

## An Evaluation Related with Preschool Education in Turkey

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**Abstract:** The aims of the research is to show the development of the preschool education from past to present time in Turkey, define the insufficiencies and mistakes in preschool education and determine what is required to improve preschool education. A qualitative research methodology has been used in this research. Focus group interviews were applied to collect the data. There are insufficiencies in some areas such as physical conditions and facilities, school family cooperation, low enrollment rate of students in preschools in Turkey. There has been a considerable increase in the number of preschools as well as the number of preschool teachers and the number of preschool students.

**Key words:** Preschool education • Turkey • Issues and conditions of preschools

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### INTRODUCTION

Preschool education is an educational process that is appropriate for the development level and personal traits of 0-72 weeks-old children, provide them with rich stimulator environment, support their physical, mental, emotional and social development, teach them their cultural values in the best way and prepare children for primary education [1, 2].

The definition of Early Childhood Education reflects its importance. Early Childhood education includes some different processes such as living, growing and care. Therefore, the aim of the Early Childhood Education is to grow, provide them with care and educate them. These processes come into being simultaneously or one after another. Therefore, it is important to provide four different processes that are mentioned above by means of Early Childhood Educational programs. This reflects the importance and requirement of the combined definitions and programs: living, growing, development and care [3, 4].

The preschool educational institutions make children adopt the ability of adjusting the social life, which is one of the purposes of education, by means of supporting the psychomotor, language, mental, emotional and cognitive development of children. International evidence indicates that quality early childhood programs impact positively on children's social and cognitive outcomes, are cost-effective and yield improved educational performance for all children and especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds [5, 6]. It is a widely known

fact that the children at the age of preschool education have different emotional and intellectual development ways than adults. Planning and implementing of a healthy educational processing by considering these differences is important from this point of view. In order to provide a good preschool education, the purposes and quality of the preschool education should not be compared with that of primary education either by teachers or families.

In this context, the aims determined for the preschool education can be achieved by means of planning and implementing programs that are effective and compliant to the qualities of preschool education. The application of a comprehensive and qualitative Early Childhood Education will increase the educational level of society, make it healthier, provide the social harmony; and therefore, strengthen the human capital. The researches show that outcome of the investment to the human capital during the preschool education is at high level. The older the children are, the less outcome of investment to the human capital after the preschool education period. This condition indicates that the investment to human capital should be intensified in the early childhood period [3].

The most important criteria leading the way to Turkey in the upcoming period is Turkey's accession process to European Union. This process will affect almost all areas in Turkey. Turkey aims to increase its all economical and social values up to the level and norms of EU Countries. The European Union resources are expected to intensify especially on two fields. These are the development in the agriculture and rural area and removing the development gap between regions. Early Childhood Education takes

place under both of these headings. That EU aims to decrease the population in rural areas in Turkey, developing many rural areas in development strategies for this and prioritising removing the development gap between regions makes provision of Early Childhood Education services important [3].

**Purpose and Importance of the Research:** Preschool Education is crucial for children so that they adjust to the social life, improve physically, cognitively, affectively and in terms of psychomotor skills as well as having required skills and knowledge. Therefore, states should give the required importance to this field of education and increase investments in this field, plan the required educational programs and apply them and make it possible for all children in this age to benefit from this education. Thus, to achieve it, it is very important to determine the defects and mistakes that are faced in the preschool education. Effective reforms can be done in this way. This study is important because it analyzes the historical development of preschool education in Turkey, determining the defects and faults in this field of education and explains what is required for a successful preschool education.

#### **Research Questions:**

- What is the preschool development process in Turkey?
- What are the ideas of preschool educators about the preschool education in Turkey?
- What are the defects of the preschool education in Turkey according to preschool educators?

### **METHODS**

**Research Design:** A qualitative research methodology has been used in this research. From the qualitative research designs, phenomenology has been used to analyse the data that were obtained. Focus group interviews were applied for collecting the data. This study is a descriptive study because it investigates and describes the condition of preschools in Turkey.

**Participants:** From the purposeful sampling methods, homogeneous sampling method was used in this research. Accordingly, 21 preschool teachers working in the Province of Kilis in Turkey were interviewed. The teachers who participated in the research were selected from 5 different schools. 9 teachers worked in public schools and the other 12 teachers worked in private schools.

All of the interviewed teachers were female. The experience period of teachers was between 2 and 8 years.

**Collecting the Data:** For collecting the data about the opinions of the teachers, the focus group interviews were applied in the research. Focus group interview can be defined as “a series of discussions which have been carefully planned in a moderate and non-threatening environment for having the perceptions about a subject determined before” [7]. The pilot study was performed for the focus group interview after the place and technological facilities were arranged and then the real interviews were performed. In the research, 3 focus group discussions were made and 7 teachers participated in each session.

The focus group interviews that were arranged with the participants was performed unstructured with the help of open ended questions. To give answers to the questions, the interview was performed with 21 preschool teachers working in Kilis province in Turkey. The interview was recorded by means of tape recorder and it was written later. To provide transferability (external validity), purposeful sampling was applied and to provide consistency (internal reliability), consistency test was applied. When the consistency analysis of data was performed, it was analysed whether the data were collected in similar processes and conceptualizing approach reliability [7] was analysed. In the data encoding process, the consistency of concepts and themes was enlightened.

**Study of Validity and Reliability:** In order to provide the plausibility in the research, the examination was held by the participants and the experts. The interview duration period with the teachers with whom the interview done was prolonged, therefore with this prolonged interaction the plausibility was provided. The transmissibility (detailed description) has been realized. Coherency and conformability have been provided by two experts.

**Data Analysis:** For the analysis of the data obtained from focus group interviews, “content analysis” approach from qualitative data analysis was applied. The main purpose of the content analysis is to reach the concept and relations for explaining the collected data [7]. The thematic and conceptual encoding, which was applied in the research, was performed in accordance with the concepts taken from data. Two themes were determined in the research and conceptual encodings were done under the following themes. Theme I: Current State (CS), Theme II: Insufficient Areas (IA).

Table 1: The Change in the Number of Preschool Education, Students and Teachers from 1930's to Present Time

Academic years	Number of schools/ class-rooms	Increase rate in number of schools/ classrooms (%)	The number of Students			Rate of increase in the number of students (%)	The number of Teachers	Rate of increase in the number of teachers (%)
			Male	Female	Total			
1932-33	92	---	1990	1905	3895	---	32	----
1940-41	51	-44,6	889	801	1690	-56,6	60	87,5
1950-51	52	1,9	941	819	1760	3,4	71	18,3
1960-61	64	23	1535	1195	2730	55,1	104	46,7
1970-71	112	75	2299	1902	4201	53,3	185	77,8
1988-89	3.437	2968,8	53404	50527	103931	2373,9	6391	3354,5
1994-95	5169	50,3	77738	70350	148088	42,4	9098	42,3
1995-96	5600	8,3	84055	74299	158354	6,9	9771	7,3
1996-97	6082	8,6	92872	82038	174710	10,3	9971	2
1997-98	6583	8,2	96690	85843	182533	4,4	10376	4,6
1998-99	6888	4,6	107935	96526	204461	12	10979	5,8
1999-00	7880	14,4	111637	100966	212603	3,9	11591	5,5
2000-01	8255	4,8	119821	107643	227464	6,9	11896	2,6
2001-02	9480	14,9	133036	120477	253513	11,4	14295	20,1
2002-03	8873	-6,4	148214	135091	283305	11,8	13356	-6,6
2003-04	13285	49,7	180005	164753	344758	21,6	17511	31,1
2004-05	15929	19,9	222279	203501	425780	23,5	22109	26,2
2005-06	18539	16,4	286347	263799	550146	29,2	30910	39,8
2006-07	20675	11,5	334252	306597	640849	16,4	38240	23,7
2007-08	22506	8,9	366209	335553	701762	9,5	41969	9,7
2008-09	23653	5,1	421033	383732	804765	14,6	47633	13,4

Note. The Source was obtained from [8, 13](a) Akyüz, Y. (2004) and (b) Milli Egitim Bakanligi. (2009)

**Findings:** As it is seen in the Table 1, there has been a considerable increase in the number of preschools as well as the number of preschool teachers and the number of preschool students. However, the number of school and classroom decreased in 1940-1941 compared with the numbers of 1932-1933 and in 2002-2003 compared with the previous year.

Table 1 shows that there is a significant increase in the number of teachers, students and school /classroom in preschool education between 1970 and 1989. This increase can be explained with migration from rural areas to urban areas and economical development in Turkey.

That there is a large increase in the number of schools/ classrooms in 2003-2004 is noteworthy. Compared with the previous year the number of schools/ classrooms increased by 49.72% in 2003-2004. The fact that the increase in the number of schools/ classrooms is higher in recent years than the first years is also noteworthy.

The number of preschool student in 1940-1941 academic year decreased in proportion to 1932-1933 academic year. That may have been caused by the World War II. In Table 1, it is noted that the

number of students increased in all the other years. The number of the male students who are beneficiaries from the preschool education have always been higher than the number of female students. The reason behind this situation may be that the Turkish people pay attention to the male students education much more than female students.

The number of teachers working in the field of preschool education increased except in 2002-2003 academic year. The reason why the number of teachers decreased may have been the economic depression period in 2001.

As the number of the students in 2009 (804765) is divided into the number of teachers in 2009 (47633), it is found out that the number of the students per each teacher is 16,89. So that, we can say, this number is ideal number. When we examine the table, we also find out that the number of students, teachers and the number of preschool education institutions have all increased since 2003. And also when the average of only the last five years is examined in the table 1, the increase in average number of schools/classrooms (61,8%), students (93,2%) and teachers (112,8%) is seen.

Table 2: The Preschool Teachers' Opinions about Preschool Education in Turkey

Theme	Comments (Quotations)	Focus Points
Current Condition	<p>“Preschool education is a field which has started developing in our country and to which importance is attached. Therefore, it is rather hard to say that an effective and healthy education is given in this field.”</p> <p>“Unfortunately, we cannot give an education at the desired level because we don't have inadequate opportunities; however, we try to do our best. I hope that better conditions will help the condition of education to become better as well.”</p> <p>“No matter how much importance is attached to preschool education recently, it cannot be considered to be sufficient. This insufficiency is not only institutional but it also has a familial dimension. This conditional are, naturally, supposed to affect preschool education negatively.”</p> <p>“Although preschool has started to be given recently in Turkey, a successful education is tried to be given with the available opportunities.”</p> <p>“Preschool education is a new field that has been developing in Turkey and that is open to development. I believe that the conditions will get better in the future.”</p> <p>“Although a service has been given in the field of preschool education in our country for years, the education in this area has become more prominent in recent years. The scientific studies on this field of education are also effective on the development of this area. Turkey, give a successful education to students in preschool education.”</p> <p>“This education is given decently in our country. I believe that the level of success will increase thanks to the developments in preschool education.”</p>	<p>*A developing field</p> <p>*Developing conditions</p> <p>*Familial dimension</p> <p>*Current conditions</p>

**The Ideas of Preschool Educators about the Preschool Education:** As it is seen in the Table 2, the preschool teachers' opinions about preschool education in Turkey are all focused on the themes “a developing field, developing conditions, familial dimension and current conditions”

The teachers participated in focus group interview stated in general that they believe the preschool education has been developing in Turkey and it will come to a better condition. The teachers emphasized the fact that the preschool education has been attached more importance recently. The teachers also stated that a qualitative education would be given in preschool institutions thanks to people's giving more importance to it. The teachers stated that the reason why people have become interested in preschool education is that the effect of preschool education on children development has been perceived.

No matter whether the teachers of preschool education believe that preschool education has increased, they also stressed that the current conditions are insufficient for an effective education. Therefore, they believe that they have not been able to give the education they desire. They stated that they do their best in spite of insufficient conditions. Contrary to the teachers' thinking that the service given for the preschool education is inadequate, some other teachers believe that the education is given in this field quite successfully.

Some of the teachers stating that the preschool education in Turkey is not very successful explained that this is highly related with the familial dimension. They stated that family has many duties to help for achieving success in all phases of education, but they don't think that the families in Turkey have this awareness.

Although there are differences between the ideas of the teachers stating their opinions about the preschool education in Turkey, a point about which all of them are in agreement is noteworthy. All of the teachers participating in the research think that there has been a fast increase in preschool education in Turkey. This opinion of teachers is also in agreement with the numerical data given in Table 1. Obviously, the information in these tables only indicates the condition of institutions, teachers and students.

The wrong ideas of families about preschool education and an infirm coordination between families and school are considered insufficiencies in education. Some families' wrong ideas about preschool education and unawareness of some families cause the number of children benefiting from preschool education to decrease. Teachers believe that families do not know how preschool education is important in children development and what they should do about this subject.

Some schools' being insufficient in equipments that are used in preschool education is considered as one of the defined insufficiencies. The teachers emphasized that the personal needs of children at the age of preschool

Table 3: The Data about the Insufficient or Defective Sides of Preschool Education in Turkey according to Preschool Educational Teachers

Theme	Ideas (Quotations)	Focus Points
Insufficient Areas	“Preschool education is misapprehended by families in general. Families usually consider the preschool education as an opportunity which helps children to deal with and a security environment for their children when they are at work. However, preschool education is a process which develops children healthily and makes the basis of knowledge and information of children in many fields. The misapprehension of families is about this issue hinders this process to be fruitful. Because a fruitful preschool education is possible with the coordination of school and education.”	*family
	“Considering preschool education until primary school unfortunately hinders many children from benefiting from this education. Some families are negligent about this issue; and therefore, prevent children from benefiting from this process.”	*physical equipments
	“Our schools are insufficient in terms of physical equipments to give preschool education. The children who are the age of preschool education have different needs and different features. When the physical equipments are set, such needs must be put into consideration. Providing schools with more equipment will be rather useful for a better education and attracting the attention of children better.”	*private educational institutions
	“In our country, there is a misapprehension that the education in private educational institutions is better. It means that the public educational institutions are ineffective anymore. Many children are deprived of the benefits of preschool education because of all these misapprehensions.”	*teacher training
	“In our country, there is not a full coherence in terms of the education given to the educators giving preschool education. As this field of education has developed only recently, so the conscious preschool educators who have had education in this area have taken office only recently.”	*the beneficiary age group
	“Interestingly, the preschool education is considered as one-year process before children start primary school. Therefore, especially 5-6 age group benefit from this education.”	*Selection of preschool education models
	“There are many preschool education models. It is impossible to say that one model is effective every time and in every condition. The educators should themselves decide which model they will use by considering the conditions in which they are. However, this condition hinders a successful preschool education in some regions.”	

education should be put into consideration for choosing the equipments for school when the physical needs are being determined. Although considering this subject is so important, it is noted that there is no awareness of this subject in the current institutions.

The teachers point out another misapprehension of the community about preschool education. Stressing that the community believes that a better education is given by the private educational institutions, teachers stated that; therefore, children do not have the expected benefit from preschool education in public schools.

Koç, Taylan and Bekman’s [9] Preschool Education in Turkey: According to Research Report of Determining the Needs of Services and Evaluating the Language Ability Level, the teachers working in preschool education were asked what the priority to be handled in preschool education. 44.4% of them said that the priority is to increase knowledge and education, 30.6% of them said that the priority is to increase the awareness of families about the preschool education, 41.7% of them said that the priority is to improve physical equipments. While raising the awareness of families for preschool

education came first in the research, the improvement of physical conditions (equipments) was also stated by teachers [10].

That the education given in preschool teacher is different is considered as inefficiency by the teachers as well. Coherency in education would make it possible to give educational services according to a definite standard.

Giving preschool education to children of 5-6 age groups in Turkey is interpreted as a restriction of the content of education given. The teachers state that this education should be considered as early childhood education; and therefore, the age group of children benefiting from this education should decrease down to below 5-6. They state that the earlier childhood education will be applied more effectively.

The teachers evaluate that putting the different preschool education models into practice is inefficiency. Stating that application of different preschool education models is an advantage, the teachers state that the important matter is to apply the most appropriate model according to the conditions. However, this choice is not applied actively in our country and this condition harms

education. In the researchers conducted by Koç, Taylan ve Bekman [9], 81.1% of the nursery classes' teachers stated that the most appropriate model for their region is the institution-centred model. The family education model was considered very appropriate by 45.9% of teachers and 46% appropriate at the middle level.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

No matter whether the preschool education has undergone a fast development process, it has been lacking in many ways. The current opportunities; in other words, the investment made for the preschool education is assessed as insufficient by the teachers and this condition is considered as an obstacle preventing the development. The point about which the teachers were in agreement in the interview in the conducted research is the fact that the preschool education develops fast in Turkey. Some teachers related the insufficiencies in preschool education with the fact that it is a developing area. As it is a new area, many things are expected from it; and therefore, the current condition seems to be insufficient. Although there are preschool teachers who think that the current conditions are insufficient and they have not the opportunity to give a good education, they also stated that they were contented with the developments. There are teachers-from those participated in the research-who think that a good education is given when the opportunities are considered. According to the teachers, the physical conditions and opportunities are lacking because of the investment made for preschool education is insufficient. Contradicting data obtained from researches conducted in this area. Dinçer's [11] research was conducted in 88 Preschool education institutions in Istanbul and an evaluation measurement that was developed by Lovell and Harms was used from evaluating its result. 1/3 of centres were considered insufficient as a result of the evaluation made in terms of security, the functionality of playing areas and the easiness of monitoring children [3]. In another research about physical conditions [12], the physical conditions of 25 institutions in Ankara were evaluated. The results of the research indicate that the physical conditions are appropriate for the development of children, there are different activities and the children can have toys separately [3].

The attitudes of families and their cooperative attitudes were also considered as insufficient by the teachers. The attempts for supporting the activities for the contribution of parents to family-school coordination,

which has an example in England as Pre-School Learning Alliance, will help eradicate the misapprehension of families about the preschool education and result in a better education with their support. There are different application models in the preschool education. The teachers taking part in the research recommend that different models appropriate for different conditions should be applied for an effective preschool education.

Although the numerical values show that the number of children benefiting from preschool education has increased, the teachers working in preschool education institutions believe that the number of children in preschool education institutions is still little. The state should make more investments in this area and the awareness of families should be raised so that more children benefit from this area.

Some of the teachers taking part in the research stated that the families have misapprehension that the private schools provide a better preschool education and therefore, a large number of children do not have preschool education. To prevent these wrong ideas, informing people about preschool education and the preschool education in Turkey may be useful. Some of the interviewed teachers stated that there is not a standard among the educators giving education in preschool education and this affects the education negatively. The conclusion of this research is parallel with the remark "common standards should be determined for the titles of educators and employees" in the report called "Right Start: Preschool Education in Turkey" (2005), by Turkish Industrialist's and Businessmen's Association.

The data about the early childhood education in Turkey indicate that education is predominantly given to the children of 5-6 age groups which are followed by 4-6 age groups. According to these figures, only 16% of children of 4-6 age group benefit from Early Childhood Education. When the system is taken into consideration, it is seen that the institutions which are prominently provided with education are nursery schools and nursery classes. While the rate of schooling of nursery schools and nursery classes was 5,1% in 1991-1992 period, it increased up to 16% in 2004-2005 period, 22,4% in 2006-2007 period, 27% in 2007-2008 period and 33% in 2008-2009 period [3, 13, 14]. The preschool educational institutions have been established as optional and non-formal educational institutions. Although there are preschool educational institutions in all counties, the number of preschool educational institutions is low when it is compared with the number of institutions in other countries. Most of the existing students are in the urban

schools. The schools established with the permission of Social Services and Society of protection of Children and the schools opened under the public and private institutions are predominantly exist in large cities. It can be said that the service given in rural areas is limited [15].

Making a general evaluation about the last decade, it can be said that there is a fast increasing development in preschool education in Turkey. But this is not considered sufficient. Therefore, various activities are performed for informing people about preschool education and making it attractive. The projects related to preschool education and activities for increasing compulsory education to 9 years as from 2009-2010 academic year included in these activities. A great importance is attached to preschool education since the time schooling rate in primary education increased to 97.3% (2007-2008 academic years). The economical development in Turkey in the 5 recent years and the increase of income per capita (\$10.913 in May 2009) are expected to have influence on the increase of schooling rate in Turkey. According to Census in 2007, 70% population of Turkey live in cities. Compared to the Census 2000, it can be said that the urbanization has increased to a large extent. Based on the fact that the preschool education is more common in cities, the schooling rate is expected to increasing in the next years.

Parallel to the increase of student in preschool education institutions, preschool education departments have been opened in 33 faculties for educating the teachers for preschool education. Considering the data obtained in 2009, it is noted that there are 16.89 students per each teacher. This number is considered ideal. More teachers are needed for the increase of the schooling rate. However, more teachers will not be employed so as to take economic measurement. The preschool education will be increased in parallel with the increase of economy.

Considering the average of OECD countries, the schooling rate of preschool students is low. However, it is expected to reach the average rate of OECD countries. Based on the data obtained and the ideas of the personal working in preschool education institutions, increase of pre-school education should be supported by covering the expenses and making the required changes.

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