that they have a sufficient level to answer the difficult questions of the children. Parents in the HSEC group encouraged children to fill their knowledge gaps and ask different questions by giving more explanatory answers to the children's questions. In addition, they have increased their own credibility with their children.

About two-fifths of the parents stated that they do not answer the children's difficult questions. Previous studies indicate that parents leave children's questions unanswered (Sak, 2015; Sak, 2020), they do not answer children's questions satisfactorily (Martin & Torres, 2013), they do not provide qualified explanations for children's questions (Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018), they reluctantly answer children's questions (Tizard et al., 1983), ignore children's questions and tell children what they do not know (Tozduman Yaralı & Kara Eren, 2020). Parents cannot give an explanatory answer because they do not have the necessary information (Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018) and do not know how to explain. Parents who give explanatory answers to children's difficult questions are mostly in the LSEC group

and the MSEC group. Parents in the LSEC group and MSEC group have lower education levels than parents in the HSEC group. This may lead to the conclusion that the inability to answer the difficult questions of the children is related to the education level of the parents. Giving explanatory answers to children's questions may lead to a decrease in the reliability of parents, children not seeing parents as a source of information, and children's suspicion of parents. In addition, children who do not get an explanatory answer to their questions will be more likely to experience anger, frustration, anxiety and developmental negativities. Therefore, it is very important for parents to answer children's questions appropriately.

The strategies of the parents who did not answer the children's difficult questions varied depending on the SEC. Passing off and saying that they do not know strategies were emphasized more by the parents in the LSEC group. According to Hoff et al. (2002), parents with a low SEC talk to their children less and use more prohibitive language (for example, "not now"). This was also found in the results of the present study, that is, the parents in the LSEC group were the group that passed the children's questions off more often and said that they did not know more often. Most of the difficult questions of the children in the LSEC group are related to daily life. Parents in the LSEC group may have passed the difficult questions off and said that they do not know in order to avoid the situation that the children's questions would create, to protect the child emotionally or simply because they did not know how to explain. Saying that they will look into it and offering to look into it together was emphasized more by the parents in the MSEC group. The strategies of parents in the MSEC group saying they will look into it and offering to look into it together can be considered a positive step towards passing off children's questions. Because parents may not always have the knowledge and time to answer children's questions clearly (Kurkul & Corriveau, 2018). Parents in the MSEC group preferring the strategies of saying they will look into it and offering to look into it together may be related to their education level. Difficult questions of the children in the MSEC group are more about religion. It can be said that parents in the MSEC group are not indifferent to their children's curiosity about religion.

To summarize, preschool children's questions and difficult questions were related to daily life, religion, science/nature and sexuality/birth. There are two types of parents' approaches to children's difficult questions: giving explanatory answers and leaving questions unanswered. Most of the parents gave explanatory answers to the children's difficult questions. The frequencies of children's questions and difficult questions differed according to SEC. Likewise, the frequencies of the strategies parents used in the case of leaving questions unanswered also varied according to the SEC.

This study is limited to the subjects that the children's questions are related to and the verbal answers of the parents. Despite these limitations, the present study is unique in terms of being the first study in Turkey, examining the questions and difficult questions of preschool children with different SECs, and the answers given by parents to difficult questions. The results of this study will make a significant contribution to the preschool literature. At the same time, the findings of the study are important in terms of informing teachers and parents about children's questions.

Children's questions are greater and more serious than parents imagine (Olsson, 2013) and have important functions for children. For this reason, parents should be aware of the importance of their children's questions, support children to ask questions, answer children's questions clearly and accurately, accept when they do not know the answers, and improve themselves in the face of children's difficult questions. Preschool teachers should guide parents on how to answer children's difficult questions. For this, teachers can direct parents to information resources such as books, articles and websites about the importance of children's questions and how to answer them appropriately. In addition, organizations such as seminars and conferences can be organized for parents. The present study was conducted with parents from different SEC groups whose children attend formal preschools. In future studies, the questions/difficult questions of children of different ages, genders and attending different institutions (private and public schools) and the answers of their parents can be examined

comparatively. In addition, the answers of the parents can be examined in terms of variables such as gender, age and education level. The nature and characteristics of children's questions can be investigated in different contexts such as hospitals, parks, shopping malls and markets. Finally, the children's reactions to the parents' answers can be examined according to the SEC factor.

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