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A Study of Anxiety Levels of Children Attending Preschool Institutions According To Teachers' Views

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The goal of this study is to reveal anxiety levels of children attending preschool institutions according to teachers' views, identify any correlation between anxiety levels and demographic features of children and their teachers. Study group of the research comprise 1465 children attending preschool institutions in Ankara province. Study data were collected by means of Personal Data Form and Preschool Children Anxiety Scale- Teacher's Form. The study was designed in survey model, one of the quantitative research methods. Study results conclude that anxiety levels are significantly correlated with children's age. It was also revealed that anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with children's gender, parental educational status, monthly income and family structure. It is revealed that children's anxiety levels are correlated with teachers' educational status; anxiety levels of children whose teachers are graduates of high school are lower while anxiety levels of children whose teachers have master's degree are higher than other children.

Keywords: Anxiety, child, teacher, preschool

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is one of the natural emotions that children feel as they grow up. Children go through various types of anxiety such as separation anxiety, sibling anxiety and school anxiety. There are different definitions of anxiety in literature. Barlow (2002) defines anxiety as a future-related emotion and Le Gall (2012) defines it as an emotion with an indefinite source that involves abstract situations. According to Horney; emotion is the "isolated and helpless emotion of a child in a hostile environment. Moreover, it will not be possible for children to realize themselves if they often encounter inconsistent paternal behavior and are forced to dependence through over-protectives attitude, which will ultimately cause emergence of basic anxiety in children (Geçtan, 1995). According to Eroğlu (2000), anxiety includes dissatisfaction caused by feeling weak in a hostile environment, internal disorders, fear or apprehension and internal reactions shown against any risky situation (Güler, 2016). Based on these definitions, it might be suggested in general terms that anxiety is a disturbing and unpleasant emotional condition that every individual meets in certain periods of their lives.

Anxiety disorders are the mental disorders that are the most prevalent or most likely to occur. Anxiety disorders include a group of situations characterized by excessive or pathological anxiety as a basic disorder of emotional condition (Karaca & Ateş, 2019). A normal level of anxiety might be an effective tool of motivating individuals (Demirsu, 2018). It is also functional in taking measures and developing problem-solving skills in a dangerous situation. For example, being anxious of catching COVID-19 virus in a crowded setting will motivate individuals to be cautious, keep social distance and wear mask. A normal level of anxiety makes people display self-protective, avoidant and problem-solving behaviors (Alisinanoğlu & Ulutaş, 2003). However, anxiety over the normal level might cause various negative effects on individuals. It might cause intolerance, unhappiness, desperateness and dissatisfaction of life while in some people while it might cause nausea, stomach ache, polyuria in some others (Berksun, 2003; Köroğlu, 2004). According to Cüceloğlu (1998), anxiety that affects life quality of individuals also involve negative emotions and high level of anxiety might have negative effect on building social relations.

The preschool period, in which the foundations of personality development are laid and all areas of development are rapid, is extremely important for the development of the child. It is seen that most of the researches on anxiety are conducted for adults, and the existing studies on the younger age group are limited in number even though they have increased in recent years. In addition, some researchers in the literature argue that anxiety problems in children are similar to anxiety problems in adults (Tallis, 2003). Some researchers argue that children and adults should be evaluated differently (Muris, Merckelbach, Schmit, &

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Mayer, 1999). The first setting that children develop themselves after the family are the preschool education institutions. Teacher is undoubtedly the figure that children most interact and model in a preschool education institution (Işık, 2007). Children who observe teachers at school imitate and take them as example. There are findings in literature that indicate that teachers' anxiety status affects children's anxiety levels. There are also studies that reveal different variables affecting children's anxiety levels (Bora & Ünüvar, 2020). This study is important as it deals with teachers' and children's anxiety levels in terms of different variables and reveals the factors that affect anxiety levels of preschool children. Moreover; considering that the time period we are currently going through is defined as "the age of anxiety", it is quite important to out this study and contribute to the literature. In this context, the goal of this study is to identify children's anxiety levels and analyze whether there is a correlation between anxiety levels and teachers' and children's demographic features according to the teachers' views.

RESEARCH DESIGN and METHOD

This section is spared for information on research model, study population, data collection tools and data analysis.

Research Model

The goal of this study is to reveal anxiety levels of children attending preschool institutions according to teachers' views, identify any correlation between anxiety levels and demographic features of children and their teachers. In this context, survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used in the study. Studies that deal with a situation as it is are defined as survey research (Karasar, 2008).

Participants

The sample of the study comprise 1465 children attending preschool education institutions in Ankara province in 2019-2020 educational term. Demographic distribution of children is presented on Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of preschool children

Variables	Categories	f	%
Gender	Girl	741	49,6
	Boy	754	50,4
Age	3 years	147	9,8
	4 years	416	27,8
	5 years	866	57,9
	6 years	66	4,4
Father's Educational Status	Primary School	242	16,2
	High School	573	38,3
	Associates Degree	136	9,1
	Undergraduate	435	29,1
	Postgraduate	109	7,3
Mother's Educational Status	Primary School	269	18,0
	High School	599	40,1
	Associates Degree	164	11,0
	Undergraduate	405	27,1
	Postgraduate	58	3,9
Monthly Income	Below 1.500 TL	156	10,4
	1.501-3.000 TL	587	39,3
	3.001-4.435 TL	376	25,2
	4.436-8.000 TL	316	21,1
	8001 TL and over	60	4,0
Family Type	Nuclear family	1316	88,0
	Extended family	145	9,7
	Single-parent family	34	2,3

According to information on Table 1, 49.6 % of children who participated in the study (n=741) are girls and 50.4 % (n=754) are boys. 9.8 % of children (n=147) are 3 years old, 27.8 % (n=416) 4 years old, 57.9 % (n=866) 5 years old and 4.4 % (n=66) 6 years old. Fathers of 16.2 % of children (n=242) are graduates of primary school, 38.3 % (n=573) high school, 9.1 % (n=136) associates degree, 29.1 % (n=435) undergraduate and 7.3 (n=109) postgraduate. Mothers of 18 % of children (n=269) are graduates of primary school, 40.1 % (n=599) high school, 11 % (n=164) associate degree, 27.1 % (n=405) undergraduate and 3.9 % (n=58) postgraduate. Data related to monthly income of the families of children in the study show that 10.4 (n=156) have a monthly income below 1500 TL, 39.3 % (n=587) 1501-3000 TL, 25.2 % (n=376) 3001-4435 TL, 4 % (n=60) 8001 TL or over. 88.0 % of children (n=1316) live in nuclear families, 9.7 % (n=145) in extended families and 2.3 % (n=34) in single parent families.

Demographic features of teachers of preschool children in the study are presented on Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic distribution of teachers of preschool children

Variables	Categories	f	%
Institution	Kindergarten	742	49,6
	Nursery class	420	28,1
	Private school	333	22,3
Educational Status	High school	108	7,2
	Associates degree	189	12,6
	Undergraduate	1127	75,4
	Postgraduate	71	4,7
Professional experience	0-5 years	307	20,5
	6-10 years	653	43,7
	11-15 years	329	22,0
	16-20 years	95	6,4
	21 years or longer	111	7,4

Table 2 shows that 49.6 % of children (n=742) attend kindergarten, 28.1 % (n=420) nursery class and 22.3 % (333). Information on educational status of their teachers indicate that 7.2 % (n=108) are graduates of high school, 12.6 % (n=189) associates degree, 75.4 (n=1127) undergraduate and 4.7 % (n=71) postgraduate. 20.5 % (n=307) have 0-5 years working experience, 43.7 % (n=653) 6-10 years, 22.0 % (n=329) 11-15 years, 6.4 % (n=95) 16-20 years and 7.4 % (n=111) 21 years or longer working experience.

Data Collection Tools

Study data were collected with Personal Data Form and Preschool Children Anxiety Scale- Teacher's Form in September 2019.

Personal Data Form

Personal data form, designed by authors, was used to obtain data on demographic features of preschool children and their teachers.

Preschool Children Anxiety Scale-Teacher's Form

The scale, used to identify preschool children's anxiety levels by teachers, was developed in 2018 and published in 2021 by Şahin. Literature and similar scales were reviewed while designing the scale. Then, scale items were built with the help of the scale developed by Spence et al (2001) (Şahin, 2020). The items were presented to expert view and subjected to a pre-study. Then the scale was applied to 250 preschool teachers. Exploratory factor analysis was carried out according to the teachers' responses, yielding the result that scale items gathered in one dimension. Factor load values of items were between 0.447 and 0.800, accounting for 48

% of total variance. It was found out that revised item-total correlation coefficients ranged between 0.483 and 0.744 and Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was 0.938. After identification of the scale structure, the scale form consisting of 21 items were re-applied to 260 teachers. Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out according to the responses of the second group of teachers. Every item on the scale had significant t values and factor loads ranged between 0.38 and 0.41 while regression coefficients ranged between 0.14 and 0.39. Model data-fit index confirmed one-dimensioned structure (X^2/sd=1,13; RMSEA=0,023; GFI=0,93; NFI=0,96; CFI=0,99; NNFI=0,99). Reliability of responses obtained from the second study group was found 0.939. In this context, the scale was used in the study as it was understood that it yielded a valid and reliable result (Şahin, 2021). A few of the items of the Preschool Children's Anxiety (Anxiety) Scale Teacher Form are listed below. "He is tense, irritable and restless because of his worries.", "He wants to be comforted even when it is not necessary.", "He is afraid of playing with his peers and participating in their activities."

Teachers of 1465 students attending preschool institutions were asked for their views as part of this study. Anxiety level of children was identified according to the views of teachers. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, calculated to identify the reliability of the responses of teachers to scale items, was found 0.932. In other words, teachers who participated in the study gave reliable responses to the scale items.

Data Analysis

The study began with an evaluation of frequency values in order to check whether there was any missing data in the data set, followed by examination of highest-lowest data of check false data input. Then, anxiety level distribution of preschool children was studied. As the normality test results might be misleading because of the large data set (Çokluk et al., 2014), skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated. Skewness coefficient was found 0.904 (0,063) and kurtosis coefficient 0.853 (0,126). Çokluk et al. (2014) suggest that data set does not deviate excessively when skewness and kurtosis coefficient is found in ±1 range. Another method of analyzing normality distribution is histogram chart. The histogram chart in the figure was drawn for the anxiety level of preschool children.

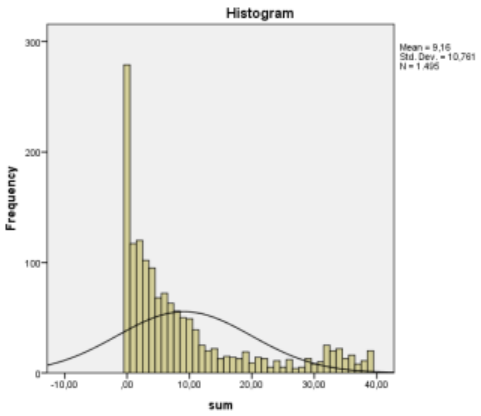

Figure.1 Histogram chart for anxiety levels of preschool children

As seen on Figure 1, anxiety level of children in the study is low in general terms but data distribution does not deviate excessively from the normal value.

As anxiety level of children are distributed normally in the context of gender, t test was carried out in unrelated measurements. In addition to normality hypothesis, homogeneity of variances was tested with Levene as the number of categories in children's other demographic features and teachers' demographic features was over 2. One Way ANOVA was carried out to compare variables that had homogeneous variance and Kruskal Wallis Test in cases that it does not exist. In the tests, p value for significance of results was taken 0.05. Results are presented in tables and interpreted.

FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics

The 21-item scale was filled by teachers in order to identify anxiety level of children who attended preschool institutions. Descriptive statistics were calculated according to the values of children and results were presented in the Table.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Scale	N	Number of items	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{X}$	S_x
Anxiety	1495	21	0,00	39,00	9,16	10,76

Table 3 displays that anxiety level scores of preschool children range between 0.00 and 39.00. Mean score of children's anxiety levels is 9.16 (±10.76).

The scale, applied to identify anxiety levels of preschool children, is rated in 5 Likert-type and includes 21 items scored from 0 to 4. In other words, the lowest score obtainable from the scale is 0 while the highest score is 84. According to the "range/category" equation put forward by Tekin (2002), scores from 0 to 28 points indicate low level of anxiety, 29-56 points moderate and 57-84 points high anxiety. Mean scores related to preschool children's anxiety levels reveal that their anxiety level is quite low.

Comparison of children's anxiety levels in the context of their demographic features

The research involves a study of any difference between children's anxiety levels and their gender, age, parent educational status, monthly income and family type. Results are presented on Table 4-Table 9.

Table 4. Independent t test results in the context of preschool children's gender

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S_x	sd	t	p
Girl	741	8,64	10,31	1493	1,837	0,066
Boy	754	9,67	11,17			

Table 4 displays that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly different based on their gender ($t_{(1493)}$=1,837; p>0,05). In other words, anxiety levels of boys and girls are similar.

Table 5. Kruskal Wallis test results in the context of preschool children's age

Age	N	$\bar{X}$	S_x	Rank $\bar{X}$	sd	X^2	p
3 years	147	6,45	7,45	692,76			
4 years	416	10,31	10,69	811,09	3	14,019	0,003*
5 years	866	8,96	11,06	725,25			
6 years	66	10,52	12,25	771,97			

*p<0,05

Table 5 displays that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their age ($X^2_{(3)}$=14,019; p<0,05). Tamhane test, a multiple comparison test, was carried out to identify the groups between which there were differences. The test results showed that anxiety levels of 3-year-old children (6,45±7,45) were significantly below the anxiety levels 4-year-old children (10,31±10,69), 5-year-old children (8,96±11,06) and 6-year-old children (10,52±12,25).

Table 6. One way variance analysis results in the context of educational status of preschool children's fathers

Father's educational status	N	$\bar{X}$	S_x	sd	F	p
Primary school	242	9,20	11,37	4 (1494)	0,398	0,810
High school	573	9,11	10,69			
Associates degree	136	8,79	10,50			
Undergraduate	435	9,56	11,04			
Postgraduate	109	8,22	8,90			

Table 6 indicates that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their fathers' educational status ($F_{(4,1494)}$=0,398; p>0,05). In other words, anxiety levels of children whose fathers are graduates of primary school, high school or have associate, undergraduate and postgraduate are similar.

Table 7. One-way variance analysis results in the context of educational status of preschool children's mothers

Mother's educational status	N	$\bar{X}$	S_x	sd	F	p
Primary school	269	10,09	11,54			
High school	599	9,23	10,77	4(1494)	0,992	0,411
Associates degree	164	8,09	10,04			
Undergraduate	405	8,96	10,56			
Postgraduate	58	8,59	10,24			

Table 7 indicates that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their mothers' educational status ($F_{(4,1494)}$=0,992; p>0,05). In other words, anxiety levels of children whose mothers are graduates of primary school, high school or have associate, undergraduate and postgraduate are similar.

Table 8. Kruskal Wallis test results in the context of preschool children's family monthly income

Monthly income	N	$\bar{X}$	S_x	Sıra $\bar{X}$	sd	X^2	p
Below 1.500 TL	156	9,97	12,31	751,43			
1.501-3.000 TL	587	9,53	10,87	763,20	4	4,564	0,335
3.001-4.435 TL	376	8,19	9,76	718,79			
4.436-8.000 TL	316	8,84	10,71	738,22			
8001 TL or above	60	11,18	11,40	824,92			

Table 8 indicates that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their family monthly income ($X^2_{(4)}$=4,564; p>0,05). In other words, it was found out that children whose family income was below 1500 TL, 1501-300, 3001-4435, 4436-8000 and 8001 or above were similar.

Table 9. Kruskal Wallis test results in the context of preschool children's family type

Family type	N	$\bar{X}$	S_x	Sıra $\bar{X}$	sd	X^2	p
Nuclear family	1316	8,98	10,63	741,01			
Extended family	145	10,92	11,93	814,10	2	3,800	0,150
Single parent family	34	8,56	10,09	736,65			

Table 9 indicates that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their family type ($X^2_{(2)}$=3,800; p>0,05). It was found out that anxiety levels of children living in nuclear family, extended family and single parent family were similar.

Comparison of children's anxiety levels in the context of their teachers' demographic features

The study involves an analysis of any correlation between anxiety levels of children who attend preschool institutions and their teachers' working institution, educational status and working experience. Results are presented in Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12.

Table 10. Kruskal Wallis test results in the context of institutions that preschool children attend

Institution	N	$\bar{X}$	$S_{\bar{X}}$	Rank	sd	X^2	p
Kindergarten	742	9,70	11,03	766,95			
Nursery class	420	10,15	12,40	752,51	2	5,627	0,060
Private school	333	6,71	6,90	700,08			

Table 10 indicates that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with the preschool institutions that they attend ($X^2_{(2)}$=5,627; p>0,05). In other words, it was found out that anxiety levels of children who attended kindergarten, nursery class and private school were similar.

Table 11. Kruskal Wallis test results in the context of educational status of preschool children's teachers

Teacher's educational status	N	$\bar{X}$	$S_{\bar{X}}$	Rank $\bar{X}$	sd	X^2	p
High school	108	5,66	7,41	584,87			
Associates degree	189	9,81	10,20	803,85	3	34,371	0,000*
Undergraduate degree	1127	9,03	10,85	741,66			
Postgraduate degree	71	14,76	12,80	948,09			

*p<0,05

Table 11 indicates that anxiety levels of children who attend preschool institutions are significantly correlated with their teachers' educational status ($X^2_{(3)}$=34,371; p<0,05). According to Tamhane results, anxiety levels of preschool children whose teachers are graduates of high school (5,66±7,41) are significantly below the anxiety levels of children whose teachers have associate degree (9,81±10,20), undergraduate degree (9,03±10,85) and postgraduate degree (14,76±12,80). Similarly, anxiety levels of children whose teachers have postgraduate degree are significantly over the anxiety levels of other children.

Table 12. Kruskal Wallis test results in the context of working experience of preschool children's teachers

Teacher's working experience	N	$\bar{X}$	$S_{\bar{X}}$	Rank $\bar{X}$	sd	X^2	p
0-5 years	307	8,55	9,50	753,87			
6-10 years	653	9,12	10,54	757,42	4	4,434	0,350
11-15 years	329	9,03	10,61	743,33			
16-20 years	95	11,61	13,37	772,39			
21 years or longer	111	9,36	12,97	669,32			

Table 12 indicates that anxiety levels of preschool children are not significantly correlated with working experience of their teachers ($X^2_{(4)}$=4,434; p>0,05). In other words, anxiety levels of children whose teachers have 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21 years or longer experience are similar.

DISCUSSION

This study identifies the anxiety levels of preschool children according to their teachers' views and analyses whether children's anxiety levels are correlated with children and their teachers' demographic features. The study reveals that anxiety levels of preschool children are quite low according to their teachers' views. It was found out that children's anxiety levels were significantly correlated with their age and anxiety levels of 3 year old children are significantly below the anxiety levels of 4-6 year old children. Similarly, Buluş and Güngör (2010) conclude in their study that anxiety levels increase as children grow. It might be considered that anxiety levels increase with age as children gain knowledge and awareness as they grow. However, Bora and Ünüvar (2020) conclude in their study that children's anxiety levels do not significantly increase with age.

Another finding achieved in this study is that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their gender. In a similar study, Çiftçi Topaloğlu (2013) investigated children's anxiety scored in the context of several variables (gender, parents' jobs, parents' educational status). They concluded that anxiety scores of 4-5 year old children in the study were not significantly correlated with gender. Gülay (2008) also found no significant correlation between children's gender and fearful-anxious behaviours. In a similar study involving 379 children, Buluş and Güngör (2010) analysed the correlation between 5–6-year-old preschool children's perceived anxiety levels and demographic features of these children and their parents. Study results revealed no significant correlation between children's anxiety levels and gender. Contrary to these studies, however, there are studies in literature revealing that preschool children's anxiety levels are correlated with their gender and anxiety levels of girls are significantly higher than boys (Alisinanoğlu & Ulutaş, 2003; Bosquet & Egeland, 2006; Bowen, Offord & Boyle, 1990; Demiriz & Ulutaş, 2003; Paulus, Backes, Sander, Weber & Von Gontard, 2015; Spence, 1998). Differences between the results of these studies might be attributed to the demographic features, cultural values, social gender roles, mothers' anxiety levels of the study participants.

Study findings also reveal that preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their fathers' and mothers' educational status. Similarly, Gülay Ogelman and Çiftçi Topaloğlu (2014) concluded in their study that anxiety scores of 4-5 year old children were not significantly correlated with their parents' educational status. However, Bora and Ünüvar (2020) concluded in their study that children of parents with higher educational level were less anxious. Again, Güngör (2009) found out that children's anxiety was correlated with parents' educational level and higher educational level decreased anxiety in children. There are various studies suggesting that children's anxiety decreases as educational level increases (Alisinanoğlu & Ulutaş, 2003; Beesdo, Knappe & Pine ,2009; Çakıcı, 2006; Gümüş, 1997; Hsu, 2004; Murray, Creswell & Cooper, 2009; Rapee, Schniering & Hudson, 2009). This finding might be attributed to the fact that financial difficulties and future concerns of parents who have lower educational status might cause anxiety in their children.

The study reveals that children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their parents' monthly income and family type. Terzi (2009) achieved a similar finding, suggesting that children's anxiety levels were not significantly correlated to their parents' monthly income. It also concluded that children's anxiety levels were correlated with family type. Contrary to others, however, a study by Girgin (1990) involving families with different socio-economic status concluded that there were significant differences between children's anxiety scores, children in lower socio-economic level were more anxious. In another study overlapping these findings, Aral (1997) concluded that children's anxiety levels were significantly correlated with their socio-economic level. Again, according to Alisinanoğlu and Ulutaş (2003), anxiety levels of children at lower socio-economic level are higher.

It was found out that children's anxiety levels were correlated with their teachers' educational status as anxiety levels of children whose teachers were graduates of primary school were lower while anxiety levels of children whose teachers had a postgraduate degree were higher than other children. Teachers are often second after parents in spending time with children. It might be considered that teachers might cause anxiety in children as they want them to be better and often criticize them. Again, it is possible that teachers who have a postgraduate degree might cause anxiety in children as they often expect more and better performance from children due to a sense of perfection. However, Güngör (2009) concluded that teacher's demographic features are not a significant predictor to children's anxiety levels.

Another finding of the study is that children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with the institutions they attend and their teachers' working experience. In other words, it might be said teachers' number of working years does not affect children's anxiety levels. Güngör (2009) analyzed the correlation between children's anxiety levels according to teacher perception and found out that anxiety levels were not correlated with teachers' job experience. According to Howes (2000), teachers will contribute to the development of teacher-child relations, peer relations and other social relations when they build warm relationships with students, regardless of their institution. A classroom where positive teacher-child relationship is built will decrease children's anxiety levels, affect their social and academic skills and gain confidence and sense of belonging (Myers & Pianta, 2008; Rudasill, Rimm-Kaıfman, Justice & Pence, 2012).

Anxiety, a part of children's normal development often occurs from the first years of life in various forms, various places and various levels. However, emergence of anxiety at unexpected moments, very low and high anxiety might have negative effect on children's developmental fields, particularly social relationships. In this context, it is considered that analysis of preschool children's anxiety levels in the context of children's and teachers' demographic features will contribute to the literature.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies children's anxiety levels according to teachers' views and analyses whether children's anxiety levels correlate with children's and teachers' demographic features. The study is limited to 1465 children attending a pre-school education institution in Ankara and not knowing the past experiences of the child and his teacher. It is concluded in the study that Children's anxiety levels are significantly correlated with their age, anxiety levels of 3 year old children are significantly lower than 4-6 year old children. Children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with their gender, parents' educational status, monthly income and family type. Children's anxiety levels are correlated with their teachers' educational status; students whose teachers are graduates of high school have lower anxiety and students whose teachers have a postgraduate degree have higher anxiety. Preschool children's anxiety levels are not significantly correlated with the preschool institution they attend and their teachers' job experience.

It might be suggested according to the study results that Identify anxiety levels of children in preschool education institutions and provide counselling, hold informative sessions and meeting on anxiety for parents and teachers, analyze children's anxiety levels in the context of different variables.

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