



TEACHERS' OPINIONS ON THE UPDATED PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM: THE CASE OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to understand the views of preschool teachers working in the Bahçelievler district of Istanbul, affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), regarding the strengths and areas for improvement of the 2024 MoNE Preschool Education Program and the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024) (1).

This study employs a qualitative research method, specifically a case study design, characterized as a holistic single case study. The convenience sampling method, a type of purposeful sampling commonly used in qualitative research, has been utilized for sample selection. A total of 15 voluntarily participating preschool teachers from the Bahçelievler district of Istanbul have been determined as the sample group. Data of the research were collected through individual interviews. In the research, when preschool teachers were asked to list the essential characteristics of a preschool education program, they predominantly emphasized the importance of the program being child-centered and flexible.

Regarding program content, the most significant aspect identified was the necessity of incorporating values education and the availability of diverse, high-quality learning materials. These emphases indicate a consensus among teachers about the fundamental qualities that a preschool education program should possess to effectively meet the developmental needs of children.

Key words: Preschool education, educational program, teachers' opinion

INTRODUCTION

Preschool education forms the foundational pillars of children's developmental processes, representing a critical period that shapes not only their future academic success but also their social and emotional development. As a vital component in the development of children's cognitive, emotional, and social skills, preschool education must be continuously evaluated to respond to the evolving requirements of society and the changing needs of the times (2). Updating and improving educational programs in line with emerging scientific data, contemporary theories, and social dynamics is of paramount importance.

Preschool education is a process that enables children to acquire social and cognitive skills in

their early years. During this period, children learn essential life skills and develop social interactions and problem-solving abilities. Preschool education not only helps children discover their interests and talents but also prepares them for primary school and subsequent stages of education (National Association for the Education of Young Children (3)). Research on children's learning processes indicates that effective educational practices that begin at an early age support not only children's academic achievement but also the development of their social skills (4).

The quality of preschool education is related to how much children can benefit from this education (5). As a component of quality in preschool education, the education program and its features (6) can be a very powerful tool in the hands of the teacher who will implement this program in the classroom. As (7) stated, it is important for early childhood education programs to be compatible with the human

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characteristics that countries want to raise and for countries to shape their own education programs.

THE EVOLUTION OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN TURKEY

Turkey has witnessed significant developments in the field of preschool education. In 1952, the first preschool education program used in the country was updated in 1989, 1994, 2002, 2006 and 2012 (8). In the early 2000s, reforms were initiated to enhance the quality of the preschool education system. The MoNE Preschool Education Program, implemented in 2013, provided a framework aimed at supporting children's cognitive and social development (9). This program targeted the acquisition of knowledge and skills across various domains while also supporting teachers in effectively conducting educational processes.

However, it has been recognized that the program needed to be updated in response to the changing needs of the education system and scientific advancements. As of 2024, two different preschool education programs have been developed in Turkey: the MoNE Preschool Education Program (2024) and the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024). These programs not only reflect the country's educational vision but also aim to align with international standards (10).

MoNE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM (2024)

The MoNE Preschool Education Program (2024) has been developed as part of a UNICEF-supported project, aiming to align with international education standards. The program offers innovative approaches that support children's social and emotional development during early education. It includes diversified learning materials and activities that take into account children's individual differences (11). This approach aims to provide educational experiences tailored to various learning styles and needs.

The program is enriched with activities that specifically support children's development in areas such as social skills, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking. Additionally, it includes recommendations designed to enhance teachers' interactions with children and provides resources for teachers' professional development. This, in turn, strengthens the role of teachers in the educational process, ensuring

that children receive comprehensive support throughout their learning journey (11).

TÜRKİYE CENTURY EDUCATION MODEL PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM (2024)

Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024) (2024) is a comprehensive educational framework developed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) that encompasses all educational levels across the country, focusing on the preschool education. This program is designed with consideration for Turkey's educational vision and future needs. It includes strategies aimed at enhancing the quality of education and developing children's fundamental skills (11).

Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024) adopts a holistic approach to education, aiming to support children's academic, social, and emotional development. Furthermore, the program encourages active participation from not only teachers but also families in the educational process. It includes elements such as seminars and informational meetings aimed at increasing awareness regarding children's education and enriching the learning environments at home. This approach seeks to establish a strong collaboration between families and teachers at every stage of the educational process (11).

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The effectiveness of preschool education programs is largely related to the perspectives and implementation skills of the teachers who carry them out. Teachers' views on these programs play a crucial role in identifying their strengths and areas for improvement. The success of educational programs is directly linked to how teachers perceive and implement them (12).

Teachers' feedback regarding educational programs provides critical information about their feasibility, content quality, and impact on children. Therefore, collecting the opinions of preschool teachers on the MoNE Preschool Education Program (2013), the MoNE Preschool Education Program (2024), and the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024) will contribute to

efforts aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and quality of these programs.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to gather teachers' perspectives on the updated preschool education program in order to enhance the effectiveness of the programs and propose solutions to existing issues. Teachers' opinions are critically important for the development of educational policies and the improvement of preschool education practices. The research seeks to provide concrete data for the development of educational programs by collecting teachers' experiences, observations, and suggestions.

Preschool education is crucial for children's futures, making teachers' roles and perspectives vital to the overall success of the education system. Continuous evaluation and updating are necessary to improve the quality of education and maximize children's potential. Enhancing the quality of preschool education programs directly affects children's developmental processes. In this context, teachers' views and experiences play a vital role in the development of educational policies and the updating of programs.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SUB-PROBLEM STATEMENTS

What Are Teachers' Perspectives on the Updated Preschool Education Program?

Sub-Problems:

1. What are the strengths of the 2013 MoNE preschool education programs? Why? How?
2. What are the strengths of the 2024 MoNE preschool education programs? Why? How?
3. What are the strengths of the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)? Why? How?
4. What are the areas for improvement in the 2013 MoNE preschool education programs? Why? How?
5. What are the areas for improvement in the 2024 MoNE preschool education programs? Why? How?
6. What are the areas for improvement in the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)? Why? How?
7. In your opinion, what are the essential features that a preschool education program should possess? Why? How?

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

1. Participants Answered The Interview Questions Sincerely And Without Feeling Any Pressure.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research is limited to;

- * The data obtained from teachers working in Bahçelievler district of Istanbul in the 2023-2024 academic year (interview records),
- * The data collection tools used and
- * The analyzes made.

MATERYAL AND METHODS

Our research employs a qualitative case study design, specifically a holistic single-case design. The study group consists of 15 preschool education teachers working in the Bahçelievler district of Istanbul during the 2023-2024 academic year, who voluntarily agreed to answer the interview questions. To ensure that preschool teachers could respond to the questions candidly, their names were kept confidential and coded by the researcher.

We utilized the convenient sampling technique, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods in qualitative research. The data collection tool used in our study was a semi-structured interview forum. To enhance internal validity, a relevant conceptual framework was established during the creation of the interview forum, based on a literature review.

For external validity, we provided detailed descriptions of the theoretical generalizations made throughout the research process to increase the coefficient. The reliability of the themes generated for our internal reliability was assessed using "kappa" analysis. The analysis resulted in a kappa value of 1.00, indicating an excellent level of agreement in the codes (13).

To determine preschool education teachers' views on communication skills, the researchers prepared open-ended semi-structured interview questions, which were converted into suitable personal interview forms for the participants. The form included seven questions for the preschool education teachers, and the interviews lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes.

To facilitate more accurate analyses and quicker data collection, permission was obtained for the use of audio recording devices. The anticipated duration of the interviews was communicated to

the preschool teachers, and no restrictions were imposed during this time. To ensure that the preschool teachers could provide accurate and comfortable responses, it was assured that the information shared would remain confidential, their names would not be disclosed, and the collected data would only be used for research purposes without sharing with others. This created a relaxed environment for the interviews and fostered a sense of trust between the researchers and the preschool education teachers.

The data obtained from the preschool education teachers using the audio recording device was later transcribed into text. Additionally, the analysis of the audio recordings was conducted according to the 5W1H rule. The data provided during the interviews were initially coded (conceptually categorized), and the themes among these codes were identified. Accordingly, descriptive analysis was conducted to evaluate the responses of the

remaining 15 teachers. In conducting the descriptive analysis, firstly, two coders examined one third of the forms (5 forms) together and determined the themes. Then, half of the remaining forms (5 forms) were coded and evaluated separately by two coders. The coders then came together and compared their evaluations. The inter-coder reliability rate calculated at this stage was 90.91% for [agreement/ (agreement + disagreement)] (14). The coders reached a consensus by discussing their disagreements and completed the process by coding the remaining forms in this way.

FINDINGS

The research data were obtained from participants using two different methods. The first method involved information gathered through personal interviews conducted with the participants. The second method consisted of data obtained from the metaphor analysis conducted.

Demographic Findings

Table 1. Descriptive Information About the Preschool Education Teachers in the Study Group

Variables	f	
Gender	<i>Female</i>	12
	<i>Male</i>	3
	Total	15
Age	45 years and older	2
	37-44 years	4
	29-36 years	6
	21-28 years	3
	Total	15
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	10
	Master's Degree	5
	Total	15
Bachelor's Degree Graduation	Preschool Education	14
	Child Development	1
	Total	15
Professional Experience	10 years and above	9
	1-10 years	6
	Total	15
Type of Institution Served	Pubic Kindergarden/Preschool	13
	Private Kindergarten	2
	Total	15
Duration of Implementation of the MoNE 2013 Preschool Education Program in the Classroom	10 years and above	4
	7-9 years	2
	4-6 years	5
	1-3 years	4
	Total	15

The findings indicate that the majority of teachers participating in the study are female, aged between 29 and 44 years, hold a bachelor's degree, have received training in early childhood education at the university level, possess ten or more years of professional experience, and are employed in public kindergartens. The distribution of teachers

regarding the duration of implementing the MoNE 2013 Early Childhood Education Program in their classrooms shows a relatively similar pattern; however, it can be inferred that most of the teachers involved in the study have been implementing the program for a period of 4 to 6 years.

Table 2. Information on Preschool Education Programs of Preschool Teachers Participating in the Study

	Yes (f)	No (f)
Have You reviewed the MoNE 2024 Preschool Education Program?	15	-
Have You Received Training on the MoNE 2024 Preschool Education Program?	10	5
Have You reviewed theexamined the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)?	14	1
Have You Received Training on the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)?	12	3

It is observed that all preschool teachers participating in the research have reviewed the MoNE 2024 Preschool Education Program, and more than half have received training/seminars regarding the implementation of this program.

Except for one teacher, it is noted that all have examined the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024), and nearly all have also received training on this program.

Table 3. The Most Recently Implemented Education Programs by Preschool Teachers Participating in the Research in Their Classrooms

Most Recently Implemented Preschool Education Program in the Classroom	f
Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)	5
MoNE 2024 Preschool Education Program	8
MoNE 2013 Preschool Education Program	2
Total	15

It is evident that a vast majority of the teachers participating in the study have implemented one of the programs developed and launched in 2024 in their classrooms. Among these, the

program most frequently applied in classrooms has been identified as the MoNE 2024 Preschool Education Program.

Table 4. Teacher Opinions on Planning in Accordance with the Preschool Education Program

	Very Sufficient (f)	Sufficient (f)	Moderately Sufficient (f)	Slightly Sufficient (f)	Insufficient (f)
Planning in accordance with the MoNE 2013 Pre-School Education Program	13	2	-	-	-
Planning in accordance with the MoNE 2024 Pre-School Education Program	4	9	2	-	-
Planning in accordance with the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)	4	8	2	1	-

The teachers participating in the research were found to evaluate their competencies in planning according to the pre-school education

programs positively, stating that they feel very competent and competent in planning for the program implemented in 2013. Regarding the

planning for the programs introduced in 2024, it has been determined that the majority of teachers expressed themselves as competent.

This situation has been naturally assessed due to the recent development and implementation of these programs.

Table 5. Teachers' Opinions on the Strengths of the Programs

	In Terms of Characteristics										In Terms of Content and Method										
	Holistic	Child-Centered, Active Child	Flexible	Needs-Oriented	Learning Through Exploration	Developmental	Developmental Areas	Implementable	Hierarchical Structure	Family and Community Participation	School Readiness	Skill-Based	Contemporary and Popular Approaches	Inclusive Education Perspective	Detailed Learning Outcomes	Outdoor and Non-School Learning EnvironmentsOrtamları	Early Literacy	Values Education	Trends	Digital Literacy and Technology Integrationİntegrasyonu	Character Education
MoNE Pre-School Education Program 2013	9	12	10	4	1	3	3	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MoNE Pre-School Education Program 2024	6	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	2	-	-	-	8	4	7	11	-	-	-
Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)	8	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	8	-	-	11	-	11	6	8	3	

When examining the teacher opinions regarding the strengths of the preschool education programs implemented in Turkey over the past decade, particularly the ones developed and launched in 2024, it is highlighted that the child-centered approach of the 2013 preschool education program stands out as its strongest feature. Additionally, the program's flexibility and holistic structure are also notable aspects. Teachers express that the strengths of the 2024 MoNE Preschool Education Program, in terms of content and methodology, include its emphasis on values education, the detailed elaboration and enrichment of children's learning outcomes, and the prominence given to early literacy. They evaluate the program's features based on its significance placed on family and community involvement. As a model unique to the Republic of Türkiye, Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024) is designed to follow a holistic structure across all educational levels. Its strengths include the emphasis on outdoor

and experiential learning and values education in terms of program content and methods. The program is also noted for its skill-based approach, modern and contemporary strategies, and its holistic nature. It is understood that these areas are the characteristics emphasized by teachers as distinguishing features of each program. While an inclusive educational approach is present in all three programs, teachers did not evaluate it as such. Although early literacy skills are prominently emphasized in both 2024 programs, they were not considered a strength of the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program. Similarly, despite the inclusion of digital literacy and technology integration in the MoNE Preschool Education Program 2024, these aspects were not highlighted, whereas the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024) was notably recognized for its values and character education.

Table 6. Teacher Opinions on the Aspects of the Program Open to Improvement

	In Terms of Characteristics						In Terms of Content and Method						
	Relevance to schools with different disadvantages	Directing the teacher for planning appropriate for the assessment	Sensitivity to culture and environmental characteristics	Elimination of deficiencies in guidance services	Uncertainties in the evaluation process	Focus on children with special needs	Complexity of program structure	Enrichment of learning outcomes	Simplification of Learning Outcomes	Inadequate for children's needs	Increasing practical applications and skills	Improving the quality of materials used in education everywhere	Implementation challenges
MoNE Pre-School Education Program 2013	5	8	4	5	-	-	-	2	-	10	-	-	
MoNE Pre-School Education Program 2024	-	-	1	3	-	-	6	-	8	6	3	3	6
Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program (2024)	4	-	-	-	2	4	8	-	-	4	1	-	14

According to teachers' views on the areas for improvement in the MoNE Pre-School Education Program 2013, it is understood that there is a need for change due to the program's inadequacy in meeting children's needs in terms of content and methodology. Additionally, the program's features suggest that it should guide teachers in making appropriate plans for children's development following their assessments. The rapid changes and developments experienced in all fields today explain the inability of a decade-old education program to fully meet children's needs, highlighting the necessity for teachers to receive guidance for making evaluative recommendations, thereby supporting the development of the programs.

In the case of the MoNE Pre-School Education Program 2024, teachers noted that its areas for improvement are primarily related to the program's structural complexity. In terms of content and methodology, the need for simplification of learning outcomes, inadequacy in meeting children's needs, and

challenges in implementation are identified as aspects needing development.

For the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program 2024, teachers indicated that its areas for improvement include the complexity of the program structure and the need to increase its relative applicability to schools with different disadvantages, as well as a greater focus on children with special needs. Nearly all teachers expressed that there are challenges in implementation regarding the program's content and methodology, emphasizing the need for it to be more applicable.

When evaluating all three programs together, teachers stated that both of the programs developed and implemented in 2024, particularly the Türkiye Century Education Model Preschool Education Program 2024, should be more feasible. Furthermore, although the two programs developed in 2024 do not fully meet children's needs, teachers expressed

that they are more suitable compared to the program implemented in 2013.

Table 7. Teachers' Views on the Essential Characteristics of Pre-School Education Programs

Views	f	
In Terms of Characteristics	Child-Centered Approach	13
	Flexible Structure	10
	Inclusivity/Accessibility for All Children	10
	Family and Community Involvement	9
	Play-Based Approach	6
	Developmentally Appropriate Practices	5
	Alignment with Program Goals	3
In Terms of Content and Method	Values Education	13
	Diverse Learning Materials	5
	Safe and Supportive Environment	2
	Interactive Learning Environment	2
	Peer Education	2
	Social-Emotional Learning	2

When the preschool teachers participating in the study ranked the essential characteristics of a preschool education program, they predominantly emphasized that the program should be child-centered and flexible in its structure. Additionally, they expressed that education should be inclusive, meaning all children should equally benefit from it. The involvement of families and communities in education, as well as a play-based and developmentally appropriate approach, were also identified as significant program characteristics. In terms of program content, the most critical aspect highlighted was the inclusion of values education and the availability of diverse, high-quality learning materials.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results obtained from the study, which compiled the opinions of teachers on the updated preschool education program in order to increase the effectiveness of preschool education programs and to bring solutions to existing problems, teachers believe that the program of 2013 should be updated. Regarding the 2024 revised programmes, teachers cited the detailed learning outcomes and learning gains, and the increased support for early literacy and primary school readiness as strengths of both curricula. Besides, there is room for improvement in both programs: reducing details based on children's needs and thus preventing implementation difficulties. Emphasis on flexibility and applicability of programs,

indicates the necessity of addressing the challenges teachers face and enhancing the efficiency of educational environments (15). The planning process and the integration of activities into daily education significantly impact teachers' success.

Teachers emphasize that activities must be planned and implemented according to the needs of the students. However, the challenges encountered in this process hinder teachers' efforts to improve educational quality. Limited resources and insufficient guidance for teachers exacerbate the issues faced in educational processes. A study found that teachers reported insufficient support from school administrations regarding the implementation of programs. Providing necessary support and resources for teachers is vital for the effective application of educational programs. Strengthening management-teacher collaboration is considered a critical element for improving educational quality. Furthermore, it has been emphasized that teachers do not receive adequate guidance during the evaluation phase of educational plans. Continuous review and updating of educational programs, along with the provision of guidance to support teachers' professional development, are essential (16).

In the current study, the features that teachers think a preschool education program should definitely have include being child-centered, being flexible, being inclusive and accessible, including values education, being play-based,

and being implemented in an environment supported by various materials. A study revealed that teachers value elements such as play-based learning and family involvement, yet these aspects are not adequately supported in practice. It is well known that play-based learning plays a critical role in children's development, contributing to their social, emotional, and cognitive skills. However, for this approach to be effectively implemented in education, necessary materials and support must be provided. The research results show that teachers are requesting more materials and activities to support children's social and emotional development. This demand indicates the need for enriched educational environments and increased resources for teachers' professional development (17). In their research, highlighted the physical and managerial challenges teachers face in implementing educational programs. Issues such as large class sizes, lack of materials, insufficient administrative support, and inexperience negatively impact teachers' capacity to provide effective education. Particularly, large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to address individual student needs, lowering the quality of education. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing educational quality (18).

A study indicated that, according to preschool teachers, most of the goals set in the 2013 program were achieved. However, it was noted that family involvement, guidance services, and the effectiveness of learning centers did not reach the desired levels. Given the critical role family involvement plays in children's education, improving this area is once again emphasized as essential. Ensuring families actively participate in educational processes offers significant opportunities to support children's development and enhance educational quality (19).

In conclusion, the conducted research indicates that addressing teachers' needs is essential for improving the effectiveness of preschool education programs. It is necessary to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system and take concrete steps to develop these aspects. Listening to teachers, providing them with the necessary support and resources, will enhance the overall quality of the education system. Additionally, reshaping educational policies by considering teachers'

experiences and feedback will be a critical step toward increasing success in education. Promoting a culture of collaboration and sharing among teachers will also contribute significantly to the development of the educational system.

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