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ABSTRACT

During tumultuous times, the need for information has become even greater. However, in pandemic process, not everyone could access information equally. Inequality of academic opportunity, especially among children, has increased all over the world. As a developing country in Turkey, children's access to information during the pandemic process hasn't been conducted. Based on this problem, during pandemic we prepared an online education project first time in Turkey via a children's library. Within the scope of the project, a total of 34 workshops in 12 different branches were prepared. During 14 days, 171 students between the ages of 6 and 10 were given 23 hours of training. This project highlighted how children's libraries can be used as a learning center for disadvantaged children. As a result of the study, it was seen that providing new learning environments via the children's library has positive effects on disadvantaged children and their families.

Keywords: Children's Libraries, Equality of Opportunity, Out-of-School Learning, Pandemic, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

One of the library's key missions is to provide services to entire communities, regardless of background or socioeconomic status. Children's libraries are free and publicly supported institutions that can play a role in improving the negative effects of childhood for children born and living who are necessarily disadvantaged by their families (poverty; being a refugee; low education level of parents; at least one parent in prison, etc.). And it is a public right to receive services from these libraries (Kakırman Yıldız, 2019). Therefore, in social structures where there is a serious difference between social and economic indicators, children's libraries should work for "equality of opportunity" in order to balance the representation power of children belonging to the upper-socio-economic level and the lower-socio-economic level. Designing children's libraries as education providers lies at the heart of working for equal opportunities (Sey, Coward and Bar, 2013). From this point of view, as education providers outside of formal education institutions, children's libraries should prepare workshops, educational programs suitable for age groups and create clubs appropriate to the needs (language club, drama club, homework club, etc.) to support the academic, language and cognitive development of children.

The disconnection of children from schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the inequality of academic opportunity and learning loss among children all over the world. It has been observed that developed countries are trying to solve this problem by reaching out to children via children's libraries and trying to provide them with new online learning environments. However, as a developing country in Turkey it is not possible to say that the children's libraries adapt to pandemic period. With the pandemic, all libraries were closed and unfortunately no online services were offered. Thus, access to information by disadvantaged children, whose access to information is already limited, has almost come to a halt.

In the development goals of the United Nations, it is emphasized that in order for sustainable development to be realized all over the world, it is necessary to ensure equality of opportunity in education and to offer lifelong learning opportunities to everyone (Transforming Our World…., 2018). But, during the pandemic period, the academic gap between the disadvantaged child and the advantageous child has increased even more. However, if children's libraries are designed as out-of-school learning centers, they can be used as a good learning center for disadvantaged children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Children's Libraries in Pandemic

The pandemic has deeply affected the entire world, libraries, users and services. But as always, children were the most affected by this process. UNICEF announced that the schools of more than 168 million children around the world have been closed for a year due to the coronavirus epidemic. The organization warned that the closure of schools would have "devastating consequences" (COVID: Schools…, 2021).

As was the case with many issues during the pandemic, children's access to books revealed a number of problems based on inequality. Some parents can buy books for their children, while others do not have the financial flexibility and disposable income to do so. Research conducted by the World Book Day charity revealed that since the beginning of the pandemic the number of children reading has declined, and a quarter of primary schools expressed concern that access to books has become a barrier to reading for pleasure and general literacy levels. Recent reports highlight that even in the UK, which is one of the strongest economies in the world, up to 30 percent of children still live in poverty, with nine out of every 30 classes living in poverty (Libraries can save us…., 2021).

Especially in developing countries, being from the disadvantaged group is not only related with low socio-economic level but also with living in an environment where mentality is shallow. According to the results of the studies, it is seen that there is a gap between girls and boys in having equal opportunities in some countries (Development and Access to Information, 2020). For this reason, children's library services will serve as a solidarity network especially for disadvantaged children and families and in a sense, will function as a social support mechanism (Tuğrul and Yılmaz, 2013). Children's libraries are free and equitable intervention centers that can provide a learning environment for children and families.

Inequality of opportunity may increase depending on the environment at home and the school children attend. Child development experts, pedagogues, sociologists and educators state

that the opportunities the child has and the family environment s/he is in play a critical role in dealing with the psychological problems created by the pandemic process. Children's libraries should be one of the necessary intervention settings in order to equalize or minimize this disadvantaged indicator of children who are necessarily disadvantaged due to their families (Dearing, McCartney and Taylor, 2001).

The start date of the distance education in Turkey (March 23, 2020) is seen as continuing deepening of inequalities in access to quality education. As of the end of 2020, a group of students attending private schools interactively participated in the lessons through live lessons, while the other group that went to the public school tried to continue learning by watching video lessons only on television channels, some of them did not even have access to television or disconnected from distance learning for various reasons (TEDMEM, 2021).

Many projections have been made that estimate the negative effects of education disruption due to COVID-19 on both individuals, society and the economy. The mathematical modeling made shows that learning losses are not only the loss students experience in their education life but also there will be great losses in basic skills, individual gain, welfare level, and the growth and development of the country's economy (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020). When schools are closed, students' social and emotional development is adversely affected and it causes nutritional and behavioral problems in students (WHO and UNICEF, 2020). This lost quality will deepen for disadvantaged students, girls, ethnic minorities and students in need of special education, who are more likely to have problems accessing distance education (TEDMEM, 2021).

Therefore, early intervention programs should be implemented for these children from the disadvantaged group and their families. The child who feels deprived should be supported with out-of-school activities and social and academic inequalities with other children should be balanced. The most basic center that can be used for this is children's libraries. For example, the project called "Bookstart" in many countries around the world is a product of the goal of minimizing child disadvantage via libraries (Bookstart inspired programs ..., 2021).

United Nations which announced its targets for 2030 (Transforming Our World, 2020), in order to ensure sustainable development in every field all over the world, emphasized the need for public and children's libraries to serve as learning centers (Development and Access to Information, 2020).

International Federation of Libray Association (IFLA) takes decisions to support these goals, which is one of the main institutions in determining and applying the principles of librarianship, investigated whether libraries produce services for children and young people during the COVID-19 process and explained how library services can be offered in this process. In the same study, trying to balance the inequality of access to information and resources between children and young people was also named as one of the tasks of children's and youth libraries. In this process, the necessity of providing access to online resources and technology suitable for children and young people was emphasized (Library Services to People…., 2021; Jones, 2009; Pötsönen, 2020).

In accordance with IFLA's advice it is seen that children's libraries had to take an innovative approach, especially to ensure disadvantaged children access information and support their continued learning. During the pandemic, it has been observed that many libraries work for children and their families such as workshops, reading hours, origami, helping with homework

(Chicago Public Library, 2021; Scottish Book Trust, 2021; Los Angeles Public Library, 2021; Fayette County Public Library; 2021)

METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

Aim, Scope and Hypothesis

In this project, we aimed those:

1- To present a model the first time in Turkey on how to use children's libraries as a learning center.

2-To show how this deficit of children who do not have equal opportunity academically can be eliminated through free training in children's libraries, in cooperation with volunteer educators.

3- It is aimed to contribute to the children to be qualified and successful individuals in the future by gaining exploration, socialization, language development and analytical thinking skills.

4- With the project realized, free public service was provided to girls and boys of different age groups, regardless of location.

However, the project has effects on various groups. Along with children, families, librarians, educators (teachers, academics) are in this group. Therefore, this project, which has a community-based approach in terms of social benefit, is the ultimate goal to be taken as an example by other libraries and schools, and to be implemented and disseminated.

In the studies conducted within the scope of the project, it was aimed to draw attention to the fact that the only purpose of children's libraries should focus not only on lending books but also on the academic needs of children.

The hypothesis of this project is "children's libraries, can be used as an education and training center in order to minimize the academic opportunity inequality among children" has been proven by looking the results of the satisfaction questionnaire conducted after the workshops. According to result, the parents were extremely satisfied with the workshops and homework clubs held free of charge through the Children's Library.

Preliminary Process

Primarily, it has been worked on under which subject headings virtual Google classrooms should be opened. Since Google classroom is a free application and this study was conducted with volunteers, the program did not cost anything. Subsequently, volunteers who could provide training for these clubs and workshops were determined and contacted. After the workshops and clubs were determined, a registration form for the participants and the content of the workshop and clubs' activity program were prepared and announced on the social media platforms of the Children's Library which is serving in one of Istanbul's districts with the lowest socio-economic level. In this way, 171 disadvantaged children were reached.

The questionnaire was not applied to the children as they were younger than 18 years old. Instead, the following questions were asked to the parents (171 people) of the children who enrolled in the workshop during the workshop registrations:

- The type of school your child attends (Public Primary School / Private Primary School)

- Should our library continue to organize such events?

- What other workshops should we add?

- Do you have any suggestions for us?

Online Education Process

After the registrations were completed, virtual classes were opened on the Google Classroom learning platform and students were placed in the workshops and clubs they chose. Zoom links of the virtual classes were conveyed to the students who enrolled in the relevant workshop / club before each session. In this way, the instructors and students of each workshop and club met in the virtual classroom environment.

A zoom link was created for each virtual classroom and the student who wanted to join the workshop joined the workshop by clicking this link. Each workshop took approximately 40 minutes. The quota for each workshop and club is limited to 50 people. In the project, there were 3 different workshops every weekday and homework clubs at the weekend. These workshops and homework clubs were following:

-Music Workshop

-Space Sciences Workshop

-Book Club

-Homework Club

-Art Studio

-Experiment Workshop

-Ottoman Workshop

-I'm Meeting the Author Workshop

-Philosophy Workshop

-DIY Workshop

-Productive Thinking Skills Workshop

- Museum Studies Workshop

After Education Process

After the workshops were completed, a questionnaire measuring was applied which children and parent satisfaction with the project and their awareness about the children's library. The questionnaire was sent 3 times on different days to the e-mails of 171 parents who registered for the workshops and clubs. At the end of 3 days, feedback was received from 43 people in total. The survey results were analyzed based on the answers given by 43 people. According to the results of the satisfaction questionnaire conducted after the workshops, the parents were extremely satisfied with the workshops and homework clubs held free of charge through the Children's Library and stated that it should be continued.

RESULT ANALYSIS

The Type of School Your Child Attends (Public Primary School / Private Primary School)

To this question, where we analyzed whether there is a significant difference between the types of schools attended by children who choose to participate in workshops and clubs. 133 (78%) of 171 parents answered public primary school and 38 (22%) answered private primary education (Figure 1).

Figure 1

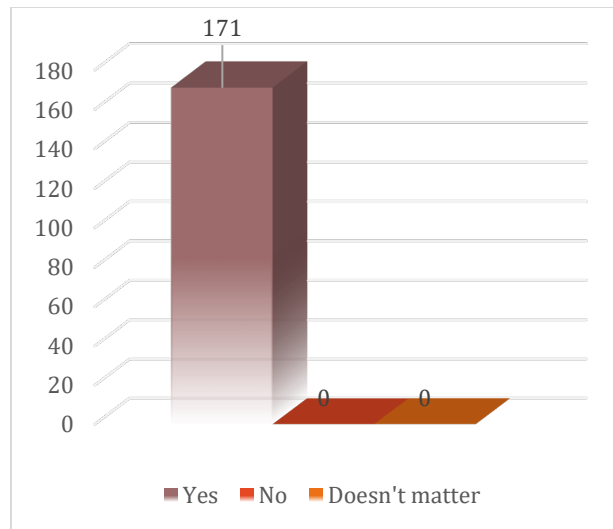*School Type of Children Attending the Workshop*
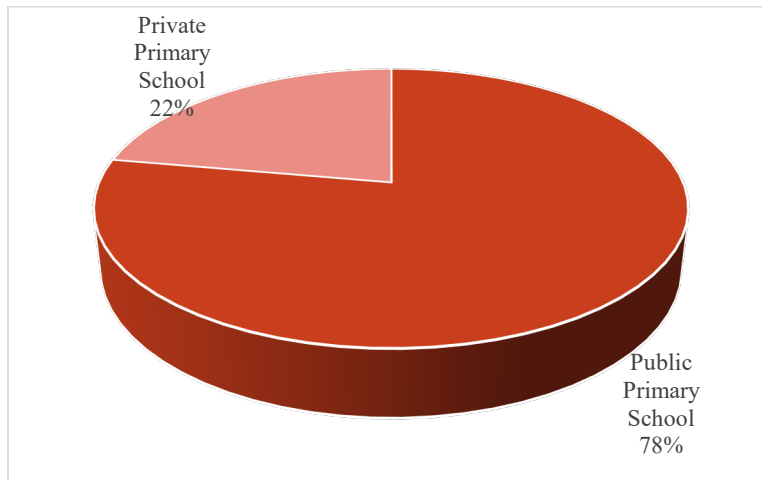
Should Our Library Continue to Organize Such Events?

We asked the families of children participating in workshops and clubs. It is seen that all 171 parents (100%) answered yes to the question (Figure 2).
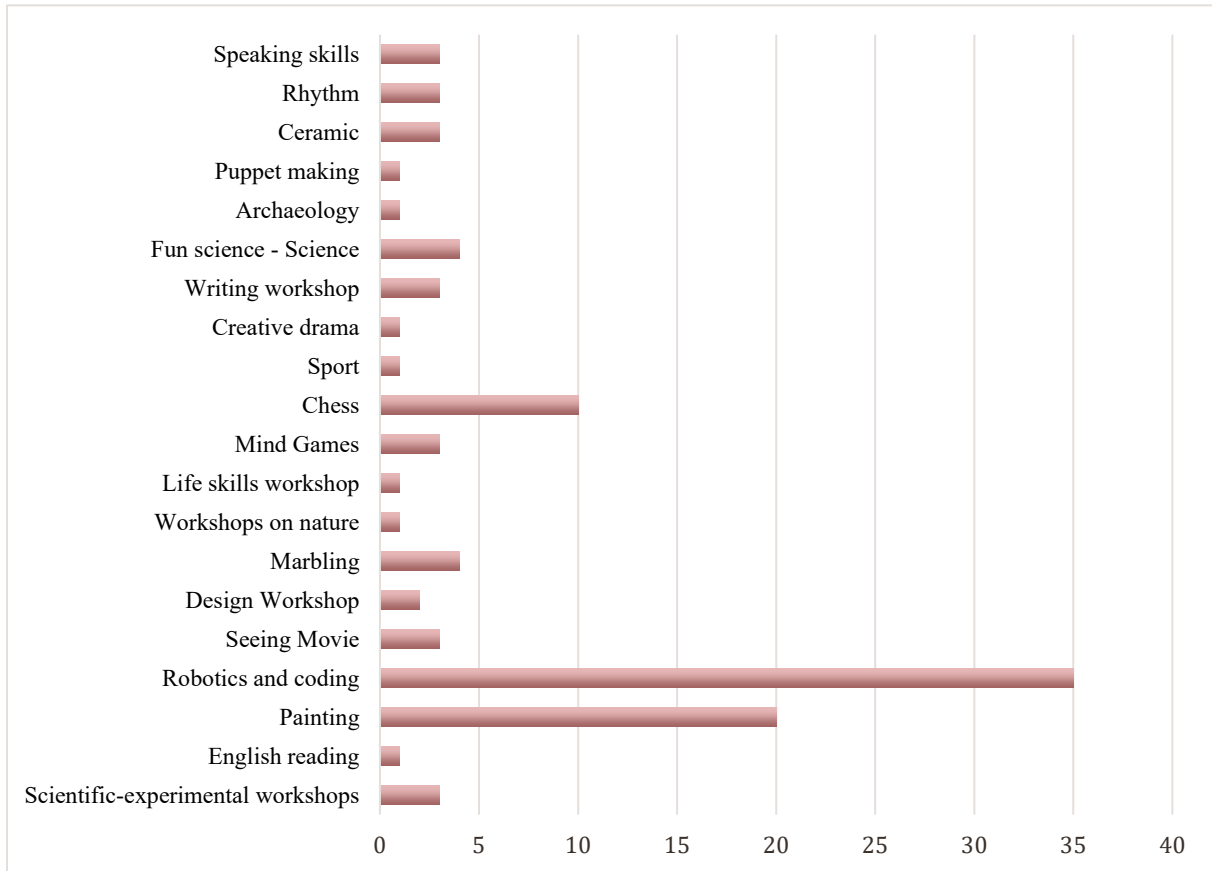
Figure 2

*Opinion of children's libraries on continuing to organize workshop and club activities*

What Other Workshops Should We Add?

From the answers they gave to the question, it was seen that families and children mostly wanted robotics and coding trainings, painting workshops and chess clubs (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Requested workshops

Do You Have any Suggestions for Us?

When looking at the answers given to the question, it is seen that the parents express their satisfaction with this study. In addition, it is observed that parents mostly demand that the number of activities increase, the quotas are increased, the age range is wider and similar workshops are usually paid, so children's libraries demand these workshops regularly (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Views and Suggestions of the Workshops in the Project
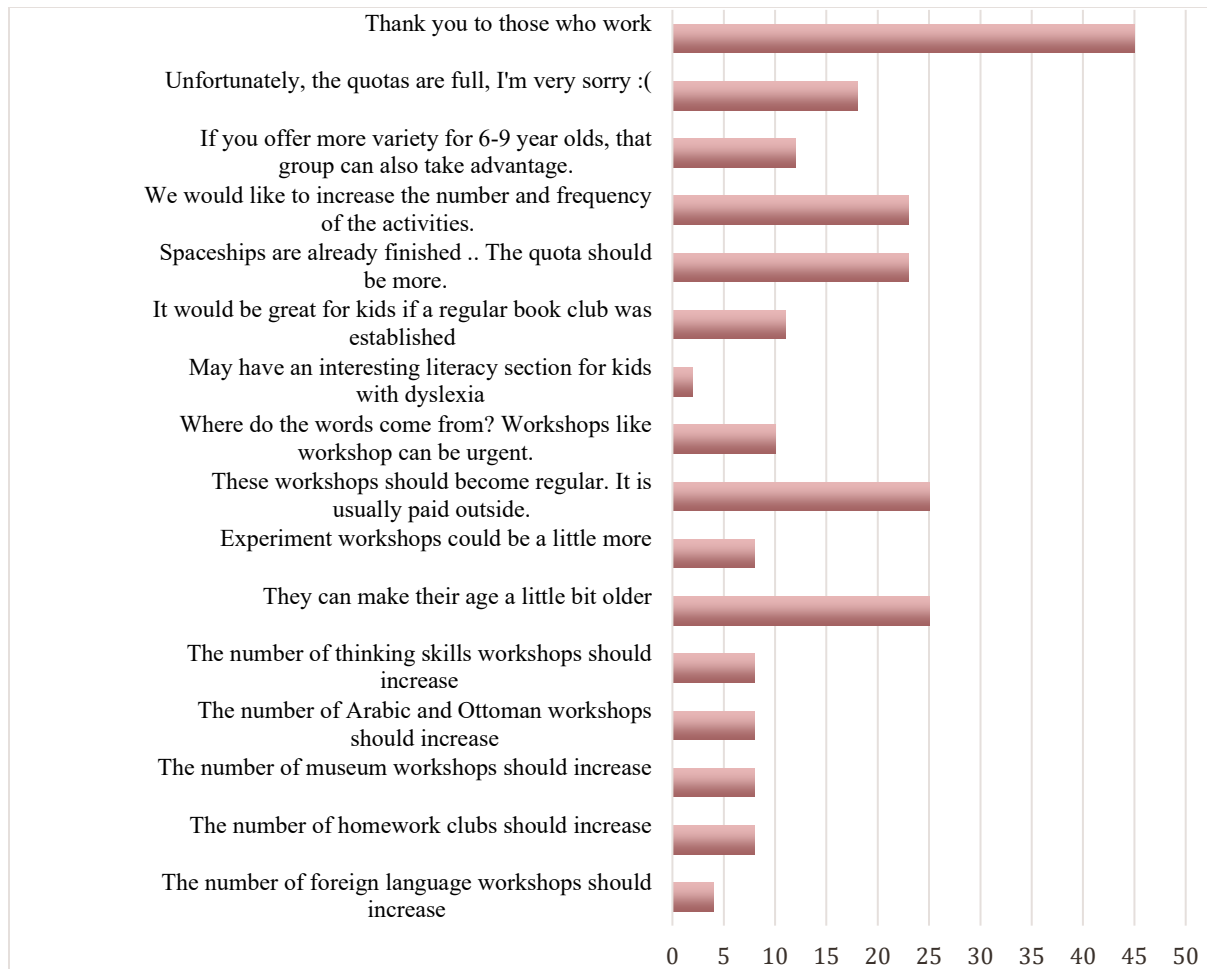
Parent's satisfaction with the project

A questionnaire was applied to the families of the children participating in the project, measuring their satisfaction with the project and their awareness about the children's library, and the results were analyzed. All of the 43 parents who participated in the survey found the workshops offered in the project useful for their children.
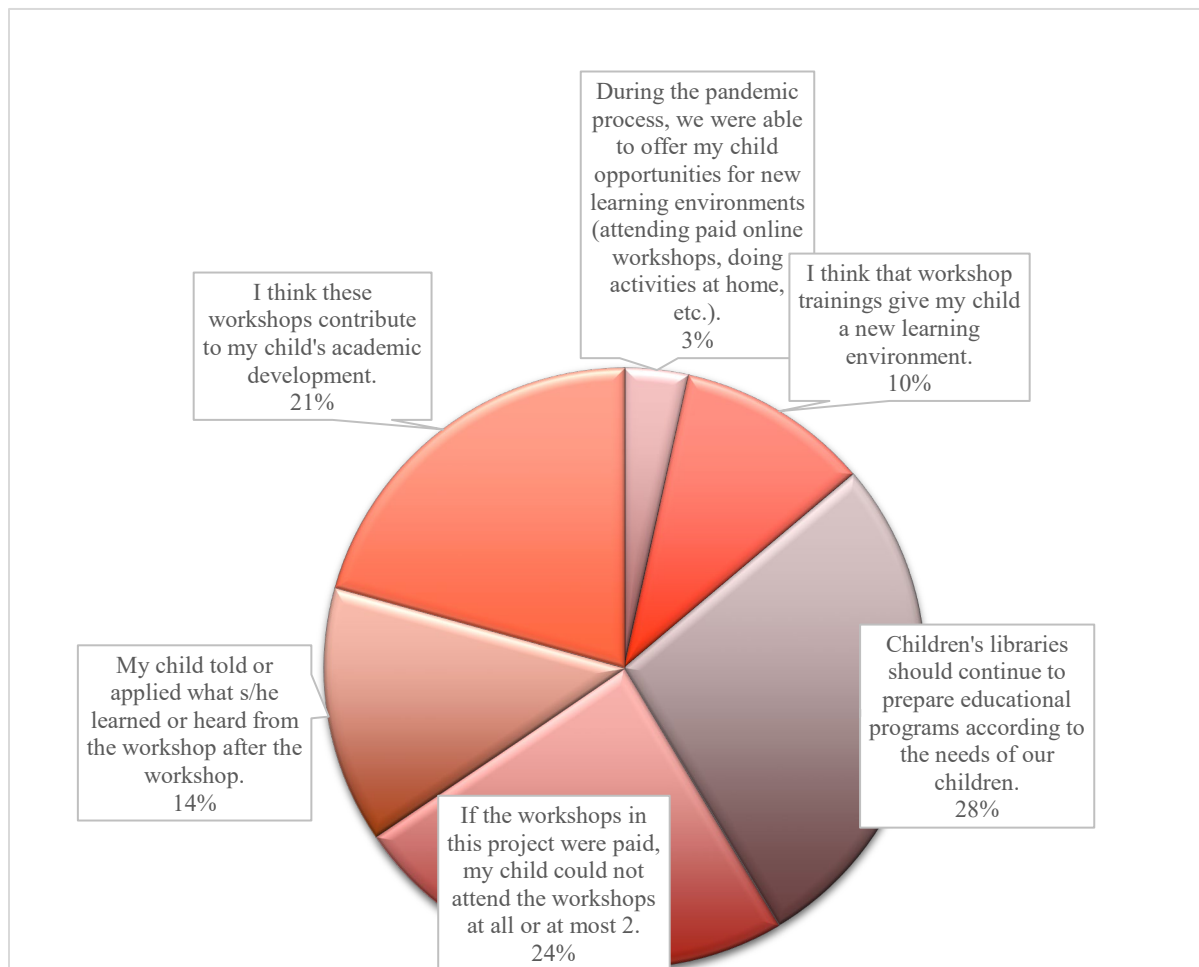
After the workshops, it is seen that their children apply or convey what they have learned, that children's libraries should continue to provide educational content for children, and that children's libraries create a good learning environment for their children. In the results of the same survey, it was seen that it is important for the majority of parents (38 people) that these workshops

are free of charge, and again the vast majority (36 people) do not know that children's libraries can prepare educational programs according to children's needs. During the pandemic process, it was determined that the number of parents who can offer their children an out-of-school learning environment is extremely low (13 people) (Figure 5).

All parents state that these educational environments that children's libraries offer free of charge as an out-of-school learning environment should continue; It is observed that only 5 out of 43 parents who answered the satisfaction questionnaire stated that if these workshops are paid, they can register their children for at most 2 of them (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Parents' Satisfaction with the Project and Their Interpretation of Children's Libraries

Pie chart segments:
- During the pandemic process, we were able to offer my child opportunities for new learning environments (attending paid online workshops, doing activities at home, etc.). 3%
- I think that workshop trainings give my child a new learning environment. 10%
- I think these workshops contribute to my child's academic development. 21%
- Children's libraries should continue to prepare educational programs according to the needs of our children. 28%
- My child told or applied what s/he learned or heard from the workshop after the workshop. 14%
- If the workshops in this project were paid, my child could not attend the workshops at all or at most 2. 24%

DISCUSSION

When the activity program is announced on the social media accounts of the Children's Library, the workshop quotas (50 people x 34 workshops and clubs = 1700 registrations) are filled within 18 hours. it shows that the children and their families have need new learning environments and access to information and activities free of charge.

It is seen that there is a significant difference between the school types of the children participating in the workshop. Participation of the children attending the public primary school more to the workshops shows that the opportunity for children to participate in the workshops offered by other institutions is related to the economic situation that families can provide for their children. As a matter of fact, it is estimated that children who can receive primary education for a fee can also attend museums and workshops offered by institutions that create out-of-school learning environments.

"Which other workshops should we add?" It is important to determine that families and children mostly want robotics and coding trainings, painting workshops and chess clubs from the answers they gave to the question, as it is a guiding data for the next workshop.

"What are you suggesting to us?" The fact that the parents, whom we asked, want the number of activities to increase and similar workshops for groups other than primary school students, again free of charge, will be used as an important data for the next project.

When the results of the satisfaction questionnaire made to the parents at the end of the project were examined, it was found that all parents found the workshops offered in the project useful for their children. After the workshops, it is seen that their children apply or convey what they have learned, that children's libraries should continue to provide educational content for children, and that children's libraries create a good learning environment for their children. According to the results of the same survey, it was seen that it is important for most of the parents that these workshops are free of charge, and again, the majority of them do not know that children's libraries can prepare educational programs according to the needs of children. During the pandemic process, it was determined that the number of parents who can offer their children an out-of-school learning environment is extremely low.

The success of the implementation process of this study and the satisfaction with the results provided a model for how a children's library can be used as a learning center. Librarians and users are presented with a formula for how a children's library can be accessible even when it is not physically accessible.

The fact that this study was conducted with volunteer educators also showed how important volunteering service is for children's libraries. Thanks to the educators who will work voluntarily in children's libraries, it has been shown that children's libraries can also be used as an out-of-school learning environment for children who do not have equal opportunities academically.

The fact that the girls and boys participating in this study have a learning environment under equal conditions, when examined in the long term, helped them to gain exploration, socialization, language development and analytical thinking skills.

Therefore, it is known that children's out-of-school learning environments become much more restricted, especially in a difficult period such as the pandemic. While some families can buy these works for their children by private museums and workshops for a fee, it is a fact that many families do not have this opportunity. As can be seen from the above results, as a result of designing children's libraries, which are free public institutions, as learning centers, disadvantaged children can also benefit from these opportunities; In this way, it is seen that it can be a solution to the inequality of academic opportunity among children in terms of out of school learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This project is important in terms of showing that children's libraries can be used as a learning platform if they are organized within a certain program and content is created according to the needs of children and that they are an institution that can be a solution to the inequality of opportunity in education.

Especially in developing countries such as Turkey, where the economy, educational infrastructure and academic opportunity are weak, it is extremely easy and cheap to ensure equal academic opportunity among children by using children's libraries as learning-entertainment and education centers. It is thought that the implementation of a similar project across the country, and even expanding its scope to include families, will contribute to the academic, linguistic, social and cognitive development of individuals in developing countries.

This positive effect will be able to create much more comprehensive learning environments for children and even families. The positive impact of free content on children in children's libraries will spread throughout the country in the long run, and the power to create this effect will support the access the information and academic development of children and families in the country.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Weekly schedule of workshops and clubs

	Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**	**Sunday**
10:00 – 10:40	Space Workshop	Music Workshop	Space Workshop	Art Workshop	DIY Workshop		
11:00 – 11:40	Book Club	Book Club	I Meet the Author Workshop	Book Club	Book Club	English Homework Club	English Homework Club
12:00 – 12:40	Ottoman Workshop	Experiment Workshop	Philosophy Workshop	Thinking Skills Workshop	Museology Workshop	Mathematics Homework Club	Mathematics Homework Club

Appendix 2 – Children's Library Online Event Program Content

CHILDREN'S LIBRARY ONLINE EVENT PROGRAM CONTENT
Space Sciences Workshop / 7-10 years
Monday, January 25, 10:00 am // Wednesday, January 27, 10:00   Monday, February 1, 10:00 am // Wednesday, February 3, 10:00   This workshop will be given by Çelebi KALKAN, who has both national and international studies on space and astronomy. The workshop consists of physical activities that help children develop strength, endurance, coordination and spatial awareness, and scientific activities that focus on STEM issues and allow students to reason scientifically.   (The list of materials required for this workshop will be shared with the participants in advance.
Music Workshop / 7-10 Years
Tuesday, 26 January at 10:00 // Tuesday, 2 February at 10:00   In this workshop, "Ud" and "Tambur", which are less known classical Turkish music instruments by children than some instruments, are introduced. In the workshop to be given by Udî Hüseyin Kıyak and Tamburî Fatih Baha Aydın, the artists also perform some works by famous composers.
Book Club / 6-9 Ages // 7-10 Ages // 8-10 Ages
Monday, 25 January / Time 11:00 // Tuesday, January 26 / 11:00   Thursday, January 28 / 11:00 // Friday, January 29 / 11:00   1 February Monday / 11:00 // 2 February Tuesday / 11:00   Thursday, 4 February / 11:00 am // Friday, 5 February / 11:00   Children travel to the magical world of books and libraries, accompanied by creative drama methods and entertaining games, at the workshop led by Aslı Erden, the library manager of the Selimiye Children's Library.   (The list of materials required for this workshop will be shared with the participants in advance.)
Thinking Skills Workshop / 7-8 Years // 9-10 Years
Thursday, January 28 / 12:00 // Thursday, February 4 / 12:00   Productive thinking is a system of thinking directed towards creating new thoughts, inventions and tools. The orientation of intelligence to productive thinking can be an innate feature or it can be developed through education. The existing productive thinking skills of children can sometimes be dulled by being squeezed into stereotypes. For this reason, teaching productive thinking systems to children from an early age and encouraging them to produce products in this field enables the child to look at events from different perspectives in adulthood.With "Productive Thinking Skills" given

by Necmettin Moroğlu, it is aimed for children to produce "fluent", "flexible" "rich" and "original" products.

Philosophy Workshop / 9- 10 Years

Wednesday, January 27 / 12:00 // Wednesday, February 3 / 12:00

Participants of this workshop, which does not require any prior knowledge or preparation and will be given by Çağla Gülses, have the opportunity to both talk about their situations and different emotions and express their creativity through play.

Homework Club "Mathematics" and "English" // 8-10 Ages

30 January Saturday / 11:00 // 31 January Sunday / 11:00

Saturday, February 6 / 11:00 / Sunday, February 7 / 11:00

The workshop, which aims to create a learning environment where students can ask questions they cannot solve in their homework, includes Mathematics and English lessons. Mathematics teacher Fadime Moroğlu; English questions are answered by Asiye Kakırman Yıldız. Assisting students who send their questions to the workshop leaders the day before; as well as reinforcing their knowledge by allowing them to see other question styles.

Art Workshop // 8-10 Ages

Thursday, January 28 / Time: 10: 00 // Thursday, February 4 / Time: 10:00

In the workshop where world-famous painters Osman Hamdi Bey and Picasso will be told, firstly, information about the painters and their works is given and videos are watched; then art work is done. Participants, who try to imitate the techniques in these works, using the information conveyed during the workshop to be conducted by the teacher Sevda Güçlü, embark on a journey to discover the art of painting.

(The list of materials required for this workshop will be shared with the participants in advance.)

Experiment Workshop // 7-8 Years // 8-9 Years

Tuesday, January 26 / Time: 12:00 // Tuesday, February 2 / Time: 12:00

Two different experiments are carried out in the workshop, which aims to explain to children that all movements in nature occur through a simple physics and chemistry event. Büşra Doğan is the director of the "Weather Events" workshop, and Tuğba Sarıkaya is the manager of the "Connected Vessels" workshop.

(The list of materials required for this workshop will be shared with the participants in advance.)

Ottoman Workshop // 9-10 Years

Monday, January 25 / 12:00 / Age 9-10 // Monday, February 1 / 12:00 / Age 9-10

In this workshop, books, letters, catering, denunciation, Kerem, etc., which are Ottoman words that we use frequently in daily language. How many words are formed is explained? For this purpose,

Kenan Yıldız, who is the director of the workshop, first introduces Ottoman letters to children and encourages them to write; then he explains how different words are formed with the same letters.

I Meet the Author Workshop // 7-9 Years // 6-9 Years

Wednesday, January 27 / 11:00 / Wednesday, February 3 / 11:00

Famous authors Nihan Temiz and Sara Şahinkanat read their most read books for children using creative drama technique and share the story of the book with them. The workshop aims for children to experience the excitement of meeting the author whose book they have read before and to strengthen their bond with the book.

DIY (Do it yourself) Workshop // 7-9 Years // 8-10 Years

Friday, 29 January / 10:00 // Friday, 5 February / 10:00

Büşra Doğan and Tuğba Sarıkaya are the executives of the workshop, which aims to create new products and create environmental awareness with waste materials at home.

(The list of materials required for this workshop will be shared with the participants in advance.)

Museology Workshop

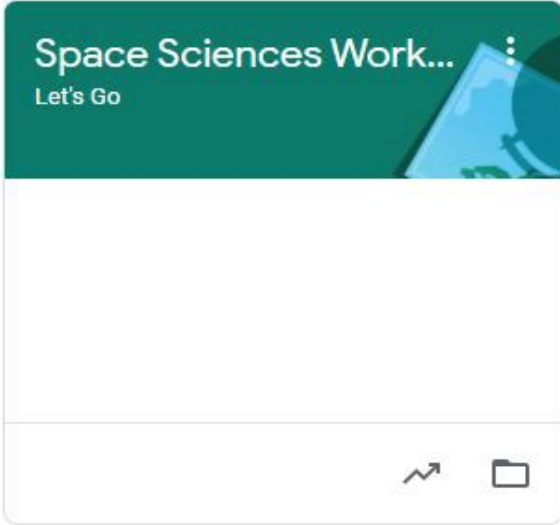Friday, January 29 / 12:00 // Friday, February 5 / 12:00

Asiye Kakırman Yıldız is the director of the workshop, which aims to instill museum awareness in children and explain why museums are important for a nation. First, the children take a journey to the British Museum and the Louvre Museum, and then they put the remnants of this journey on paper.

(The list of materials required for this workshop will be shared with the participants in advance.)

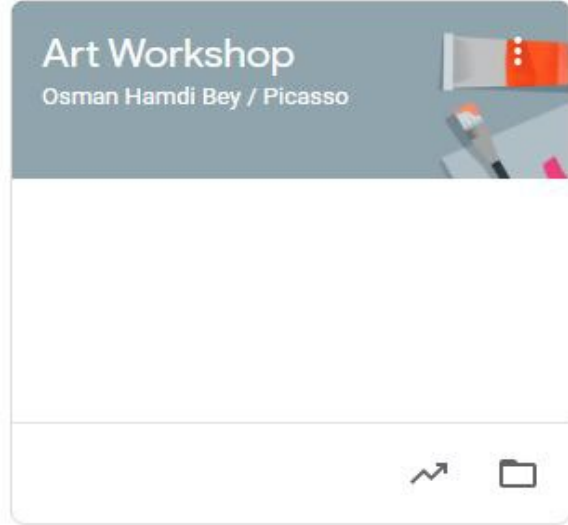**Appendix 3- Google Classroom of Workshops and Club**

≡ **Google** Classroom

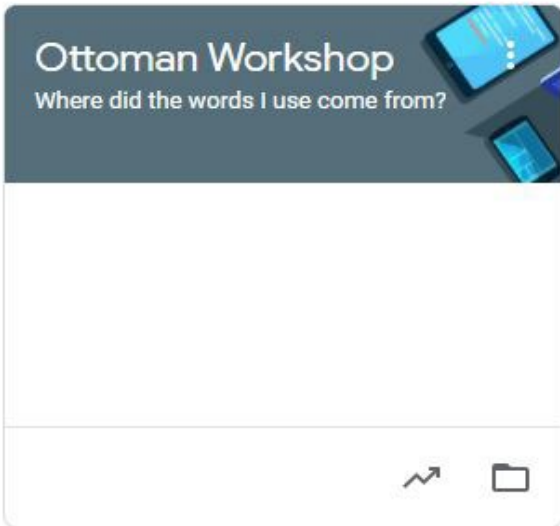📄 İncelenecekler   📅 Takvim
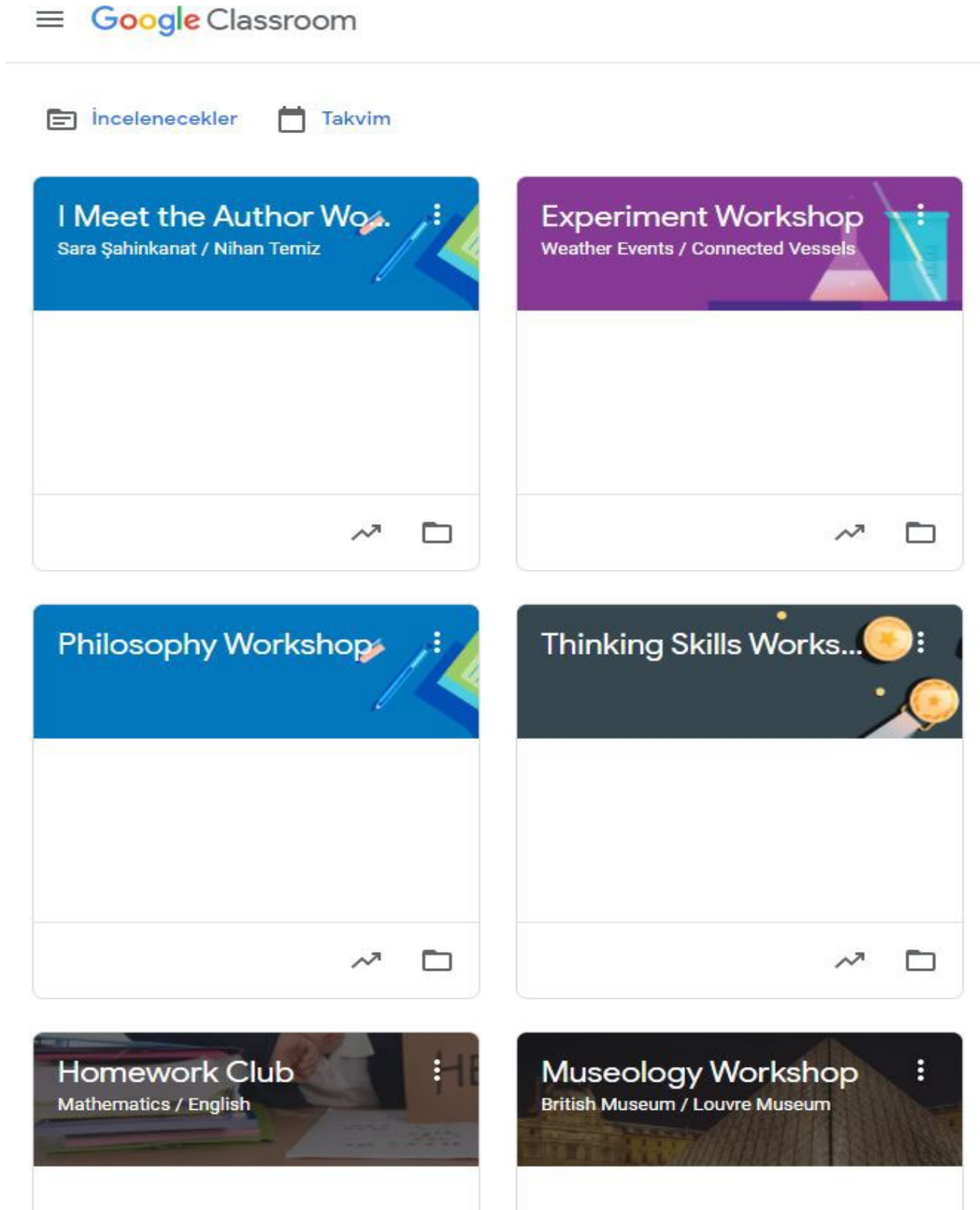
Space Sciences Work...
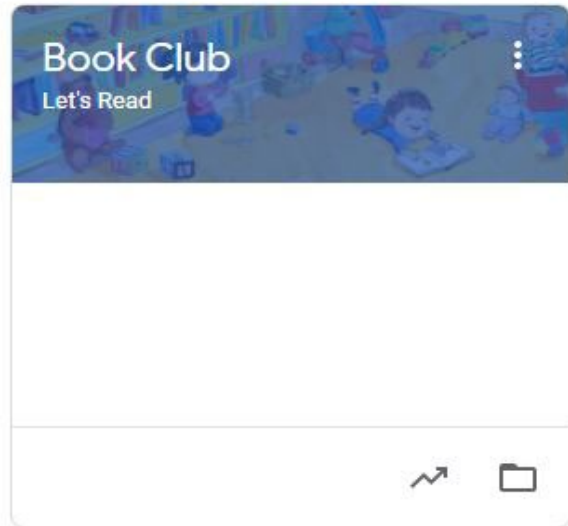Let's Go

Art Workshop
Osman Hamdi Bey / Picasso

Ottoman Workshop
Where did the words I use come from?

Book Club
Let's Read

Music Workshop
"Ud" and "Tambur", which are classica...

Do It Yourself (DIY) W...

Appendix 4- Google Classroom Access to Workshops

About the author

Prof. Dr. Asiye KAKIRMAN YILDIZ is an academic at Marmara University in Turkey since 2002. Prof. Dr. Yildiz has been collaborating with various non-governmental organizations, ministries and municipalities to explain the importance of children's libraries in Turkey. Prof. Dr. Yildiz explains to the librarians working in the children's library what the mission of the children's library is and what can be done for children and families in children's libraries in person or virtually. Prof. Dr. Yildiz encourage my students to work voluntarily in children's libraries and to produce projects for the benefit of the child and family.