

## “Parent School” Evaluation of the Program: A Qualitative Study

### “Ebeveyn Okulu” Programının Değerlendirmesi: Nitel Bir Çalışma

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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Implementation of systematic education programs for the healthy development of children can contribute to learning the basic building blocks for the cognitive, social, emotional, motor, and language development of children while improving the knowledge and behaviors of parent. This study was conducted to evaluate the contributions of the “Parent School” program to parents.

**Material and Methods:** The study was conducted on July 1-15, 2023, using the focus group technique using the phenomenology study design, one of the qualitative research models. A total of 23 parent actively participated in the “Parent School” program. Among the parent, 11 parent who agreed to do post-program evaluation constituted the sample of this study. A descriptive data form consisting of 5 questions and a semi-structured interview form consisting of 3 questions were used to collect data. Three nurses analyzed participants’ opinions, and thematic coding was performed.

**Results:** In the interviews conducted with the parent, four themes (Emotional change in the parent, behavioral change in the parent, change in the child, and difficulty in transition) and 14 sub-themes (Awareness, consistency in discipline, self-confidence, self-compassion, self-efficacy, playing, effective communication, spending time together, behavioral change, contribution to growth and development, emotional state, comparison with others, family elders and feeding behavior) were determined.

**Conclusion:** In the interviews with the parents at the end of the program, it was determined that there were changes in themselves and their children and that they had difficulty with some changes. In particular, they stated that they had difficulties with comparison, conflicts with family elders or feeding.

**Keywords:** Parent, parenting education, qualitative research, nursing.

#### ÖZ

**Giriş:** Çocukların sağlıklı gelişimi için sistematik eğitim programlarının uygulanması, çocukların bilişsel, sosyal, duygusal, motor ve dil gelişimi için temel yapı taşlarının öğrenilmesine katkı sağlarken, ebeveynlerin bilgi ve davranışlarını da geliştirebilir. Bu çalışma “Ebeveyn Okulu” programının ebeveynlere katkılarını değerlendirmek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Materyal ve Metotlar:** Çalışma 1-15 Temmuz 2023 tarihleri arasında nitel araştırma modellerinden fenomenoloji çalışma deseni kullanılarak odak grup tekniği ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. “Ebeveyn Okulu” programına toplam 23 ebeveyn aktif olarak katılmıştır. Ebeveyn arasından program sonrası değerlendirme yapmayı kabul eden 11 ebeveyn bu çalışmanın örneklemini oluşturmuştur. Veri toplamak için 5 sorudan oluşan tanımlayıcı veri formu ve 3 sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların görüşleri üç hemşire tarafından analiz edilmiş ve tematik kodlama yapılmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Ebeveynle yapılan görüşmelerde dört tema (Ebeveynde duygusal değişim, ebeveynde davranışsal değişim, çocukta değişim ve geçiş zorluğu) ve 14 alt tema (Farkındalık, disiplinde tutarlılık, öz güven, öz şefkat, öz yeterlilik, oyun, etkili iletişim, birlikte zaman geçirme, davranışsal değişim, büyüme ve gelişime katkı, duygu durumu, başkalarıyla kıyaslama, aile büyükleri ve beslenme davranışı) belirlenmiştir.

**Sonuç:** Program sonunda ebeveynlerle yapılan görüşmelerde kendilerinde ve çocuklarında değişimler olduğu ve bazı değişimlerde zorlandıkları tespit edilmiştir. Özellikle kıyaslama, aile büyükleri ile çatışma ya da beslenme konusunda zorlandıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Ebeveyn, ebeveynlik eğitimi, nitel araştırma, hemşirelik.

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## Introduction

The typical path to enhancing the well-being of parents and their children is to improve parenting. Secure and positive parent-child interactions lay the foundations for healthy child development (1-3). Especially during the early years of life, how children are raised will significantly influence their later physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development. Therefore, it is crucial to guide parents towards appropriate resources such as education and counseling services for their development and awareness (1-3).

Implementation of systematic education programs for the healthy development of children can contribute to learning the basic building blocks for the cognitive, social, emotional, motor, and language development of children while improving the knowledge and behaviors of parents (3, 4-7).

Studies conducted with parents generally show that a single dimension of development, such as language development, social-emotional development, or cognitive development, is addressed (8-10). However, no training programs include healthy children's cognitive, behavioral, motor skills, language development, and social-emotional dimensions and guide parents in raising children.

In Turkiye, there is a lack of established routine child rearing programs under health policies. Therefore, parents are contribute to their children's development with social learning skills or traditional methods during routine checks performed by pediatricians in hospitals providing social pediatrics services. However, during these routine check-ups, nurses do not evaluate children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. In order to contribute to child development, there is a need for a parent school where evidence-based information can be transferred using technology, experiences can be shared, and interaction can be found. In this direction, within the scope of a doctoral thesis in the field of nursing (11), "Parent School" ([www.ebeveynokulu.org](http://www.ebeveynokulu.org)) was developed for parents with children aged 1-3 years. A website was created within the scope of this program. Through such programmes, nurses play a critical role in increasing the level of knowledge of parents and guiding them in proper care practices. This website incorporated five modules comprising written messages, dialogues, and videos offering insights into children's physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development. Parents were encouraged to read one module per week and engage in online discussions regarding the content they had reviewed during the same week. In the subsequent week, parents received one-on-one counseling sessions. This approach reinforces the role of nurses in health education and helps parents to provide more informed and effective care for their children.

As parenting programs represent effective methods for enhancing parenting skills, program evaluations are crucial in

assessing parental satisfaction levels and identifying areas for improvement (12). A review of studies conducted to evaluate parenting programs indicates that parents consistently reported a notably high level of satisfaction with these programs, often finding practical solutions to their parenting challenges (13-15). This study was conducted to evaluate the contributions of the "Parent School" program to parents.

## Material and Methods

### Study Design

The study was conducted on July 1-15, 2023, using the focus group technique using the phenomenology study design, one of the qualitative research models.

### Participants

The study used the homogeneous sampling method to conduct focus group interviews. Twenty-three parents participated in the "Parent School" program. The sample of this study consisted of 11 parents who agreed to be evaluated after the program. The inclusion criteria were determined as follows: a) to have participated in the parent school program, b) acceptance of the parents to be recorded on the Zoom platform. Exclusion criteria were as follows: a) parents leave without finishing the interview.

### Data Collection Tool

In order to determine the descriptive characteristics of the parents, a form containing questions regarding age, education level, child's age, child gender, and number of children, and a semi-structured interview form consisting of three questions created by the researchers was used to collect qualitative data. The questions included what changed in the parents' lives after the program, what changed in their children's lives, and what were the difficulties between their previous and current knowledge about raising children.

### Data Collection

Before starting the study, the parents who participated in the "Parent School" program were informed that their opinions would be taken to evaluate the program. They were informed that the interviews would be online (zoom), scheduled at times convenient for them, and recorded. In order to obtain qualitative data, the periods when the parents who agreed to participate in the program evaluation were planned, and they were invited to be interviewed on the online (zoom) platform on the determined dates and times. The researcher created a link for the parents to enter the training on the online (zoom) platform, and all interviews were recorded.

The purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the information were explained to the parents. During the interview, after the

warm-up questions, the parents were asked their opinions about what changed in their lives with the information they gained from the program, what changed in their children's lives, and whether there were any difficulties between their previous knowledge about child rearing and their current knowledge. After each interview, the answers given by the participants were summarized, and their accuracy was confirmed. They were also asked to add any comments they would like to add.

A moderator researcher conducted the interview. The focus group interview was conducted in two sessions. Five people participated in the first session, and six participated in the second session held the following day. The interviews lasted an average of 57 minutes 08 seconds (Min=52 minutes 49 seconds, Max=63 minutes 06 seconds).

The study was reported under the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) guidelines (16).

### Data Analysis

In the qualitative data analysis phase, the recordings of the participants' opinions were listened to, and all statements were transferred to a Word file without comment. Each parent participating in the study was assigned a code number (M1, M2, M3...). Thematic content analysis was then conducted. Data analysis was conducted manually by three experts without using any program.

The coding was done independently by two experts with qualitative research knowledge and a doctorate in pediatric health and disease nursing, working as a clinician and an academic nurse. The experts analyzed the responses of the parents who participated in the study. First, the data were coded, and thematic coding was performed by determining the similarities and differences of the resulting codes. Then, themes were formed by combining the related codes in the same category. The principle of internal and external consistency was considered during thematic coding. The thematic coding obtained by two experts was evaluated by an academician working in pediatric health and disease nursing and having qualitative research knowledge, and a consensus was reached.

### Ethical Aspects of the Research

The research was conducted under the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (17). In order to decide on the ethical appropriateness of the research, approval was obtained by applying to the ethics committee commission of a university (Research Code: 2023-816). Before the data collection process, the parents were informed about the research. After the purpose of the research was explained, written consent was obtained from the participants that they agreed to participate in the research.

## Results

### Results on the descriptive Characteristics of Parents

A total of 23 parents participated in the parent school program. The program evaluation was conducted with 11 mothers who agreed to be interviewed. The descriptive characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of parents and their children

| Participant | Age (Years) | Education Status          | Number of Children | Gender of children | Child age (Months) |
|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| M1          | 39          | Primary or high school    | ≥Two               | Girl               | 26                 |
| M2          | 27          | Primary or high school    | One                | Boy                | 29                 |
| M3          | 35          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Girl               | 27                 |
| M4          | 31          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Boy                | 26                 |
| M5          | 44          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Boy                | 25                 |
| M6          | 42          | Undergraduate or graduate | ≥Two               | Girl               | 24                 |
| M7          | 38          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Boy                | 23                 |
| M8          | 36          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Boy                | 26                 |
| M9          | 28          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Boy                | 23                 |
| M10         | 32          | Undergraduate or graduate | One                | Girl               | 24                 |
| M11         | 35          | Undergraduate or graduate | ≥Two               | Boy                | 29                 |

Four themes and 14 sub-themes were identified in the interviews with parents about program evaluation.

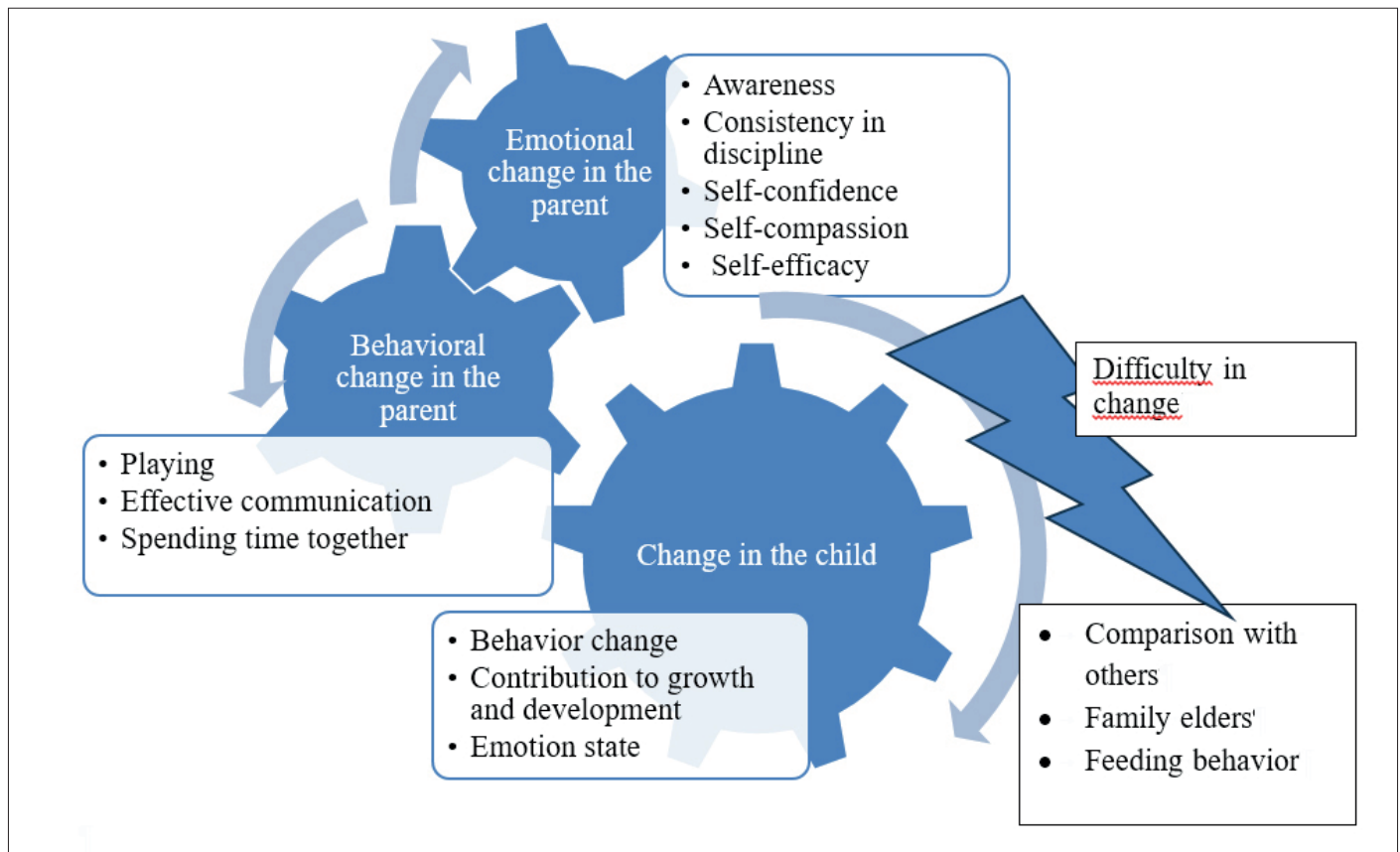
### Emotional change in the parent

#### Awareness

#### Consistency in discipline

#### Self-confidence

- Self-compassion
- Self-efficacy
- Behavioral change in the parent
- Playing
- Effective communication
- Spending time together
- Change in the child
- Behavior change
- Contribution to growth and development
- Emotion state
- Difficulty in change
- Comparison with others
- Family elders
- Feeding behavior



**Figure 1.** The themes and sub-themes

The themes and sub-themes are given in Figure 1.

### a) Emotional Change in Parents

Five sub-themes were identified under the theme of emotional change in parents. These sub-themes are awareness, consistency in discipline, self-confidence, self-compassion, and self-efficacy.

The sub-theme is awareness: Parents mentioned that their children's behaviors were normal and realized there was no problem as they listened to other parents' stories. Some of the statements related to this situation are given below;

*M2: ...I realized that I was not alone, because it was psychologically exhausting for me. It was as if he was the only one like this and I was the only one experiencing these problems.*

The sub-theme is consistency in discipline: Parents emphasized the importance of acting consistently with spouses when setting limits for their children. Below are the parent statements related to this sub-theme;

*M11: I better understood being consistent, that is, parents should be consistent. We even talked about it with my husband because he can't stand it. I seem to be a little bit harsher, but I understood much better how important it is to be positive without being harsh, not only for the child but also for my own life.*

Sub-theme self-confidence: Parents stated that their self-confidence increased thanks to the information they learned. A sample sentence expressing this is given below;

*M3: ...I used to be in such a hurry before; how will I get her to use the toilet? How am I going to get her to stop breastfeeding? Now that it has been broken, I am calmer. Whenever I feel like it, I do not feel ready; if I feel ready, I will do it; I believe I will do it. We are moving forward with more confident and secure steps.*

Sub-theme self-efficacy: As parents put what they learn into practice, their skills improve, and their self-efficacy increases. The parent statement for this sub-theme is given below;

*M4: I learned that I should be more patient. I realized he resorted to those ways in these tantrums because he could not express himself. Just the other day, he scratched the middle of my eyebrow. I immediately stayed calm during the crisis.*

The sub-theme is self-compassion: During the interviews, parents (mothers) mentioned that they forgot about themselves, evaluated themselves as inadequate, and ignored the importance of their work while caring for their children. Parents' statements regarding this sub-theme are given below;

*M5: You have always said you should love yourself in front of the mirror every morning. This affected me greatly, so my only wish for the new year was to love myself. Because I always say*



*the same thing to my wife: If I am happy, you are happy. If I am happy, you are all happy. That is what you gave me the most.*

*M6: ...Sometimes we may not be able to see the child, we may not be able to see their emotions. This does not make us incomplete, and we may not see it at that moment. Honestly, I learned that this is very humanitarian and that we should show compassion to ourselves in that sense. I was a self-torturing mother at that point, but now I treat myself more compassionately.*

### **b) Behavioral Change in Parents**

Three sub-themes were formed under the theme of behavioral change in parents. These sub-themes are play, effective communication, and spending time together.

The sub-theme is playing: The program emphasizes the importance of play in interacting with children. Therefore, parents stated in the interview that they develop playing skills with their children at every opportunity. Below are the parent expressions related to this sub-theme;

*M3: I mean, I can give the game as an example. So with the information you gave me about this game, our games have become more fun...*

*M8: The most beautiful development in our son... he loves to play with me and his father. He usually wants to play with us. He wants to play games. He wants to play not only one-on-one with his father, but he also wants to call me to play with him. He loves it when the three of us play.*

Sub-theme effective communication: Parents stated in the interviews that they could communicate more efficiently with their children, learn how to develop behaviors specific to their age group, and increase their vocabulary. Sample statements for this sub-theme are given below;

*M5: For us, I should say reading books, poking books more... Our vocabulary has become more apparent and more frequent. He repeats what we say more. The most beneficial thing for me is that when I explain something, instead of just saying that it is a tree, I explain it in a very detailed way, such as its branches are green, it has pink flowers, look, birds have landed on its trunk and branches, and I see the benefit of this very much.*

The sub-theme is spending time together: Parents learned the importance of spending quality time with their children in the program and stated that they increased this by playing games and doing activities together. A sample statement for this sub-theme is given below;

*M9: ... I take them outside, we have birds, we feed our birds. We make play dough. ...I hide the tablet; we have a tablet, and I never take it out anymore. I usually turn off the TV. There is only one phone left; I usually hide it so no one can watch it anymore.*

### **c) Change in the Child**

Three sub-themes were identified under the theme of change in the child. These sub-themes are behavioral change, contribution to growth and development, and emotional state. The statements of the mothers regarding these sub-themes are given below.

The sub-theme is behavior change: Parents struggled to cope with their children's autonomy, especially in the two-year-old syndrome. The program taught them to understand their children's emotional state and set limits. In the interviews, they stated that they could now overcome this situation and manage the change in their children. Examples of these statements are given below;

*M1: I mean, we have started solving all our problems now. For example, I could not calm my daughter down; now, I divert her attention when she cries. Her fights with her brother have decreased. They became calmer. They gained speaking skills. For example, we had food problems with my son, but I gradually overcame them. He ate, and my daughter started to eat well. They used to choose food, but now neither of them chooses.*

Sub-theme contribution to growth and development: During the interviews, parents discussed their children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. Sample statements for this sub-theme are given below;

*M7: ...Words do not come out, but he can explain everything with his movements; he takes the materials, he brings them, we are going to do this, we are going to do that, he takes them away from our hands, he can explain what he wants. He started to spend more time with us.*

Sub-theme emotional state: Parents stated that they controlled their tantrums the most among the changes in their children. They stated they felt helpless and inadequate when they could not control their tantrums before the program. Statements related to this sub-theme are given below;

*M2: My son was a much more angry child. We have discussed this with you before. Because his language development was weak, he used to get very angry when he could not express himself. Now that he can express himself a little more, we have overcome our tantrums, those crying tantrums. This was one of the things that made me the happiest.*

### **d) Difficulty in Change**

Three sub-themes were identified under the theme of difficulty in change. These sub-themes are comparing with others, family elders, and feeding behavior. The statements of the mothers regarding these sub-themes are given below.

Sub-theme comparison with others: In the interviews, parents stated that their children were compared between spouses, that there were conflicts between them, and that they saw

improvement in this situation thanks to the program. Below are parent statements related to this sub-theme;

*M4: This happened to me; my wife is usually affected by the environment very quickly now. I would not say I like these comparisons either; we were slightly at odds. Someone said, "Oh, my child was like this, do this, do that, should we do that, look, his child is like that... I never liked these things, either. However, in this process, for example, when I shared these with him in our meetings with you and the articles I read, I feel he closed his ears to the outside at least a little bit.*

Sub-theme family elders: In the interview, parents stated that although the parents showed consistent behavior towards the child, family elders such as grandmother or grandfather disrupted the consistency, and the child was affected by this situation. Statements related to this sub-theme are given below;

*M7:...He has now moved to a crying position when we say no to something that would harm him. He cries; he tries to make me do it by crying. I have grandparents at home; there is his grandmother. She makes him do it when I am not there.*

*M10: ...Not with my husband, but conflicts with my grandparents. It is challenging to break traditional taboos. Whether it is eating all kinds of time, we spend together. For example, while we prefer to offer options, they approach it in a way that they only say that she should not cry. I have been fighting a lot on this issue, and I am still fighting. Unfortunately, I have not solved it. Nevertheless, I will overcome them.*

The sub-theme is feeding behavior: Although parents considered themselves competent in many areas, they stated that they could only progress a little in feeding behavior. The statement for this sub-theme is given below;

*M8: I have not progressed much in eating, but I am trying; it is about eating habits. I have difficulty offering alternatives, but I am gradually improving that as much as I can. You know, I try to offer different things; I try patiently. I was offering things that had a high chance of being eaten. I said, "He does not eat eggs. I could make fried potatoes. He might eat them.*

*M11: I am having trouble feeding him. I have tried everything – leaving him alone, but he does not eat. If you do not feed him for three days, he still will not eat. At night, he wakes up like crazy and attacks the breast milk. He takes a spoonful and says he is full. I know I am doing it wrong, but I feed him by playing games. Sometimes, I say to myself, 'I hope we do not choke the child while playing a soccer game.' He eats when we play soccer but will not eat any other way.*

## Discussion

In this study, opinions were taken to evaluate the "Parent School" program created for parents with children aged 1-3

years. Participants were expected to evaluate the program and express what changed in their lives after the program. As a result of the analysis, the changes that the program created for parents and their children and the issues that they had difficulty changing were determined.

Healthy parenting positively affects children's developmental outcomes in the following years. In order to develop and strengthen healthy parenting, it is essential to recognize the importance of supporting parents' knowledge and skills in child rearing (18-20). Within the program's scope that forms the basis of our study, parents were trained to increase their knowledge and skills regarding children's physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development. For this reason, participants in the study mentioned emotional and behavioral changes in themselves and their children. These are short-term effects. The impact of programs for parents should also be monitored in the long term. In their systematic review of parenting programs' acceptability and perceived benefits, Butler et al. (2020) reported that programs cause changes in children and parents (21). Changes such as establishing relationships with the child, spending time together, communicating, developing empathy skills, making parents feel empowered, gaining confidence in parenting skills, and increasing self-awareness were reported. In a study conducted by Benzie et al. (2023) to determine what parents who participated in various parenting programs learned from the programs and what they applied differently, they reported that the participants experienced positive changes in their relationships with their children, better understood their children's point of view, improved communication between them, felt more connected to their children and changed their parenting behaviors (22). In our study, similar to the literature, parents reported that their awareness improved, their practical communication skills increased, and they were able to spend quality time with their children. In our study, the positive changes experienced by the parents were due to the voluntary participation of the parents in the programs, their desire to improve their parenting skills, and peer interaction.

Although the "Parent School" program was not directly aimed at correcting children's behaviors, parents were provided with information to improve their boundary-setting skills to support their children's social-emotional development. In this direction, parents mentioned that they developed self-confidence and self-efficacy skills at the end of the program and that there was consistency among parents in disciplining their children. Day & Sanders (2018) examined the effectiveness of the Triple P Online program developed on child behaviors and parenting styles and reported that improvements were observed in negative parenting behaviors and children's challenging behaviors after the program and that the program led to an increase in parental confidence (23). Spencer et al. (2020), in a meta-analysis study examining the effectiveness of online training programs for parents, reported that online parenting programs have a substantial effect on increasing positive parenting and have significant effects on

reducing negative parent-child interactions, child problematic behaviors, negative discipline strategies, parenting conflicts, parental stress, child anxiety, parental anger, and parental depression, and increase in parental confidence and positive child behaviors (24). One of the most challenging issues for parents in raising children is developing the ability to set limits. Within the scope of our study, parents mentioned behavioral changes in their children within the program and stated that they managed their children's tantrums better. When they prevented their children's tantrums, it was seen that their skills, such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-compassion, also improved.

Parenting education programs are known to impact child health and development positively. These training programs provide parents with knowledge and awareness to strengthen parent-child relationships, increase parent and family well-being, and promote healthy child development (2, 22). However, even though parents are provided with education, raising children is influenced by different cultures and beliefs, affecting expectations and behaviors in parent-child relationships. As parents observe how other parents treat their children in society, they reappropriate culturally shaped behavior patterns in their relationships. In addition to beliefs in the cultural context, the influence of the environment can also affect parents' child-rearing practices and parent-child relationships (25-27). In this study, parents also mentioned difficulties in change. In particular, they stated that they had difficulties with comparison, conflicts with family elders or feeding. Parents' difficulties in these areas after the program can be interpreted as being influenced by family elders and exposed to social and cultural impositions.

### Strengths and Limitations

Although 23 parents participated in the parenting school program, only 11 parents evaluated the program, which does not reflect the views of all parents. In addition, the study focused on parent school, a program for parents with children aged 1-3 years, so the research includes the views of parents in this age group. The aim of the study was to assess the contributions of the parent school program to parents and their children. For this reason, the research questions were designed to focus on the contributions of the program. However, the limited scope of the questions is among the limitations of the study.

### Conclusion

In order to contribute to child development in the best way possible, a parent school was established where evidence-based information could be transferred, experiences could be shared, and interaction could occur. At the end of the program, interviews with parents revealed that there were changes in themselves and their children and that they had difficulties with some changes.

The Parent School is a guide that will guide individuals, especially first-time parents, in the healthier development and

upbringing of their children within the age group. It is also a social environment where experiences are shared by interacting with other parents. It is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of parenting programs, to develop programs, and to evaluate their applicability.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethical approval was obtained from Gazi University Ethics Committee (dated 26.06.2023 and numbered 12).

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Author Contributions:** Concept - AC, EK; Design - AC, EK; Supervision - AC, EK; Data Collection and/or Processing - AC, EK; Analysis and/or Interpretation - AC, EK; Literature Search - AC, EK; Writing - AC, EK; Critical Reviews - AC, EK.

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