

An Investigation of Preschool Teacher Candidates' views on Applications of Educational Activities

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Abstract

The aim of this study investigates the views of preschool teacher candidates on applications of educational activities in preschool education. This research is the screening model research and 110 teacher candidates attending the third and fourth grades in the Department of Preschool Teaching in Faculty of Education in Giresun University and filling out the form constitute the working group of this study. 'A Semi-Structured Interview Form' is used to gather the data of the study. With this aim, the form, was shaped by the researchers, took its last form after two experts examined them and following the necessary changes. This form includes four demographic questions and seven open ended questions. In the first place, teacher candidates are asked about their views on activities in preschool education. They are asked to select one of the following options; 'I enjoy them', 'I am reluctant', 'I have difficulty', 'I get bored'. Later, they are asked to write the reasons of their choices. Then, the teacher candidates are asked about 'doing good or doing no good' in these activities. They are asked choosing on the following options; 'I think I do good' and 'I do not think I do good'. Then, they are asked to write about the reasons of their choices. In data encoding, 'encoding pertinent to the notions gotten from data' is used. It is clear that the activities in which the participants have the most difficulty are free play, science and math, and preparations for literacy activities. It is clearly seen that 48.1% of the teacher candidates get bored during the free play activities. Such teacher candidates stated that the most important reason for this is that they have too much free time. It can be seen that teacher participants do not think (56.3%) that they do good in free play activities. What they stated as the most important reason for this is that the school has limited opportunities, so it is seen that the teacher candidates (53.6%)

have difficulty in science and mathematics activities. They also stated that the most important reason for this is that 'they do not know which activities they should use'.

Key Words: Preschool education, teacher candidates, educational activities

Introduction

The preschool education is described that it is convenient for child, from birth to 72 months, development and individual characteristics, and provides a rich environment, and exciting activities. It also supports children's physical, mental, emotional and social developments. Besides these, it helps children to prepare for primary education regarding with the value of society (MEB, 1993). In the preschool age, the children learn the basic notions in life via their experience and develop the understanding of the scientific process. Children's experience in this age provides a basis of future knowledge, which is identified as an integral part of obtaining notions (Kamay & Kaşker, 2006). The preschool teachers get the benefit from educational activities to cause children to gain notions and experiences. Doğan (1975) defines educational program that the educational program covers whole activities to teach children aimed learning. Demirel (2000) also explains that the educational program is a kind of learning mechanism to teach children experiential learning via planned school activities and outdoor activities. Büyükkaragöz (1997) also clarifies that the educational program is all of planned activities, which creates an ambiance for gaining the expected learning. In other words, an educational program covers every activity to provide the expected learning. The educational activities in preschools are free play, language, play and movement, music, science and maths, preparation for literacy, drama, field trips and art craft activities. The importances of such activities are identified with following statements (MEB, 2006).

Free Play: Free play activity covers multiple activities, can be chosen by children according to their willingness, and art activities. Such activities have a preparation role to children for following daily activities (MEB, 2006).

Language (Turkish): During this activity, it is aimed that children's language abilities are improved so children can speak fluently and understandably (MEB, 2006).

Play and Movement: An improvement in the children's creativity and psychomotor skills are aimed by performing this activity (MEB, 2006). A play field is an important part of the child education due to providing a natural environment. In this play field, children can have some opportunities to improve their necessity behaviours, knowledge, skills etc during play and movement activities. At the same time, the play enables children to explore themselves and environment (Yavuzer 2000). Besides this, it is claimed that play and movement have an important role in children's learning, and play has a positive effect on children's creativity, success in education and shaping children's behaviours (Öncü & Özbay 2005). It is stated that in the preschool education, due to retaining activities effectively related with play, teachers should have efficient plans for the play activities in educational activities (Sevinç, 2004).

Music: In this activity, listening voice and realizing differences, rhythm and eurhythmics and a development in auditory perception for children are aimed in the educational activities (MEB, 2006). For the preschool age children, the music activities are joyful, funny and pleasing activities. Moreover, music has a favourable influence on firstly, mental and emotional development, secondly social and personnel development. Thus, music activities are important for the children's whole development. Although children get the first formal music experience from his/ her preschool teacher, the inadequacy in teachers'

knowledge to music has a negative effect on children's development of music ability, so the teachers' experience on music has a decisive role on children's interest to music (Kelly, 1998). In other words, if the preschool teachers have a positive background on music, their students is highly likely to have a positive behaviour to music.

Science and Maths: Science and Maths activities aim to support children's concern, investigation, discovery ability (MEB, 2006). The reason for this is that children learn and gain the basic concepts and the process of science. Child experience in this age compromises the fundamental part of notions for future life so it can be observed that children customize such experiences and profit from them for daily life. In this age, children have a chance to learn maths and science via their experience. As a result, such experiences and the learning intangible scientific notions in the future have a strong positive relationship (Kamay & Kaşker, 2006). As a result of successful findings of science experiments in early years settings, children's concern, investigation, discovery behaviours are increased. This relationship should be known by teachers because unless teachers understand this relationship, they cannot realize the importance of these activities. In this case, teachers should know that children do not learn expected issues by others, children learn some knowledge which are wondered, interested and attracted by themselves (Yaşar, 1993).

Preparation for Literacy: These activities aim to facilitate starting primary school and improve the readiness (MEB, 2006). That is why, both reading and writing skills are needed to be supported to improve children's readiness. Furthermore, in the light of findings of research on readiness of reading and writing, the verbal, understanding phonology, writing skills should be supported (Cabell et al., 2011; Şimşek, 2011). The previous research findings involve in assessment the preparation for literacy deeply, so it is clearly seen that children's previous experiences on literacy have a correlation with future success of reading ability (Kandır et al., 2010).

Dram: It covers a variety of warming activities, role plays, improvisation activities, storytelling, dramatization activities and such (MEB, 2006).

Art Craft Activities: This provides children having various activities to learn differently in a daily curriculum, and is used to reach aimed acquisition (MEB, 2006)

Teachers are the important factor to process these clarified activities efficiently. During these activities, teachers should enable children having a chance to discover and develop themselves, and teachers also should plan their each activity efficiently for children (Harrington, 2006; Özbey, 2010). Such activities example what teachers use in daily activities as educational activities. Furthermore, the learning process activities, materials, methods, educational environments' features, and are deeply according to educational activities (Kandır, 2001). The teacher candidates are for the basic notions as related with such activities during their degree. On the other hand, the teachers' best presentation of the topic is not only enough to educate children, but they should also include themselves into the activities (Kandır et al., 2010). During teaching experiences, teacher candidates can process their knowledge and adopt into the activities in teaching experience lessons. Thus, the necessity thing is to determine teacher candidates' view on these activities, and this determination can help improve the quality of pre-service education. As related with this reason, teacher candidates' view has been investigated.

1. An investigation to teacher candidates' view on these activities
2. An investigation to teacher candidates' view on free play activities
3. An investigation to teacher candidates' view on science and maths activities
4. An investigation to teacher candidates' view on preparation for literacy

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

This study is constituted as a qualitative research. Qualitative research is one of the most important research models, and it has some sub-titles, which are observation, interview and document analyses. Thus, qualitative research is described as an investigation of natural understanding and issues via considering scientific process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In this study, teacher candidates' views on activities via document analysis are investigated deeply, and the findings are tried to exhibit findings.

Sample of the Study

This research is the screening model research and 110 teacher candidates attending the third and fourth grades in the Department of Preschool Teaching in Faculty of Education in Giresun University and filling out the form constitute the working group of this study. The convenient sampling is applied to identify the study groups. In this method of data collection, the researcher chooses the most available subjects (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Likewise, the researchers of this study chose Giresun University at their disposal.

Data Collection Tools

To collect data for this study, the researchers used semi-structured interview forms. Regarding with this reason, the researchers developed the 'Teacher Candidates' Occupational Information Form'. The form, was shaped by the researchers, took its last form after two experts examined them and following the necessary changes. This form, used for collecting data, is consisted of four different demographic information questions and seven open ended occupational information questions.

Data Collection

At the beginning of questions, teacher candidates are asked about their behaviours during educational activities. For these questions, they are asked to choose one of the following category as answer that are; 'I enjoy them', 'I am reluctant', 'I have difficulty', 'I get bored. Later, they are asked to write a reason of choosing this category. Then, the teachers are asked about 'doing good or doing no good' in these activities. They are asked to choose on the options; 'I think I do good' and 'I do not think I do good'. Then, they are asked to write about the reasons of their choices.

Data Analysis

While data analysis, percentage, frequency and content analysis were used. According to content analysis used for data analysis, findings were distinguished the sections and each section's meaning, national conditions were tried to understand. While the content analysis, 'encoding pertinent to the notions gotten from data' technique was used. In this technique, the researchers read the data line by line, and aim to inference the significant point in the environment. According to content analysis, the researchers produce some scripts as a guide or directly inspired from data and produce scripts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this study, the script lists were comprised for each open ended question, and all data were analyses according to this script lists. While analysing the responses of the participants to open ended questions, only these script lists were used for collected data. For some open ended questions, the number of participants' response can be higher than sample number because some participants responded these questions with more than an answer or never responded. Besides these, after analysed the teacher candidates' view on activities, it is found out that teacher candidates have some problems with three activities (free play, science and maths, preparation for literacy activities). That is why, these three activities are examined in deep.

FINDINGS

Findings regarding the first research problem: An investigation to teacher candidates' view on these activities

Table 1. Teacher Candidates' View on Educational Activities

ACTIVITIES	TEACHER CANDIDATES' VIEW											
	I enjoy them		I am reluctant		I have difficulty		I am bored		I think I am profitable		I do not think I am profitable	
	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	n	%
Free Play	29	31.9	10	11	10	11	51	56.1	37	40.7	68	74.8
Language	56	61.6	11	12.1	18	19.8	15	16.5	63	69.3	37	40.7
Play and Movement	84	92.4	4	4.4	6	6.6	6	6.6	83	91.3	17	18.7
Music	69	75.9	9	9.9	6	6.6	16	17.6	78	85.8	22	24.2
Science and Maths	15	16.5	9	9.9	65	71.5	11	12.1	28	30.8	72	79.2
Preparation for Literacy	23	25.3	10	11	57	62.7	10	11	39	42.9	61	67.1
Art craft Activities	76	83.6	8	8.8	6	6.6	10	11	78	88	22	24.2

As seen table 1, teacher candidates have a negative view on free play, science and maths, and preparation for literacy. Thus, teacher candidates' views on these three activities are investigated in deep.

Table 2. Teacher Candidates' Behaviour on Free Play Activities

	Reasons	F
I enjoy them	I like being with children	24
	I like observing children	16

I am reluctant	It is unproductive	8
	There is no plan	6
	Children are uncontrolled	6
I have difficulty	I do not know what I should do	8
	I do not know what I educationally do	7
I am bored	I have too much free time	38
	I am too much inactive	22
	There is no communication with children	13

As seen table 2, the frequency of teacher candidates' response illustrates that a numerous number of participants chose 'I am bored'. The reason for this are that participants explained as 'I have too much free time' (f=38), 'I am too much inactive' (f=22) and 'There is no communication with children' (f=13).

Findings regarding the second research problem: An investigation to teacher candidates' view on free play activities

Table 3. Teacher Candidates' View on Free Play Activities

	Reasons	f
I think I am profitable	I have a chance to reach information about children	28
	I can understand that children enjoy	24
	I process as planned	13
I do not think I am profitable	School has limited facility	56
	I cannot process educational activities	43
	There is chaos	32
	I do not know what I can do	30
	I cannot plan	22
	I just sit	14

As seen in table 3, teacher candidates' view on free play in terms of 'being profitable or not' were investigated. The frequency of response illustrates that many participants chose 'I do not think I am profitable'. The reason for this is that 'School has limited facility' (f=56), 'I cannot process educational activities' (f=43), 'There is chaos' (f=32).

Table 4. Teacher Candidates' Behaviour to Science and Maths Activities

	Reasons	F
I enjoy them	To attract children	11
	To have educational sides	8
	Children can learn from their experiences	4
I am reluctant	My degree education is inadequate	6
	I do not have enough practice	4
I have difficulty	I do not know what kind of activities I can process	46
	I cannot bespeak to this age level	27

	I do not know enough activities	14
I am bored	To process periodical activities	10
	To have difficulty with explaining reasons	7
	To have difficulty with including children into activities	3

As seen in table 4, it can be seen that according to frequency of response of participants, many of participants chose 'I have difficulty' for processing these activities. The reasons for this are that many participants chose 'I do not know what kind of activities I can process' (f=46), 'I cannot bespeak to this age level' (f=27), 'I do not know enough activities' (f=14).

Findings regarding the third research problem: An investigation to teacher candidates' view on science and maths activities

Table 5. Teacher Candidates' View on Science and Math Activities

	Reasons	f
I think I am profitable	I am able to meet children's concerns	19
	I can feel that children learn from experiments	13
	I can harness my creativity	5
I do not think I am profitable	I do not have enough theoretical knowledge	51
	I cannot transfer my knowledge to practice	32
	I cannot explain the relationship between reasons and results	23
	I have difficulty with bespeaking to this age level	12
	There is no sufficient material	5

As seen in table 5, participants' views on science and maths activities were investigated in terms of 'being profitable or not'. When the frequency levels of responses were examined, it is seen that many of participants chose the answer as 'I do not think I am profitable'. The reasons for this are that the biggest percentage of participants chose 'I do not have enough theoretical knowledge' (f=51), 'I cannot transfer my knowledge to practice' (f=32), 'I cannot explain the relationship between reasons and results' (f=23).

Findings regarding the forth research problem: An investigation to teacher candidates' view on preparation for literacy

Table 6. Teacher Candidates' Behaviours to Preparation for Literacy Activities

	Reasons	f
I enjoy them	There is no the academic side	16
	To be with children	11
I am reluctant	I do not know what I can do (There is always same activities)	13
I have difficulty	Spending time one to one for each child	34
	The classroom is	23
	There is a difficulty with bespeaking to this age level	11
	Being inexperienced	5
	To have difficulty to attract child attention	4

I am bored	To process periodical activities	9
	To have difficulty to attract child attention	5
	I am too much inactive	2

As seen in table 6, the frequency level of response of participants shows that many of participants chose 'I have difficulty'. The reasons for this are that participants explain the reason as 'Spending time one to one for each child' (f=34), 'The classroom is crowded' (f=23), 'there is a difficulty with bespeaking to this age level' (f=11).

Table 7. Teacher Candidates' View on Preparation for Literacy Activities

	Reasons	f
I think I am profitable	I have an improvement in terms of academic knowledge	32
	I receive positive feedback from families	17
I do not think I am profitable	The periodical activities are inadequate	43
	There is no experience in the lessons	24
	We sustain the activities	12
	There is an inadequacy in knowledge	7
	I think it is redundant	4

In table 7, teacher candidates' view on preparation for literacy was examined in terms of 'being profitable or not'. The frequency levels of response of participants illustrates that many of them chose the answer as 'I do not think I am profitable'. The reasons for this are that such participants chose 'The periodical activities are inadequate' (f=51), 'There is no experience in the lessons' (f=32), 'We sustain the activities' (f=23).

DISCUSSION

As it can be seen from above findings section, the teacher candidates have the most difficulty in processing three activities, which are **free play, science and maths, and preparation for literacy activities**. It can be seen that 48.1% teacher candidates are bored during free play activities. The most important reason for this condition is 'having too much free time' during these activities. It is seen that, during the free play activities, teacher candidates think themselves as '**not being profitable**'. The most significant reason for this view is illustrated as '**schools have limited facilities**'

It is obvious that the significant percentage of teacher candidates (53.6%) has difficulty during science and maths activities. The most important reason for this issue that the teacher candidates '**do not know what kind of activities they can process**'. Furthermore, it was seen that the teacher candidates think about themselves as they are not profitable during science and maths activities. The significant reason for this is that teacher candidates '**do not have enough theoretical knowledge**'. This finding of this study confirms Kildan and Pektaş's (2009) research. They also found out in their research that teachers have inadequate knowledge for science activities, so they suggest that teachers need inservice course to improve their knowledge level.

Despite Demiriz (2001) states that science activities in preschool education have an importance to enable children understanding the relationship between objects and issues. It is clearly seen that this study findings indicate that teacher candidates responded

question as 'I cannot explain the relationship between reasons and results'. When the case is considered both this issue and 'inadequacy in knowledge', it can be predicted that teachers are not able to plan activities efficiently. That is why, Wortham (2006) states that while planning activities, teachers should be attentive and consider the techniques and methods for activities. Besides this, the materials for activities should be chosen according to aim because in these activities; children learn relationship between reasons and results for future academic life of children. Tokgöz's (2006) research results also overlap with this study results in this case. Tokgöz (2006) clarifies that the preschool teachers need support for early maths education and such teachers' readiness for early maths education has an effect on their behaviours to teaching maths. Moreover, Tarım and Bulut (2006) state that the quality of current teachers training is not sufficient for improving the quality of maths education.

It is obviously that 46.3% of teacher candidates clarified that they have difficulty with processing activities of preparation for literacy. The most significant reason for this is explained by participants as '**spending time one to one for each child**'. It can be seen from findings that many of teacher candidates do not think they are profitable during these activities. The most significant reason for this is that participants explained as '**the periodical activities are used and are inadequate**'. In this context, Albrecht and Miller (2004) state that teachers have an important role in readiness for reading and writing in early years settings. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) found out in their research that in early years settings, there is no enough written material for activities of preparation for literacy and time for reading books is limited. The research results illustrate that teacher candidates are not able to plan appropriate activities for preparation for literacy according to child level. Yıldızbaşı and Parlakyıldız (2003) have parallel findings in their research. They claim that the preschool teachers have difficulty with distinguishing between literacy education and preparation for literacy, so they are not able to process activities regarding their real aim. In this context, Hulls (2002) claims in the result of his research that early years setting practitioners need in-service support.

SUGGESTIONS

- The research results show that teacher candidates have problems with processing some activities, which are free play, science and maths, and preparation for literacy activities. Thus, in-service courses should be focused on, in particular, these three activities.
- Teaching experience lessons should be controlled by lectures in universities.
- Teaching experience lessons' time should be extended, and these lessons should provide teacher candidates more opportunity to develop themselves.

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