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Examination Of Primary Student Teachers' Opinions About Preschool Education

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1. Introduction

A large number of behaviors which children acquire at the ages of 0-6, the critical years during which their development speed and learning capacity is the highest, shape their personality structures, attitudes, habits, beliefs and value judgments and form the basis of the development of their physical health. In this period, children become self-conscious and socialize by encountering other people and social rules (Oktay, 2010). Preschool education which requires guiding with a serious, scientific and systematic organization without letting go under the effects of coincidences is regarded as the vital step of all education. Therefore, with education given at preschool educational institutions, children can be made to acquire experiences which are suitable for their ages and levels and their development can be supported. For this reason, it is necessary to generalize preschool education given at institutions, try alternative models and reach all preschool age children (Basal, 2013).

At preschool educational institutions, children learn to identify colors and concepts like big-small, long-short in accordance with their age levels. They learn to listen, tell what they listen, observe, draw pictures. Through games, children gather information about their environment and peer group and prepare for primary school (Basal, 2013). Studies indicate that children having received preschool education have significantly higher levels of readiness compared to those who have not received preschool education (Oktay, 2010; Teke, 2010; Erkan, 2011; Tözar, 2011). Being prepared for primary school is more than academic knowledge and readiness is based on all domains of development multi-dimensionally. It is observed that although some children have strong language skills, they may have insufficient social skills; although some children are socially capable, they may be verbally weak. This variety existing in development may cause some difficulties in identifying children's levels of readiness for school (California Child Care Health Program, 2006). The Ministry of National Education Regulation on Preschool and Primary Education Institutions (2014) requires children completing their 66 months of age at the end of September of the year when registrations are made for starting primary school to enroll in school. Moreover, it is also included in the regulation that 60-66- month-old children with appropriate developmental characteristics can be enrolled in the primary school first grade with their parents' permission. However, it can be stated that there are great differences between preschool and primary education institutions in our country in terms of teacher attitudes, program contents and physical environments (Oktay, 2010). For this reason, the inclusion of children in primary school starting from the 60th month brings to mind the sufficiency of classroom teachers' knowledge and skill levels in relation to the characteristics of children at this period. As a result of their study, Yapici and Ulu (2010) determined that the first grade teachers expected high level of performance from the preschool teachers. Again, in a study made to determine classroom teachers' opinions about preschool education, it was determined that the classroom teachers found preschool education important, but they did not have sufficient knowledge about preschool education (Erden and Altun, 2014). Although there are some studies made on classroom teachers' opinions about preschool education, not a study made with primary student teachers was encountered. There is only one course aiming at preschool education under the name of “Early Childhood Education” in the Classroom Teaching undergraduate program. This course is given as an elective course at some universities and as a compulsory

course at some others. However, it is considered that supporting student teachers within the education process before they become teachers will affect their knowledge, skills and attitudes in the process after they start teaching. It is considered that this study is important in terms of determining student teachers' opinions about preschool education. For this reason, this study aims to reveal primary student teachers' opinions about preschool education.

2. Method

2.1. Sample of the study

The sample of the study is composed of 110 student teachers studying at the Classroom Teaching Division of the Primary Education Department of Uludag University during the 2015-2016 academic year. When determining the sample, "criterion sampling", one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. In the sampling, not having received 'Early Childhood Education' was determined as a criterion. The main reason for this was that while the course of “Early Childhood Education” had been compulsory at the Classroom Teaching Division of the Education Faculty of Uludag University, it started to be taught as an elective course. In the study, it was aimed to determine opinions of student teachers who graduated without taking this course.

Table 1. Statistical data about the primary student teachers

		Gender				**Total**	
		Female		**Male**			
		f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Did you receive preschool education?	Receive	18	19.8	5	26.3	23	20.9
	Not Receive	73	80.2	14	73.3	87	79.1
	Total	91	82.7	19	17.3	110	100
Is the preschool education necessary?	Necessary	89	97.8	18	94.7	107	97.3
	Not Necessary	2	2.2	1	5.3	3	2.7
	Total	91	82.7	19	17.3	110	100

As it is seen in Table 1, 79.1% of the student teachers did not receive preschool education. Moreover, 97.3% of the student teachers think that preschool education is necessary.

2.2. Data collection tool

In the study, with the aim of determining the primary student teachers' opinions about preschool education, the “Perception Scale for Preschool" developed by Kesicioğlu (2013) and the “Questionnaire for Evaluating Student Teachers' Opinions about Preschool Education” were used.

2.2.1.Perception Scale for Preschool

In the study, the “Perception Scale for Preschool" developed by Kesicioglu (2013) was used. In the development process of the scale, Kesicioglu (2013) worked with 200 student teachers. The scale is composed of 27 items. In the analysis of the data, with the aim of calculating the scores of the answers given by the student teachers, the items in the scale were scored as follows: "agree" was scored 3, “neutral” was scored 2 and "disagree" was scored 1. In the

scale, there were no items to be scored inversely. The lowest score to get from the scale was 27 and the highest score was 81. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .77. In the same way, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated by the researcher as .77, too.

2.2.2. Questionnaire for Evaluating Student Teachers' Opinions about Preschool Education

The study included three close-ended questions in order to determine the student teachers' genders, if they received preschool education and their opinions about if preschool education is necessary and four open-ended questions prepared to determine their knowledge and opinions about preschool education. The questions were specified below:
1- In your opinion, what is preschool education?
2- In your opinion, what does preschool education aim at?
3- Do you know anything about education given at preschool education institutions? If you do, please explain.
4- What do you expect from a child having received preschool education?

2.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire within the scope of the study were digitized and expressed in percentages and frequencies. With the aim of reflecting the student teachers' opinions more clearly, each student was given a code number (S1, S2) and direct quotations were also included. The pieces of data obtained from the study were coded separately by the researcher and an expert. The consistency of the data coded by the two researchers was calculated by using the formula of consensus/ (dissidence + consensus) (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The general coefficient of concordance between the researchers was determined as .86. Since a coefficient of concordance of .70 or above is regarded as sufficient, it can be stated that the study has a sufficient level of internal reliability.

The pieces of data obtained from the Perception Scale for Preschool were evaluated in terms of means. With the aim of determining the student teachers' opinions, a three-point scale, namely “Agree” (scores between 2.25-3.00), “Neutral” (scores between 2.00-2.24), “Disagree" (Scores between 1–1.99), was used.

3. Findings

The statistical data about the primary student teachers' perceptions in relation to preschool education was given in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistical data about primary student teachers' perceptions in relation to preschool education

Items	X	SD
Preschool education is important in terms of children's social development.	3.00	.000
Children receiving preschool education become more successful at mathematics.	2.02	.704
Children receiving preschool education have higher level of responsibility awareness.	2.79	.451
Children receiving preschool education are more creative.	2.55	.658
Preschool education is important in terms of children's acquiring academic skills.	2.68	.574
Children receiving preschool education become more successful at elementary science.	1.83	.740
Families are important for effective preschool education.	2.95	.228
Children receiving preschool education fit into society more quickly.	2.84	.439
Children receiving preschool education have more developed self-expression skills.	2.90	.330

Children receiving preschool education are more successful at solving problems which they encounter.	2.66	.579
Preschool education includes game activities.	2.99	.095
In preschool education, play grounds are important.	2.97	.163
Preschool education is important in terms of children's preparing for elementary school.	2.97	.212
Children receiving preschool education become more successful at Turkish.	2.05	.752
Preschool education includes art activities.	2.5	.581
For effective preschool education, classroom materials are important.	2.95	.209
Preschool education includes science activities.	2.36	.602
Preschool education is important in terms of children's cognitive development.	2.90	.357
Children receiving preschool education are more successful at establishing communication with their peers.	2.90	.330
Preschool education includes mathematical activities.	2.74	.519
Children receiving preschool education become more successful at art-music.	2.17	.776
Children receiving preschool education have higher self-confidence.	2.78	.457
Preschool education includes musical activities.	2.95	.209
Children receiving preschool education adapt to elementary education more easily.	2.95	.209
Children receiving preschool education learn to obey rules more quickly.	2.87	.334
Preschool education includes preparatory works for reading-writing.	2.59	.668
Preschool education is important in terms of children's self-care skills.	2.96	1.88

As it is seen in Table 2, the student teachers agreed with the item stated as "Preschool education is important in terms of children's social development" at a high rate (X=3.00). However, the student teachers "disagreed" with the item stated as "Children receiving preschool education become more successful at elementary science" (X=1.83). Moreover, it is observed that the student teachers were "neutral" about the items stated as "Children receiving preschool education become more successful at mathematics" (X=2.02), "Children receiving preschool education become more successful at Turkish" (X=2.05) and "Children receiving preschool education become more successful at art-music". It is observed that the student teachers generally "agreed" with the idea of receiving preschool education.

Table 3. Student teachers' opinions about preschool education

	f	**%**	**f**	**%**
A stage for preparing the child for school, school rules	54	32.1	168	100
Education received at nursery school or kindergarten before starting elementary school	44	26.2		
Education having effect on physical, affective and mental development	16	9.5		
Preparation works for life with games and activities	14	8.3		
Transition stage softening the period between game and lesson	10	5.9		
Social skills training	7	4.2		
General name given to nursery class-nursery school	7	4.2		
Education given in accordance with interests, developmental characteristics and abilities	4	2.4		
Education having children acquire knowledge and skill	3	1.8		
Education of children aged between 48-66 months	3	1.8		
Education developing the skill of self-expression	2	1.2		
Stage for preparation for reading and writing	2	1.2		
Education predominantly based on values education	1	0.6		
Education received starting from birth and until the age of compulsory education	1	0.6		

When Table 3 is examined, it is observed that 168 data were obtained from 110 student teachers. Primarily, the student teachers (f=54, 32.1%) stated that preschool education is the stage preparing children for school and school rules. 26.2% of the student teachers (f=44) defined preschool education as the one received at nursery school or kindergarten before starting primary school; 9.5% (f=16) defined it as the one having effect on physical,

affective and mental development; 8.3% (f=14) defined it as preparatory works for life with games and activities; 5.9% (f=10) defined it as the transition period softening the period between game and lesson. Only 1 (0.6%) student teacher defined preschool education as the one received starting from birth and until the age of compulsory education. S3 stated that preschool education includes "*preparatory works for life with games and activities. Actually, it can be said that it is for preparing for primary school*." Moreover, S6 explained that preschool education "*refers to the education which children receive before starting the 1st year. Preschool education helps children with many matters such as learning school rules, classroom, being away from family (being independent), making a circle of friends*."

Table 4. Student teachers' opinions about the aim of preschool education

	f	**%**	**f**	**%**
Preparing for school	44	17.2		
Supporting children's psycho-social development	37	14.4		
Facilitating the process of adaptation to school	28	10.9		
Having children acquire basic knowledge and skills through games	20	7.8		
Supporting children's psycho-motor development	19	7.4		
Helping children start primary school in a healthy way	15	5.9		
Supporting children's cognitive development	14	5.5		
Teaching them their responsibilities	12	4.7		
Increasing their communication skills	11	4.3		
Having them love the school	8	3.1		
Developing children in different ways	7	2.7		
Having children obey social rules	6	2.3	256	100
Raising conscious, healthy children	6	2.3		
Developing children's hand skills	5	2		
Helping children read more easily	5	2		
Instilling self-confidence	4	1.6		
Developing children's self-care skills	4	1.6		
Meeting their need for play	2	0.8		
Having children see themselves as an individual	2	0.8		
Teaching them how to deal with problems	2	0.8		
Supporting children's language development	2	0.8		
Having children acquire academic skills	2	0.8		
Developing children's imagination	1	0.4		

When Table 4 is examined, it is observed that 256 data were obtained from 110 student teachers. 17.2% (f=44) of the student teachers stated that the primary aim of preschool education is to prepare children for school. Moreover, the student teachers also stated that the aim of preschool education is to support psycho-social development (f=37, 14.4%), facilitate the process of adaptation to school (f=28, 10.9%), have children acquire knowledge and skills through games (f=20, 7.8%), support psycho-motor development (f=19, 7.4%), have children start primary school in a healthy way (f=15, 5.9%), support cognitive development (f=14, 5.5%), teaching children their responsibilities (f=12, 4.7%). S2 stated the aim of preschool education like this: *"Preschool education aims to instill children self-confidence and teach basic knowledge through games. At the same time, it aims to speed up the brain-muscle coordination in accordance with the development process of the child*." S5 held the opinion that *"Education which children receive before starting primary school both meets children's needs for play and helps them learn. This type of education helps children in the stage of preparation for primary school*. Similarly, S11 explained the aim of preschool education like this: "*It aims to teach children through amusement, prepare them for school by performing works according to their ages.*"

Table 5. Student teachers' opinions about education given at preschool education institutions

		f	%	f	%
There is	Game-centered education is given.	42	23.2	181	84.2
	Educational activities according to children's age levels	35	19.3		
	Children are made to perform artistic activities like coloring, cutting and glueing.	26	14.4		
	Children are made to do activities aiming at socialization.	12	6.6		
	Children are made to acquire self-care skills.	10	5.5		
	Children are made to perform mathematical activities.	9	5		
	Children are taught songs.	7	3.9		
	Children are made to perform activities supporting muscle development.	7	3.9		
	Children learn by entertaining.	6	3.3		
	Children read story books, comment on pictures.	5	2.8		
	Children are made to perform reading-writing activities.	4	2.2		
	Children's skills of obeying rules are developed.	4	2.2		
	Cultural activities are performed.	3	1.7		
	Values education is given.	3	1.7		
	Children's communication skills are developed.	2	1.1		
	Children are taught their responsibilities.	2	1.1		
	Science activities are performed.	1	0.6		
	Activities supporting cognitive development are performed.	1	0.6		
	A foreign language is taught.	1	0.6		
	Healthy nutrition education is given.	1	0.6		
There is not				34	15.8
Total				215	100

While 86 student teachers stated being knowledgeable about education given at preschool education institutions, 34 (31%) stated not being knowledgeable of it. 181 pieces of data were obtained from 86 student teachers having stated that they were knowledgeable about preschool education. 23.2% of the student teachers (f=42) stated that game-centered education was given at preschool education institutions; 19.3% (f=35) stated that educational activities were performed according to children's age levels; 14.1% stated that children were made to perform artistic activities like coloring-cutting-glueing. S75 held the opinion that "*Generally, children are grouped according to their levels. Since each age has its own characteriscs, education given to these groups can differ. Children's psycho-motor characteristics develop while they entertain through games*." Moreover, S93 stated that "*I went to nursery school. We continuously drew pictures, learned numbers, watched cartoons, sang songs and slept at sleeping hours. We ate 3 meals a day. Apart from these, we did nothing*."

Table 6. Student teachers' expectations from a child having received preschool education

	f	%	f	%
They do not have difficulty in adapting to primary school	38	15.2		
They have developed communication skills	29	11.6		
They have developed social skills	24	9.6		
They have developed small muscles	20	8		
They can express themselves comfortably	15	6		
They behave according to rules	15	6		
They are ahead of children not having received preschool education	15	6		
They have developed sense of responsibility	15	6	250	100
They are self-confident	12	4.8		
They learn to read and write more quickly	12	4.8		
They are prepared to learn	11	4.4		
They can meet their personal needs	9	3.6		
They love school	6	2.4		
They can understand given instructions	6	2.4		
They can adapt to the environment in which they live	5	2		

They have developed readiness level	3	1.2
They know to count up to 10	3	1.2
They know how to behave in society	2	0.8
They can identify colors	2	0.8
They have learned shapes	2	0.8
They are creative	1	0.4
They are aware that they are an individual	1	0.4
They are more conscious	1	0.4
They have concentration difficulty	1	0.4
They are more sensitive	1	0.4

As it is seen in Table 6, 250 pieces of data were obtained from 110 student teachers in relation to their expectations from children having received preschool education. 15.2% of the student teachers (f=38) stated that they expected a child having received preschool education not to have difficulty in adapting to primary school. Moreover, 11.6% of the student teachers (f=29) expected children having received preschool education to have developed communication skills. S106 held the opinion that *"Children having received preschool education at least know how to hold a pencil when starting school. They are expected to come to school more prepared and eagerly*." Similarly, S93 expressed this opinion: "*I expect them to be more equipped compared to children not having received preshool education. For, giving some types of education at certain ages is important for later years*." Moreover, S109 stated this opinion: "*When they start the 1st year, I expect them to have had toilet training, be familiar with alphabet, writing, have more developed sense of responsibility compared to others.*"

4. Discussion and Conclusion

As a result of this study aiming to reveal the primary student teachers's opinions about preschool education, it was determined that the student teachers generally have positive viewpoints related to preschool education. In the study, it was determined that the student teachers were "Neutral" about the opinion that "Children having received preschool education become more successful at art-music." However, in a study where the pictures drawn by primary first grade students were examined, differences were determined between the pictures drawn by the children having received preschool education and the pictures drawn by the children not having received preschool education in such areas as creativity, authenticity, visuality, dimensional perception and proportion and it was also determined that preschool education had great contribution in the area of art (Büyükekiz, 2008). Therefore, it can be stated that preschool education contributes to children's artistic activities, too.

As a result of this study, it was determined that the student teachers disagreed with the opinion that "Children having received preschool education become successful at science", but they were "Neutral" about the opinion that "Children having received preschool education become successful at Turkish." As a result of a study carried out to determine if the children having received preschool education were successful at Turkish, it was determined that preschool education affected their Turkish-language skills in a positive way (Erkan and Topcu-Bilir, 2015). Moreover, when the preschool education program is examined, it is observed that the program includes Turkish-Language and science activities. Therefore, even if teachers do not perform sufficient activities, awareness about this matter can be achieved. Moreover, it can be stated that children having received preschool education are more successful at reading-writing and all the areas of development. This makes us consider that children having received preschool education will be more eager to learn and, for this reason, become more successful at all lessons.

It can be stated that this study revealed that although the student teachers had not received a course on Early Childhood Education, they generally had a positive perception in relation to preschool education. As a result of the study, Kesicioğlu (2013) found out that especially male primary student teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about kinds of academic skills which children had when they started the 1st year and, for this reason, they had incorrect expectations from children coming from preschool. Moreover, as class level increased, the student teachers' viewpoints of preschool education changed. This is related to the fact that the student teachers received the course of "Early Childhood Education" in the third year.

It was determined that the student teachers defined preschool education generally as the stage of preparing the child for school and school rules, the education received at nursery school or kindergarten before starting primary school, the education having effect on physical, affective and mental development, preparatory works for life with games and activities and the transition stage softening the period between play and lesson. In a similarly study, it was found that the preschool teachers defined the aim of preschool education as the preparation for life, but the classroom teachers defined it as the preparation for school (Einarsdottir, 2003). Being ready for school is a multi-directional concept which is based on the development of the social, affective, physical and mental development in every aspect (Child-care Health Program, 2006). Preparation for school means children's reaching a level at which they can perform tasks which they are expected to do at primary school by supporting all the areas of development within the time during which they attend preschool education institution (Polat, 2010). It can be stated that although preschool education prepares children for primary school, in fact, it prepares them for life with the education it gives. However, teacher attitudes between preschool education institutions and primary school, differences observed in program contents and physical environments affect the process of children's preparing for school. As a result of the study carried out to reveal problems lived in the transition from nursery school to primary school, Bay and Simsek-Cetin (2014) found that since preschool education is based on games, does not include many academic expectations and applies a more flexible program, but, on the contrary, a more structured program with a lesson hour of 40 minutes is applied at the primary first year, children have difficulty in the transition to the primary first grade. As a result of their study, Yapici and Ulu (2010) found that the classroom teachers expected the children to sit at their desks for a lesson hour at the primary first year. Moreover, they also expressed that the classroom teachers had high expectations from the children having received preschool education and, for this reason; there were problems between the classroom teachers and the preschool teachers. The most common of these problems is the expectations related to works for preparing to read and write. In this study, although the student teachers firstly stated that children having received preschool education should not have difficulty in adapting to primary school, for some reasons as the concept of adaptation for school's being a broad concept and not having been defined in detail, it makes us consider that the student teachers had expectations about preparation for reading and writing. Moreover, when the other statements expressed by the student teachers are examined, it is seen that there were statements like "They are expected to be ahead of children not having received preschool education" and "They are expected to learn to read and write more quickly". The difference between the preschool and the primary school programs brings along differences between teachers' expectations and increases expectation differences between teachers.

In relation to the aim of preschool education, the primary student teachers stated such opinions as supporting psychosocial development, facilitating the process of adaptation to school, having children acquire basic knowledge and skills through games, supporting psycho-motor development, having children start primary school healthily, supporting cognitive development, teaching children their responsibilities. Preschool education aims to

support the psycho-motor, social-affective, language and cognitive development of children attending preschool education institutions, have them acquire self-care skills and increase their readiness levels for school (MEB, 2013). Works performed in the preschool period prepare children and their families for differences which they are expected to encounter and help children enter school easily (Saracho and Spodek, 2003; Fabian, 2007).

31% of the student teachers stated not having been knowledgeable of the education given at preschool institutions. However, the student teachers who stated having been knowledgeable of the education given at preschool institutions stated that generally a game-centered education was given at preschool education institutions, age-appropriate educational activities were applied, such artistic activities as coloring-cutting-glueing were performed. At a preschool education institution, through games, children gather information about their physical environment and peer group, identify colors and learn such concepts as big-small, long-short according to their age levels. They learn to listen, tell what they listen to, observe and draw pictures (Basal, 2013). In short, the education given at preschool education institutions makes children get ready for their future lives in every aspect.

In relation to expectations from children having received preschool education, the student teachers stated such opinions as not having difficulty in adapting to primary school, developed communication skills, developed social skills, developed small muscles, comfortable self-expression, behaving in accordance with rules, being ahead of children not having received preschool education and developed sense of responsibility. Previous studies indicate that primary first grade students having received preschool education are ahead of children not having received preschool education in such matters as starting and maintaining communication, working in groups, protecting self-control, being more eager to come to school, sharing their belongings with their friends, obeying school and classroom rules, obeying courtesy and propriety and being able to do works requiring self-care skills by themselves (Ogelman and Sarikaya, 2013; Toluc, 2008; Dockett and Perry 2004). Moreover, Erden and Altun (2014) found as a result of their study that the classroom teachers thought it necessary to achieve the integration between the preschool education program and the primary school education program. Especially, making preschool education country-wide is important in terms of these two programs' being in integrity and harmony. In order to go through the process of transition to primary school more successfully, the integrity and continuity between preschool education and primary school is important and it is suggested to use the same pedagogical frame (learning environment, family participation, teaching strategies, planning, evaluation, etc) in the training of preschool teachers and primary school teachers (UNICEF, 2012). As a result of this study, it was determined that the student teachers were generally knowledgeable of preschool education. However, determining student teachers' opinions in more detail is important in terms of examining their viewpoints in relation to preschool education.

In order for primary student teachers to have problems with the primary first grade students at the lowest level when they start their profession, it is considered that it is important that they should take at least one course on preschool education at the undergraduate level. It is also considered that in-service training programs and seminars to be given in relation to classroom teachers' perceptions about preschool education will be effective and hence cooperation can be achieved with preschool education.

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