



| Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi |

## Investigation of Preschool Teachers' Art Activity Practices

### Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Sanat Etkinliği Uygulamalarının İncelenmesi<sup>1</sup>

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#### Keywords

1. Preschool period
2. Art activities
3. Early childhood
4. Art education
5. Preschool teachers

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

1. Okul öncesi dönem
2. Sanat etkinlikleri
3. Erken çocukluk
4. Sanat eğitimi
5. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri

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#### Abstract

*Purpose:* The purpose of the study is the investigation of preschool teachers' art activity practices.

*Methodology:* The study is qualitative research conducted with a phenomenological design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with preschool teachers in the study. The study group consists of 15 preschool teachers.

*Findings:* It was found that one-third of the teachers accepted themselves as competent in art activities, and two-thirds accepted themselves as partially competent. While all of the teachers stated that they had semi-structured art activities done, a few teachers stated that they also realized unstructured activities. Within the context of art activities, teachers were identified to do technique-oriented activities (colouring, cutting and sticking, based on artists and artworks, etc.), skills-oriented activities (creativity, fine motor skills and sensory development), and realize environmental arrangements (art centre, school garden and sensory table use). Additionally, teachers were reported to use art materials, natural materials, waste materials, and manipulative materials the most.

*Highlights:* In preschool teacher education undergraduate programs, art education courses should be conducted in a qualified and functional intended for the early childhood period. Preschool teachers and experts working on early childhood arts education should be brought together with online or face-to-face training. Teachers' knowledge of the subject should be strengthened in theory and practice. Teachers should be supported with in-service training about art education in early childhood. Teachers should integrate art and other activities and combine artistic experiences and outdoor learning opportunities.

#### Öz

*Çalışmanın amacı:* Araştırmanın amacı okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin sanat etkinlikleri kapsamında gerçekleştirdikleri uygulamaların incelenmesidir.

*Materyal ve Yöntem:* Çalışma nitel bir araştırma olup, fenomenolojik desende yürütülmüştür. Çalışma grubu 15 okul öncesi öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir.

*Bulgular:* Araştırmada öğretmenlerin üçte birinin sanat etkinliklerinde kendisini yeterli, üçte ikisinin ise kısmen yeterli gördüğü bulunmuştur. Öğretmenlerin tamamı yarı yapılandırılmış sanat etkinlikleri yaptıklarını ifade ederken, birkaç öğretmen yapılandırılmamış etkinlikler de gerçekleştirdiğini belirtmiştir. Öğretmenlerin sanat etkinlikleri uygulamaları kapsamında teknik odaklı (boyama, kesme yapıştırma, sanatçı ve sanat eserinden yola çıkılan vb.), beceri odaklı (yaratıcılık, küçük kas becerileri ve duyu gelişimi) etkinlikler yaptıkları ve ortam düzenlemeleri (sanat merkezi, okul bahçesi ve duyu masası kullanımı) gerçekleştirdikleri tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca öğretmenlerin sanat etkinliklerinde sırasıyla en çok sanatsal materyaller, doğal materyaller, artık materyaller ve manipülatif materyaller kullandıkları bulunmuştur.

*Önemli Vurgular:* Okul öncesi öğretmenliği lisans programlarında sanat eğitimi derslerinin erken çocukluk dönemine yönelik nitelikli ve işlevsel bir şekilde yürütülmesi gerekmektedir. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri ve erken çocukluk sanat eğitimi konusunda çalışan uzmanlar, çevrimiçi veya yüz yüze eğitim ile bir araya getirilmeli ve öğretmenlerin konuyla ilgili mevcut bilgileri teorik ve uygulamalı olarak güçlendirilmelidir. Öğretmenler, erken çocukluk döneminde sanat eğitimi konusunda hizmet içi eğitimlerle desteklenmelidir. Öğretmenler, sanat etkinliklerini diğer etkinliklerle bütünleştirmeli ve sanatsal deneyimler ve açık havada öğrenme fırsatlarını bir araya getirmelidir.

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## INTRODUCTION

Before obtaining ways to transfer their thoughts and feelings via words, children use art to convey their understanding and interpretations of the world (Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2003). Art activities provide vast opportunities for children to detail their ideas, interests, feelings and experiences about the world. Children find symbols to express themselves through art activities and share them with others (Bea, 2004; Korn-Bursztyn, 2002).

Art activities in the preschool period contribute to all children's developmental areas. Through art activities, children's early literacy and school readiness skills increase (Phillips et al., 2010). The use of art materials supports the development of sensory-motor integrity, fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Working together by cooperation and sharing in the art centre contributes to children's social skills development. Talking about art studies and materials supports concept development and enrichment of vocabulary. While children mix colours and textures, observe changes emerging from the combination of different materials and classify materials; their mathematical and scientific skills are supported (Fox & Schirmacher, 2014). Children's use of different materials and techniques in art activities supports their creative potential. Exploring ideas individually or in a group and discussing them with other children and adults provides opportunities for developing communication skills. (Novaković, 2015). In addition, the children's attitudes towards art develop positively when they meet with different artists and works of art in art activities (Kisida et al., 2018). Creating a rich art environment in preschool is essential for developing children's aesthetic awareness, artistic abilities, and critical and creative thinking skills (Cutcher & Boyd, 2018).

Art is one of the critical components in different early childhood approaches and programs worldwide. According to the philosophy of Reggio Emilia approach, which started in Italy, searching for beauty and esthetics is a natural part of humanity and an essential element of Reggio Emilia program (Cutcher, 2013; Vecchi, 2010). According to Malaguzzi (1993), "a child has a hundred languages," and hereunder, children use different symbolic tools for expressing themselves, such as play, dance, drama, painting, sculpture and drawing (cited in Cutcher, 2013). According to the approach that places art at the centre of the curriculum, learning takes place through the use of artistic materials, imagination and self-expression of the child (Cutcher, 2013; Sullivan, 2006). In Reggio Emilia schools, children join in art activities in ateliers. An art teacher called "atelierista" work in cooperation with children and other teachers (Cutcher, 2013). As another approach, Waldorf emerged in Germany and focused on the child's holistic development as a heart-hands-mind. In this approach, art plays a vital role in improving the ability of children to perceive both the internal and external world. Art is essential for the harmonic development of the child's inner life, and art is included in the curriculum. This approach that attracts attention to the fact that children develop sensitivity to colour, line, shape and texture with art aims to develop willpower, emotion, thought and eventually self-consciousness in children (Easton, 1997; Hallam et al., 2016). The significant effect of art on development in the early childhood period was considered while preparing our country's preschool curriculum. While art activities took place among leisure time activities in the Ministry of National Education 1994, 2002 and 2006 programs, art is addressed as a different activity type and a learning centre in the 2013 Preschool Education Program (Gelişli & Yazıcı, 2012; MoNE, 2013). In the program, art activities were defined as opportunities for the child's creativity, imagination, and problem-solving and help the child to know her/himself, her/his own culture and different cultures. The necessity to provide the child opportunities to choose by enabling variety in art activity types and materials was stated (MoNE, 2013). Moreover, besides planning and implementing activities independently, the program supports integrated activities, in which more than one type of activity comes together. Integrating art activities with different activity types enables interdisciplinary connections by ensuring art is associated with different areas of life (Kandır et al., 2016).

Teachers have as much importance as the teaching programs that are prepared for children to encounter quality art practices in the learning environments. According to Brittain (1979), the quality of art experiences provided to children in preschool depends heavily on the teacher's expertise. This is because teachers are the implementers of the education program, who prepare the art materials and determine the art activities (cited in Bea, 2004). It is crucial that the preschool teacher respects the need of the child to do artwork and gives them the necessary time to develop their ideas (Novaković, 2015). Teachers should be equipped in terms of art (Bilir Seyhan & Ocak Karabay, 2018). In order to support children's creativity, the teacher should provide choices instead of giving the same topic and tools, provide different materials and activity types, materials and study environments adequate to children's developmental levels should be given by taking their interests and needs into consideration (Novaković, 2015; Yolcu, 2009). Teachers should consider that children are more interested in open-ended activities that enable them to make independent discoveries rather than unstructured activities that focus on shaping a product based on a model (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018). Additionally, preschool teachers should introduce children to the art world by directly comparing children with artworks in museums and galleries or using quality reproductions (Zupancic & Duh, 2009). In summary, teacher competence, types of art activities, styles of structuring the activities and materials provided to children are the main factors for qualified art activities in the preschool period.

For preschool teachers to be sufficiently equipped for art education, teacher training undergraduate programs have enormous importance. When the teacher training programs, which the Council of Higher Education updated in 1998, 2006 and 2018, were examined, it was seen that various changes were made in the art education course in the preschool teaching undergraduate program over the years. The art education course included as a compulsory course in the fifth semester named "Painting Teaching I" with 3 credits and in the sixth semester named "Painting Teaching II" with 3 credits in the undergraduate program published in 1998 (Council of Higher Education, 1998). On the other hand, in 2006, the fact that the name of the course was changed to "Visual

Arts Education" and took place only in the fifth semester as a required course with 3 credits attracted attention (Council of Higher Education, 2007). Teacher training programs were updated in 2018. In this context, the preschool teacher training program included an art education course as a 3-credit compulsory field education course in the fifth semester. The content of the course under the name of "Art Education in Early Childhood" includes subjects such as the definition and function of art, the definition and importance of creativity and art education in early childhood, children's painting and features according to developmental stages, and preschool art education methods and techniques (Council of Higher Education, 2018a).

Even though art education courses took place in preschool teaching undergraduate programs in the past years; research shows that teachers did not consider the course they took in their undergraduate programs sufficient (Büyükyıldırım, 2018; Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Şahin, 2020). Similarly, in studies conducted with senior preschool teacher candidates, it was found that the candidates took courses related to art education or art, but most of them did not consider these undergraduate courses sufficient for preparing and implementing art activities (Aydoğdu & Ayanoğlu, 2020; Büyükyıldırım, 2018). Teachers mentioned that they did not consider this course they took in undergraduate education sufficient because it was theory-oriented, not intended for preschool children, and the instructor was not an expert in the field, etc. (Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Şahin, 2020). Being unable to take a suitable art education course in undergraduate education may cause preschool teachers not to be competent and equipped at the desired level in planning, implementing and evaluating art activities. In the study conducted by Akyıldız (2020) with 267 preschool teachers, self-efficacy perceptions of teachers in bringing in artistic and aesthetic values to children were not very high, and they were lower in art practices. In our country, the professional development of teachers can be supported via in-service training. As the in-service training of the Ministry of National Education Teacher Training and Development General Directorate between the years 2001-2020 related to art education for preschool teachers are analyzed; courses named "Language of the Painting", "Art Education in Preschool", and "Improving Creativity in Preschool" were seen to have been organized (MoNE, 2021). However, it was seen that these trainings are few and could not reach many teachers.

Studies researching art activities conducted by teachers reveal that teachers mostly do activities such as colouring, paperwork, kneading and collage (Çelik & Yazar, 2009; Ünal, 2018), colouring, tearing/cutting-sticking (Büyükyıldırım, 2018; Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Şahin, 2020), paperwork, three-dimensional studies and colouring (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018), drawing and colouring, paper folding and origami, cutting-sticking and kneading (Bulut, 2020). When materials used in art activities were examined, it was found that teachers mainly used paint and paper (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018), also included natural materials (Çelik & Tuğluk, 2020) and used kneading materials such as play dough, salted ceramic and pastry dough (Çelik & Yazar, 2009). Furthermore, preschool teachers expressed that art activities support children's psychomotor skills and creativity (Bulut, 2020; Gökdemir, 2019; Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011), social-emotional skills, language skills, cognitive skills and self-care skills (Bulut, 2020), fine motor development and handcraft (Gökdemir, 2019).

Although children face learning opportunities that will contribute to their creativity during free play and art activities, the teacher needs to be able to guide them in art activities and have the required qualities to sufficiently contribute to development areas. Preschool teachers who will ensure art education for children should be equipped in terms of skill and knowledge (Bilir Seyhan & Ocak Karabay, 2018). Teachers' lack of knowledge, experience and pedagogics in art education may cause problems in practice (Ulutaş & Ersoy, 2004). From this viewpoint, the research aims to investigate preschool teachers' art activity practices. Previous research investigated the competence of teachers, activities they realized and materials they used. In addition to these points, this study aimed to investigate the structuring types of art activities and the materials used in more detail. In line with these purposes, the question of "What do preschool teachers do within the context of art activities?" is researched.

## METHOD

The research was conducted using phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research defines what individuals experience about a concept or a phenomenon, how they experience it and what those experiences mean for them (Creswell, 2007). The researcher tries to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals, who experienced it (Güçlü, 2019). The phenomenon of this research is art activity. Art activity is one of the activity types that preschool teachers implement in preschool education classes. In the Ministry of National Education 2013 Preschool Education Program, it is stated that art activities can be held in a learning center or as a separate activity during the day and they can be integrated with all other types of activities (MoNE, 2013). In this study, in parallel with this statement, art activity includes all the art practices that teachers perform during the day (planned activities, practices in the learning center, arrangement of the educational environment for art, etc.). Art activity, which is the phenomenon of this research, was examined in detail with the views of preschool teachers.

## Participants

Criterion sampling method among purposive sampling types was used in the research while determining participants. Accumulation of knowledge individuals have regarding a topic may shape their perspectives and experiences about that topic. Because of this reason, teachers participating in this study were selected based on educational status related to art education in early childhood period in preservice and after-service periods, professional experience periods and volunteering for the research. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that the study group should consist of 5-25 individuals in phenomenological studies (cited in Creswell, 2007). Study group of this research includes 15 preschool teachers working in Ankara city center during 2019-2020 academic year. All teachers participating in the study are female and work in state-funded preschool education institutions. While

12 of the teachers work in independent preschools; 3 (T-12, T-14 and T-15) of them work in kindergarten classes incorporated in primary schools. All of the teachers have an art center in their classrooms. Characteristics of the teachers in the study group are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the teachers in the study group**

Code	Professional experience (years)	Educational background	Educational situation about art education
T-1	22	Undergraduate	No
T-2	10	Undergraduate	Yes
T-3	18	Undergraduate	No
T-4	12	Undergraduate	No
T-5	10	Undergraduate	Yes
T-6	10	Undergraduate	No
T-7	10	Undergraduate	Yes
T-8	19	Undergraduate	Yes
T-9	13	Undergraduate	Yes
T-10	20	Associate degree	Yes
T-11	5	Undergraduate	Yes
T-12	1	Undergraduate	Yes
T-13	10	Undergraduate	No
T-14	2	Undergraduate	Yes
T-15	1	Undergraduate	Yes

When the table is examined, professional experience durations of teachers seem to vary between 6-10 years for 5 teachers, 1-5 years for 4 teachers, 16-20 years for 3 teachers and to be over 20 years for one teacher. One of the teachers has an associate degree; while the rest 14 of them have an undergraduate degree. While 10 teachers included in the study group have an experience of art education in preschool; 5 of them do not have any training on this topic.

### Data Collection Tools

Information regarding the type of institution the preschool teachers are working, their educational background, professional experience duration and whether they have educational experience regarding preschool art education or not were obtained via the demographical information form prepared by the researchers.

In phenomenological research, data is collected from people who have experienced the phenomenon and interview is accepted as the main data collection technique (Creswell, 2007). Compatible with the research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted, in order to determine the practices of preschool teachers regarding art activities. Semi-structured interview form consists of five open-ended questions prepared to reveal teachers' experiences regarding art education in preschool, their competence perception about art activities in preschool, structuring types of activities they realize, and what kind of techniques and practices they use within the context of art activities. The researcher occasionally asked some additional questions to the participants during interviews, with the purpose of gathering more detailed information about the experiences and thoughts teachers conveyed.

### Data Collection Process

After the necessary permissions for the research were obtained, the data collection process started. The researcher went to the institution of the participant teachers, explained the purpose of the research and their approval was received through consent forms. Interviews were conducted in a quiet location at the school on a convenient day and time determined by the teacher and the researcher. Interviews were voice recorded. Interviews lasted 25-30 minutes on average.

### Data Analysis

Content analysis with an inductive approach was realized in data analysis compatible with the research design. In the study, Şimşek and Yıldırım's (2016) four-step content analysis method was applied. These steps are (1) data coding, (2) developing themes, (3) organizing code and themes and (4) defining the findings. Interview records were converted into text form by the researchers. Codes were obtained from these texts and codes, sub-themes and themes were identified from the obtained codes. Phrases were used as the smallest unit while conducting content analysis. Frequency distribution is generally used in the use of phrases as the smallest unit (Berg and Lune, 2016). While transforming data into findings, T-1, T-2, ..., T-15 codes were given to teachers, in order to assure the privacy of participants. Reliability processes recommended by Gibbs (2007) were followed for the reliability of the research. While converting voice records into texts, careful controls were completed, codes and data were

compared continuously during coding process and transcoding controls were performed. After the coding controls were completed and it was determined that the data analysis results represented the data set, the inter-coder reliability, which is another reliability strategy of qualitative research, was calculated. The inter-coder reliability of the codes coded by both researchers was calculated according to the Miles and Huberman (1994) formula. Inter-coder reliability was found as 95%.

In the research, peer review strategy, which is among the qualitative research validity strategies, were used. Researchers receive ideas from other researchers in this strategy (Glesne, 2013). After the interview questions were prepared by the researchers, opinions of five experts working in the area of preschool education were taken and then interview questions were finalized. One other qualitative research validity strategy used in the research is rich and detailed description. Researchers use a type of writing that will allow the readers to get in context (Glesne, 2013). In line with this validity strategy, study group was defined in detail, data collection process and data analysis were stated in detail and thoughts of participants were presented with direct quotes.

## FINDINGS

This section includes findings regarding preschool teachers' educational status on art education, their competences about art activities, structuring types of art activities, and their thoughts for techniques, practices and materials used within the context of art activities.

Table 2 shows findings about the educational experience of preschool teachers in the study group regarding art education

**Table 2. Educational experience of preschool teachers regarding art education**

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes	N
Educational experience	Teachers with education	As a course in the undergraduate program	5 (T-2, T-5, T-11, T-12, T-15)
		Through personal interest and research	2 (T-7, T-8)
		Through other courses taken in the undergraduate program	2 (T-10, T-14)
	Teachers without education	Through in-service training	1 (T-9)
	Teachers without education	Did not receive any education.	5 (T-1, T-3, T-4, T-6, T-13)

When Table 2 is analyzed, two sub-themes seem to emerge as "Teachers with education" and "Teachers without education" in the educational experience theme. While 10 teachers participating the research in the "teachers with education" sub-theme mentioned receiving education related to art education; 5 teachers declared receiving no education about art education.

The teacher coded T-11 expressed having taken an art education course in her undergraduate education with the following sentences:

*"I took an art course at university...We reviewed the works of artists, talked about how we will examine these works with children. We talked about materials we can use with children."* T-11

Teacher coded T-15 mentioned taking an art course in her undergraduate education, however did not evaluate the course adequate as follows:

*"I took the course but the instructor was from another faculty. That is, what the instructor told was not intended to children. It contributed me in terms of art but it was not very useful for thinking what I could do with children."* T-15

Teacher coded T-8 expressed the education she received through personal interest and research with the following sentences:

*"...Now if they would say preschool teachers are to branch out as well, I would choose art. Art is my area of interest, an area I like. I did not take a course in the university but I go to exhibitions whenever I have time. I contribute to myself and think what I can do at the classroom with the things I see at the exhibition. For instance, I got interested in art therapy lately; I saw it on the Internet and immediately joined that certificate program. I read lots of resources, do research from the Internet, look at the articles..."* T-8

Teacher coded T-14, who stated to have been informed about art education within the context of an another course she took in her undergraduate education, mentioned her experience as follows:

*"We did not especially take an art course; however, we were occasionally told in other courses we took about what we could do in art activities. For instance, in children literature course, an instructor addressed it a little while we were analyzing the pictures in the books."* T-14

Teacher coded T-9, who stated that she participated an in-service training in which preschool art education took place, conveyed her experience as follows:

*"I have attended an in-service training in a city I used to work. As much as I remember, we were told about materials in art activities and what kinds of activities are done..."* T-9

Teacher coded T-13 indicated not taking any courses related to art education as follows:



*"I remember art and music courses were elective in the university. I had chosen music; I remember taking a music course but not art...I did not have the chance to get training after I became a teacher. I usually follow Orff trainings."* T-13

Findings about the thoughts of preschool teachers regarding their competence for art activities are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Preschool teachers' thoughts regarding their competence for art activities**

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes	N
Teacher competence	Partially competent	Lack of up-to-date knowledge and education about preschool art education	4 (T-6, T-13, T-14, T-15)
		Lack of knowledge about materials	2 (T-2, T-7)
		Art being out of the area of interest	1 (T-10)
		Having problems in planning art activities	1 (T-9)
		Necessity to give importance to school readiness skills	1 (T-4)
	Competent	Having problems in sparing time	1 (T-1)
		Being able to plan effective art activities	3 (T-3, T-11, T-12)
		Has knowledge and ideas adequate for children	1 (T-5)
		Art being an area of interest and being able to observe children effectively	1 (T-8)

When the findings are analyzed, sub-themes of "Partially competent" and "Competent" can be seen under the "Teacher competence" theme. Ten teachers participating in the research stated to find themselves partially competent about art activities, 5 teachers on the other hand stated to find themselves competent.

Teacher coded T-14 in the "partially competent" sub-theme transferred her thoughts as follows:

*"I cannot say I am completely competent. Because we live in a fast changing and developing world. You need to continuously follow modern ideas and novelties about art; there are many things I do not know."* T-14

Teacher coded T-15 expressed why she does not perceive herself completely competent under the "partially competent" sub-theme with the statements below:

*"To be honest I am trying to do my best but I do know I have shortcomings. I think I need more training on this topic...."* T-15

Teacher coded T-7 mentioned having a lack of knowledge about materials with the following sentences:

*"So, of course it is not enough. There is need for continuous improvement. There are points where I do not know how to use the material, or a result different than I expected is achieved when the materials are combined. On that topic, I see by trying and doing."* T-7

Teacher coded T-4 under the "partially competent" sub-theme explained why she did not perceive herself completely competent because she thinks she needs to give more importance to school readiness skills:

*"Frankly, I do not think I am very competent... Because in any way, we need to give priority to how the child holds the pencil. It is caused by the preparation process to primary school, it is caused because of my program but I still try to combine it with an art activity. This is the summary of the situation."* T-4

Teacher coded T-3 under the "competent" sub-theme declared her thoughts with below statements:

*"Yes, I am competent... I make plans in which children meet with writers, artists, painters and participate effectively."* T-3

Teacher coded T-5 conveyed her thoughts about being competent with the statements below:

*"...In this way, of course we need to learn something any moment but at least I think I have ideas and knowledge enough for children right now. Feedback I receive from children during activities supports my competence."* T-5

Teacher coded T-8 declared her thoughts about her competence in art activities with the sentences below:

*"I think I am competent. Why? In my opinion first it is my area of interest, an area I like....On the other hand I observe children very well. My education program is actually them. Yes, we have a program, books, articles in our hands but that field is entirely different. They present very precious things when I observe them. Let me tell a little anecdote, recently one of my children said 'let me draw a crack'. Believe me, it was something I never heard before. Usually there are directions such as draw a house, draw a car and draw a sun. That moment I said to myself, let me try this for the whole class. It attracted the attention of all children, all of them came to the art center saying 'I will draw as well'. I saw how clear creativity is in children..."* T-8

Findings regarding the structuring types of art activities implemented by preschool teachers are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Structuring types of art activities**

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes	N
Structuring type	Semi-structured	Activities which materials are given but instructions are not and original products are produced	11 (T-1, T-2, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-7, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14)
		Activities which materials and instructions are given and original products are produced	6 (T-6, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-15)
	Unstructured	Activities which children are completely free in material selection and activity process	6 (T-1, T-2, T-4, T-5, T-7, T-9)

When the table is analyzed, all preschool teachers participating in the research seem to prefer semi-structured activities; while 6 of them prefer unstructured activities as well.

Teacher coded T-2, who mentioned realizing semi-structured and unstructured activities, delivered her thoughts as follows:

*"I do not give photocopy activities to children. I try to find unstructured activities as much as possible. Children are already trying to produce their own products there using her/his own imagination and creativity. I choose our materials, materials change...Children act again with their own choices and preferences...I want them to improve themselves with available materials and to produce an original product somehow. In the old system there were photocopies. You cannot do art with templates. Art is a product produced as a result of a person's own dreams..."* T-2

Teacher coded T-4 mentioned implementing art activities as both semi-structured and unstructured with the following sentences:

*"Actually, I do not do planned activities for children. I just vary the things, materials in the art center. Honestly I try to put a different thing every day and I have not done a structured activity so far...The child works there with the material she/he wants in a way she/he wants....Sometimes I vary paper types. As the occasion arises I give children straw paper or glossy paper. I give the colorful papers. Other than that I give thick cardboards with for instance a shape on it, the child cuts and glue it and produce something else. I mean other than that, there is not anything I make them do simultaneously one-to-one. They work on art activities as long as they focus and want."* T-4

Teacher coded T-9, who stated to be doing both semi-structured and unstructured practices, expressed her thoughts as follows:

*"Content of art activities is usually like this, often unstructured activities in which they can use original and different materials. Sometimes we give the instructions a little more specific, though. ...For instance, we made children do still life painting with crayons. We asked them to draw not the one they see but the one they imagine ..."* T-9

Findings regarding the techniques used by preschool teachers within the context of art activities and practices they implement are displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5. The practices of preschool teachers within the context of art activities**

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes	N
Art practices	Technique-oriented activities	Painting	5 (T-1, T-6, T-9, T-11, T-14)
		Cutting and sticking	4 (T-1, T-6, T-10, T-14)
		Activities based on artists and artworks	4 (T-3, T-6, T-9, T-11)
		Kneading practices	4 (T-2, T-6, T-11, T-12)
		Free style drawing and painting	2 (T-2, T-3)
		Completion practices	2 (T-5, T-11)
		Three dimensional activities	2 (T-6, T-8)
		Pattern practices	1 (T-11)
		Paper folding techniques	1 (T-5)
		Spraying techniques	1 (T-2)
	Skill-oriented activities	Activities in which children can use their imagination and creativity	8 (T-2, T-5, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-12, T-13, T-14)
		Activities to support development of fine motor skills	4 (T-1, T-10, T-12, T-15)
		Activities that will contribute to sense development	3 (T-7, T-12, T-15)
Environmental arrangements	Art center usage	5 (T-2, T-4, T-5, T-8, T-10)	
	School garden usage	3 (T-2, T-5, T-10)	
	Sensory table usage	1 (T-7)	

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that sub-themes of “Technique-oriented activities”, “Skill-oriented activities” and “Environmental arrangements” have emerged.

Teacher coded T-6, who stated that she does painting, cutting and sticking, kneading, 3-D practices and activities based on artists and artworks within the context of art practices as “Technique-oriented activities”, expressed the practices she does as follows:

*“You see, cutting and sticking, coloring, kneading with play dough, 3-D practices in the classroom...Other than these, I mean recently we studied three artists as part of art activity. We started with Miro. Miro had figures, we started with those figures with children. Afterwards, there is an artist named Alexander Calder, he also uses geometrical shapes. From that we transferred to Picasso. You see, cubic paintings, he draws even the human face geometrically. And we did such practices with children...”* T-6

Teacher coded T-1 delivered the art practices she realizes “Technique-oriented activities” and “Skill-oriented activities” as follows:

*“While having art activities in class, I mostly do activities I believe will have more effect on children. For instance, I take activities, which will contribute their fine motor skills, such as coloring, cutting and sticking...”* T-1

Teacher coded T-12 indicated realizing art practices “Skill-oriented activities”, which will support fine motor and sense development and in which children can use imagination and creativity:

*“I pay attention to making different studies at levels that will support creativity and develop fine motor skills of children. I try to provide opportunities to children such as interpreting objects they use in their daily lives with a different perspective other than their main usage purpose, kneading practices, producing new things by kneading or touching, supporting the development of all senses...”* T-12

Teacher coded T-7 stated she did activities “Skill-oriented activities” that will contribute to the sense development of children and used sensory table “Environmental arrangements” as follows:

*“Activities in which they mostly touch and feel. I pay attention to activities which children do by touching and feeling. We have a sensory table for instance, we use it in activities. These are what come to my mind for now.”* T-7

Teacher coded T-10 was determined to realize practices in all sub-themes. This teacher conveyed her experience and thoughts below:

*“I prepare more of learning centers. Children go to art centers based on their preferences. For this, I locate materials such as watercolor paints, finger paint and dough with which they can work on individually. They get experience with these, but original studies are the ones that definitely improve their creativity. I do cutting studies occasionally for fine motor skill development...Cutting practices are really important in terms of fine motor skill development. Any child who is interested in it goes to that table. We use the garden as well. For instance, we go out to the garden, in the meantime I want them to choose one object in the garden that attracts their attention. We can use that object, which the child brings to class, bird feather, leaves or whatever; we can use it in the art activity.”* T-10

The findings of the materials used by preschool teachers in art activities are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Materials used by preschool teachers in art activities**

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes	N
Materials	Artistic materials	Various paints (watercolor, finger paint, crayon, colored pencil)	7 (T-1, T-2, T-4, T-6, T-9, T-10, T-14)
		Paper types	6 (T-1, T-2, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-9)
		Moldable materials (clay, salted ceramic dough, play dough)	5 (T-2, T-6, T-10, T-11, T-12)
		Droppers	1 (T-2)
		Brushes	1 (T-4)
	Natural materials	Branches, leaves, flowers	5 (T-2, T-4, T-8, T-10, T-11)
		Mod/soil	2 (T-5, T-8)
		Bird feathers	1 (T-10)
	Waste materials	Package (bottle, box, packet)	4 (T-3, T-11, T-13, T-14)
		Used papers	1 (T-11)
	Manipulative materials	Kinetic sand	2 (T-6, T-7)
		Insert-remove toys	1 (T-8)
		Shaving foam	1 (T-7)
	Other	Daily objects	1 (T-12)
		Presentation and slides	1 (T-15)



When the findings in Table 6 related to the materials used by preschool teachers as part of art activities are investigated; it is seen that concepts of "Artistic materials", "Natural materials", "Waste materials", "Manipulative materials" and "Other" sub-themes have emerged.

Teacher coded T-2, who stated to give place to artistic materials and natural materials within the scope of art practices, reflected her thoughts and experiences as follows:

*"...Some days I give them finger paints. Our materials vary. For instance, they can study in the ways they imagine by using watercolor paint or diluted finger paint put in a dropper. Another day we use natural materials. Of course art is not something solely based on paints. We use paper, but as little as possible. ...We obtain paint from the natural materials. For instance, they crush flowers, leaves, all of them and obtain colors on a paper from nature. They are both surprised and enjoy the situation, and a permanent learning occurs. They can of course use play dough. Sometimes we dry some of their products..."* T-2

Teacher coded T-6 mentions about using artistic materials and manipulative materials in art activities as below:

*"I use play dough and kinetic sand for 3-D studies more of course. But for other activities we do with paper, we often use finger paints, crayons and colored pencils..."* T-6

Teacher coded T-11 stated using artistic, natural and waste materials in art activities the following sentences:

*"We use materials such as clay and leaves. We do original studies using salted ceramic dough and used papers. There are also waste materials such as bottles in our activities."* T-11

Teacher coded T-15, who expressed using presentation and slides from the "Other" sub-theme in art activities, delivered her experiences about her practices as follows:

*"I use presentation and slides. Not like showing and making them do it, but for giving them an idea. For instance, if they are going to draw an animal, I prefer to show children its characteristics and real photographs as well..."* T-15

## DISCUSSION

As a result of the study, it was found that only one-third of the teachers took a course on art education in the early childhood period during their undergraduate education. Similar to this result, in another study by Çelik and Tuğluk (2020), while 80% of the preschool teachers stated that they had taken courses on art education during their undergraduate education, it was seen that some of those were different undergraduate courses like Museum Education, Creativity and its Development that are in the curriculum. Although art education is a compulsory course within the undergraduate program offered by the Council of Higher Education, previous studies revealed that some teachers had not taken any course on art education in early childhood (Erkut, 2016; Şahin, 2020). It is thought that this could be a result of the fact that the Art Education in Early Childhood course differs as an elective or a compulsory course in the undergraduate programs of universities. Supporting this thought, a teacher who participated in this study stated that she did not take the art education course because it was an elective together with a music course in her undergraduate program. She had decided to take music instead. The Council of Higher Education updated the art education course as a compulsory course in the fifth semester of the Early Childhood Education Undergraduate Program in 2018. Thus, it is thought that all preschool teacher candidates have taken the "Early Childhood Art Education" course starting from the 2018-2019 academic year. However, the quality of the course and the competency of the instructor teaching it are matters of concern to reach the course's goals (Yıldız & Esen Çoban, 2019). As a matter of fact, in the previous studies, teachers reported that art education courses did not meet their expectations because the courses were more theoretical than practical, the instructors were not experts in their fields, and the content of the course was not suitable for the preschool education level (Büyükyıldırım, 2018; Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Şahin, 2020).

Similarly, a teacher who participated in the present study stated that she had taken the art education course in an undergraduate program. However, the instructor teaching it was appointed outside the education faculty and did not present the course in line with early education. Compared to the other areas in early childhood education, there are fewer experts in the field of art education. Experts from other faculties such as fine arts could present the course from a more theoretical perspective rather than practical and appropriate for preschool education. Considering such cases, with an update by the Council of Higher Education in 2018, it was mentioned that the field courses for teaching the subject should be taught by instructors who have studied at a postgraduate level in the teaching program or who are associate professors (The Council of Higher Education, 2018b). For teachers to be equipped in early childhood art education, they must be field experts who teach this course. The course should have theoretical knowledge and practical examples for preschool education.

The present study shows that only one-third of the teachers consider themselves competent, and the rest consider themselves partially competent. Similar to these findings, a study by Bulut (2020) shows that almost half of the teachers define themselves as partially competent in art and creativity. The ones that stated they considered themselves as partially competent explained this with the lack of current knowledge and education on art education in early childhood, lack of know-how on materials, problems experienced in planning activities, lack of interest, the need to focus on school readiness skills and lack of time. The fact that the

teachers who took part in the study have problems with activity planning and their lack of education can be considered a result of not taking a qualified early childhood arts education course during their undergraduate years; because one of the reasons teachers are experiencing problems in activity planning, and implementation may be their lack of knowledge on the subject (Ulutaş & Ersoy, 2004). Teachers' lack of knowledge about the materials may also cause undesirable outcomes in practice. Materials used in artworks in early education can be definitive in terms of the art process and the quality of work. The compatibility of the materials with each other can affect the children's pleasure from the process and the permanence of the product. For instance, if a sticking material is not chosen correctly, the desired outcome may not be achieved. Therefore, the tools and materials should be chosen well (Ayaydin & Mercin, 2013). When teachers are not competent with materials, the planned art experiences may not go as desired, and children may not enjoy the process.

One of the study's striking findings is that teachers consider themselves not fully competent in art because they are not interested in art, focus on school readiness skills, and struggle to find the time. Artworks can be integrated with all types of activities (math, reading and writing readiness, movement, science etc.) in the curriculum. The Ministry of National Education Preschool Education Program emphasizes various integrated activities that are put together with suitable transitions (MoNE, 2013). Teachers can integrate art, which is not in their interest, with the disciplines they are interested in through integrated activities. Thus, problems in spending time on art can be eliminated. Also, studies show that art experiences support children's school readiness skills and literacy development (Phillips et al., 2010). Thus, teachers can support children's school readiness skills through independent or integrated art experiences.

When structuring types of art activities teachers use are examined, it is seen that all teachers use semi-structured activities while almost one-third of the teachers use unstructured activities. Teachers indicated that they choose the materials or/and instructions to be used in the semi-structured activities. Teachers who also shared that they use unstructured activities also mentioned leaving the material choice and the activation process to the children. Instead of structured and product-oriented activities, focusing on semi-structured and open-ended experiences meet children's learning and discovery needs and may increase children's active participation in the learning process (Çelik & Tuğluk, 2020). Another study supports this view by showing that the level of participation in art experiences in classrooms where an unstructured approach is used is higher than the level of participation in classrooms where a product-oriented approach is used (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018). Teachers' letting children free in their choices through unstructured activities and deciding on instructions and materials through semi-structured activities are valuable. Determining some elements of the learning process by adults in art education is beneficial and necessary for the artistic development of children (Bea, 2004). Allowing children freedom in choices at all times may cause a routine and repetitiveness in art studies (Sharp, 2004). Teachers have a significant role in creating a balance between structuring and freedom for children to express themselves freely (Bilir Seyhan & Ocak Karabay, 2018). Setting up a rich art environment with some limitations (material, instruction etc.) may help create an extensive and appealing learning environment to help children develop their artistic skills and creativity (Cutcher & Boyd, 2018). Some teachers in the study emphasized that they do not include structured activities because they would prefer to give children the opportunity to make choices, they value children's creativity in art, and the structured activities are outdated. The teachers' opinions, who stated that they carried out semi-structured and unstructured activities by emphasizing creativity, may show that these teachers' understanding of structured art activities started to change.

Findings obtained from the art techniques and practices that early childhood teachers use were evaluated in terms of techniques used, skills and environmental arrangement. It was noticed that teachers mostly prefer colouring followed by cutting and sticking, activities based on artists and their work and kneading practices. In parallel with the present study's findings, literature shows teachers often choose coloring, tearing/cutting – sticking activities (Aydoğdu & Ayanoğlu, 2020; Büyükyıldırım, 2018; Çelik & Yazar, 2009; Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Ünal, 2018). While colouring, tearing/cutting – sticking activities are essential in developing fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, they may discourage children artistically when offered (Şahin, 2020). Zupancic and colleagues (2015) stated that colouring activities are frequently used in preschool education institutions due to the ease of use of materials such as coloured pencils and crayons and the children's need and desire to express themselves with colours. That being said, teachers' choosing activities such as tearing/cutting – sticking activities is thought to result from the fact that materials used in these types of activities are easily accessible and economical as well as the preparation time is less, and they can be used in various settings. Another reason for widely using these activities by teachers may be supporting motor skills and practising skills such as holding a pencil and using scissors, thus increasing children's readiness for primary school. Teachers' statement that they also prefer art activities based on artists and artworks as well as kneading along with tearing/cutting –sticking activities has been considered a significant finding in art education. Yolcu (2009) mentioned that while planning art activities, both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work should be included considering children's perception skills can vary. According to Buyurgan and Buyurgan (2012), children should be offered not only drawing experiences, three-dimensional work or work with various materials but also an environment where they can express their opinions and hear about their friends' opinions by being introduced to artists and the work that would gain them an artistic point of view. It is thought that the teachers who stated that they are including these types of activities have more awareness about how art activities should be in the preschool period.

It was revealed from the teachers' statements that they also practised art activities to develop children's skills. When these statements were examined, it was found that teachers implement activities to support children's imagination and creativity, fine motor skills and sensory development. Similarly, in the studies, early childhood educators stated that art experiences foster children's motor skills as well as creativities (Bulut, 2020; Gökdemir, 2019; Özkan & Girgin, 2014; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011).

However, all development areas of children can be supported with art activities in the preschool period (Fox & Schirrmacher, 2014). Through quality art activities planned according to the age and development levels of children, early literacy, communication, mathematics, cooperation, and scientific process skills can be supported, as well as fine motor, creativity and sensory development (Cutcher & Boyd, 2018; Fox & Schirrmacher, 2014; Novaković, 2015; Phillips et al., 2010). In addition, children's self-care skills can be supported by the careful use of materials during art activities. It can be said that teachers should consider the benefits of art activities to children's developmental areas with a more holistic perspective and not limit them to directly related developmental areas such as creativity, fine motor skills and sensory development.

When art activities are examined in terms of environmental arrangements, it is seen that one-third of the teachers use the art centre, one-fifth use the school garden and one teacher uses the sensory table. While all teachers in the study have an art centre in their classroom, only one-third of them stated that they use the centre for art activities is another remarkable outcome of the study. Similar to this finding, in another study by Aysu and Aral (2016) with 16 teachers, only 4 of them were found to use the art centre in their classroom. The art centre is one of the learning centres mentioned in the MoNE 2013 Preschool Education Program. While all of the teachers in the study have an art centre in their classroom, most did not mention the centre. This could be explained as the art centre being set up as an area with shelves and cabinets for art materials (paint, paper etc.) instead of a space where children can spend time.

Similarly, a study by Ramazan and colleagues (2018) shows that all classrooms had art centres with materials related to art, but these areas were not designed for children's use. This finding of the present study and other studies demonstrate that art centres and materials are not of the desired quality or quantity (Aysu & Aral, 2016; Ramazan et al., 2018). The finding that three of the teachers participating in the study mentioned they use the school garden and another one mentioned the sensory table for art experiences show that these four teachers do not limit their art experiences to traditional tabletop activities. Outdoor experiences support children's cognitive, social-emotional and motor development and increase attention, creativity and imagination (Yıldırım & Özyılmaz Akamca, 2017). Teachers need to move art experiences beyond classroom walls more often to increase the quality of the experiences and benefit from the outdoor opportunities.

It is found that teachers in the study mostly use art materials for art experiences. Following art materials, it is found that natural, waste and manipulative materials are also used. Similar to the findings of this study, other studies show that teachers mostly use art materials like paint and paper (Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018) but also include natural materials (Çelik & Tuğluk, 2020). Materials used in art experiences in early childhood are pretty necessary. The variety of materials supports children's concept development and allows them to use different senses. Thus, the learning process can become more interesting for the children while what they have learnt may be more permanent. Natural and art materials enable children to interact with nature (Zembat et al., 2020). Waste materials may activate creativity by allowing children to choose materials themselves (Buyurgan & Buyurgan, 2012; Çetin & Koyuncuoğlu, 2013). In Reggio Emilia's approach, which stands out as one of the early childhood approaches with an art focus, art, natural and waste materials are often used together (Thornton & Brunton, 2009). Teachers' use of natural, manipulative and waste materials and art materials is a positive finding; however, these materials should be included more to support children's conceptual and sensory development and make learning permanent.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the study, it is concluded that art education courses offered within the scope of early childhood education undergraduate programs are not conducted sufficiently and functionally in previous years. The course names Art Education in Early Childhood, which was updated as the compulsory course in the early childhood education undergraduate curriculum in the 2018-2019 academic year, should be instructed by experts in the field. Additionally, the content of the course should include not only art theory and concepts but also artistic developmental aspects of children in early childhood ages and the contribution of art activities to young children's development. The properties of high-quality art activities, techniques, the use of material and the creation of active art centres should also be addressed in the course. In addition, it may be suggested to include subjects such as planning, implementing and evaluating qualified art activities and integrating them with other activities.

It was found that teachers do not consider themselves competent in art education due to a lack of knowledge in art practices. Preschool teachers and experts working on early childhood arts education can be brought together with online or face-to-face training. Teachers' knowledge of the subject can be strengthened in theory and practice. Also, it has been determined that in-service training for art education in the preschool period is quite limited. It may be suggested that teachers should be supported more with in-service training.

Some teachers stated that they did not find themselves fully qualified in art activities because they were not interested in arts; they thought they should give importance to school readiness skills. They had problems allocating time to art activities. It is recommended that teachers implement art activities by integrating them with other types of activities.

It is suggested that art centres in early childhood classrooms should be designed as spaces with tables and chairs and a sufficient amount of quality materials where children can have full access to materials and choose to work independently rather than spaces where art materials are only exhibited and kept. Also, teachers can often use outdoor spaces for art activities and combine art and outdoor learning opportunities.

In this study, the art practices of preschool teachers were investigated according to the teachers' opinions. In future studies, research examining the art practices of teachers can be conducted through observations in the learning environments.

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### Statements of publication ethics

We hereby declare that the study has not unethical issues and that research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

### Researchers' contribution rate

First author conceived of the presented idea. Second author developed the theory and first author collected data. All authors reviewed and analyzed the data. Second author supervised the findings of this work. Both authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript

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The research was produced from the doctoral dissertation of the first author prepared under the consultancy of the second author. Necessary ethics committee approval was obtained with Hacettepe University Senate Ethics Committee's decision dated 29 November 2019, numbered 35853172-900-E.00000880044.

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