

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Thinking about Visuals: Investigating Classroom Visuals in Turkish Preschools

Naciye Öztürk¹

¹ PhD candidate, Hacettepe University, Early Childhood Education, Ankara/Türkiye
ORCID: [0000-0002-4253-8365](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4253-8365)
E-Mail: nacye231@gmail.com

July 2023
Volume:20
Issue:54
DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1264664

Abstract

Visuals, are significant instructional tools that facilitate children's learning, provide an aesthetic perspective, and contribute to classroom management. This study investigated preschool classroom visuals on walls from the perspective of preschool teachers. The data was collected from 58 preschool teachers working in Ankara by using the Demographic Information Form and Classroom Visuals Questionnaire developed for this study. The data were analyzed with content analysis qualitatively. This study has found that generally, the visuals used in preschool classrooms mainly display children's works, basic concepts, and classroom rules. There are limited visuals representing diversity, especially for people with special needs and most of the teachers use visuals related to diversity and people with special needs during special days and weeks. Finally, the majority of static and non-static visuals are created by the teachers for their classrooms. The findings of this study, which provide a snapshot of classroom visuals from the perspective of preschool teachers, yield interventionists and researchers who work on classroom environments and learning methods, emphasizing the importance of visuals in the development, and learning of young children.

Keywords: Classroom Environment, Visuals, Displays, Diversity

Öz

Citation:
Öztürk, N. (2023). Thinking about visuals: Investigating classroom visuals in Turkish preschools. *OPUS- Journal of Society Research*, 20(54), 458-471.

Çocukların öğrenmesini kolaylaştıran önemli eğitim araçlarından biri olan görseller, çocuklara estetik bir bakış açısı sağlamak ve sınıf yönetimine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, öğretmenlerin görüşlerine göre, okul öncesi sınıfların duvarlardaki görseller incelenmiştir. Veriler, bu çalışma için geliştirilen Demografik Bilgi Formu ve Sınıf Görselleri Formu aracılığı ile Ankara'da çalışan 58 okul öncesi öğretmeninden toplanmıştır. Veriler, içerik analizi ile nitel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, genel olarak okul öncesi sınıflarda kullanılan görsellerin çocuk ürünlerini, temel kavramları ve sınıf kurallarını kapsadığı bulunmuştur. Özellikle özel gereksinimli olan bireyler başta olmak üzere farklılıkları temsil eden görsellerin sınırlı olduğu ve çoğu öğretmenin bu görselleri, belirli gün ve haftalarda kullandıkları görülmüştür. Son olarak, öğretmenlerin büyük bölümü sınıfları için statik ve statik olmayan görselleri kendileri hazırlamaktadır. Öğretmenlerinin bakış açısı ile okul öncesi sınıflardaki görsellere ilişkin bir anlayış sunan bu çalışmanın bulguları, görsellerin küçük çocukların gelişimi ve öğrenmesi için önemine dikkat çekerek, sınıf ortamı ve öğrenme yöntemleri ile ilgili çalışan araştırmacıları ve uygulamacıları yönlendireceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınıf Ortamı, Görseller, Farklılıklar

Introduction

The classroom environment including physical, social, and temporal aspects plays a vital role in the learning and development of preschool children (Division for Early Childhood, 2014) and sends positive, neutral, or negative messages to children through its physical attributes (Yu et al., 2016; Favazza et al., 2017). Positive environments, where children feel psychologically and physically safe, facilitate the children's academic and social skills (Frenzel et al., 2007; Sandilos et al., 2017) and promote respect, empathy, and positive relationships among children (Brody & Roach, 2012). The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes the "environment as the third teacher."; therefore, teachers should consider all aspects of the classroom environment more critically, including the visuals, display boards, and classroom aesthetics (Gandini, 1998).

There are diverse types of displays or bulletin boards as a part of classroom environment in almost every preschool classroom, and they are used for the display of visuals and decoration (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972). Visuals play a critical role in shaping the emotional, social, and physical environment of the preschool classroom. Based on the Learning Theory, visuals create an environment where teaching and conflicts occur (Skeet Creekmore, 1987). The visuals are not a separate system integrated into the learning environment and are a natural part of most preschool classrooms (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972). Classroom visuals, also known as displays, refer to various types of materials and visual aids including posters, maps, pictures, charts, diagrams, and others that display around the classroom environment (Almeda et al., 2014). Some visuals are children's works, classroom management, and themes being worked on related to visuals in preschool classrooms (Gayle-Evans, 2004). The visuals could be placed on a wall, cabinet, table, windows, doors, or a combination of them (Skeet Creekmore, 1987; Prescott, 2000); and they should be presented at children's eye level (NAEYC, 1998). The visuals have advantages such as flexibility and reliability and integrate easily into the learning process, and they are accepted as economic (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972) as with some

practical tips (e.g., using neutral colors), they could be easily created (Prescott, 2000).

Visuals are utilized to teach a variety of subjects in an interdisciplinary and cross-curricular way, like modern tools (Sanz et al., 2019). In line with Sanz, (2019), the three purposes of the visuals are a) educational, which refers to transmitting values such as appropriate behaviors and hygiene; b) curricular, which is linked to academic contents; c) comfort-generating which focuses on children's well-being and their comfort through classroom aesthetics. That is, preschool teachers could use the visuals as an instructional tool, gathering children's attention, classroom decoration or daily aesthetic (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972; Prescott, 2000; Sanz et al., 2019), stimulating children's imagination (Prescott, 2000), regulate children's behaviors with displaying classroom rules (Simonsen, et al., 2008), pedagogical documentation (Şahin, et al., 2022), and representing diversity such as different races, cultures, ethnic groups, and also people with special needs (Prescott, 2000; Gayle-Evans, 2004; Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017). Finally, if they are carefully and effectively planned, visuals offer children the opportunity to engage with different educational materials independently (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972).

Classroom visuals are considered to be very important not only in preschools but also at all levels of education because visuals possess an inherent and immeasurable communication power (Sanz et al., 2019). Children exhibit a powerful emotional response to visuals and express their attitudes toward them with clarity even if they could not remember the content (Collingford, 1978). There is some evidence to suggest that when classroom visuals are placed by the notion of environmental engineering for enhancement of learning, they might affect children's attention even for children with special needs (Skeet Creekmore, 1987), task performance, and learning outcomes (Harmon et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2014; Barrett et al., 2013; Barrett et al., 2015; Godwin et al., 2022). For example, word walls as a literacy tool enhance vocabulary learning and word knowledge in preschool, middle, and secondary school classrooms (Harmon et al., 2009; Wingate, 2014). Concerning children's attention, young children

often find themselves in visual environments filled with potential distractions, including too much colorful and visually stimulating displays (Skeet Creekmore, 1987; Fisher et al., 2014; Hanley et al., 2017). According to Skeet Creekmore (1997)'s study, using relevant and uncluttered visuals facilitates learning, whereas over-stimulation led to an increase in "off-task" behaviors and misbehaviors, ultimately hindering learning.

Teachers are encouraged to step back and critically examine the quality and quantity of commercial materials on their walls to determine whether they contribute to children's learning or whether they ultimately silence children (Tarr, 2004). Otherwise, according to existent literature, teachers looking for methods to offer children independent learning opportunities have almost neglected the visuals, and children are only required to passively observe them (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972). Moreover, visuals, regardless of their academic nature, are not used as effective instructional tools (Collingford, 1978) and, are frequently not related to the current learning process or academic topics (Almeda et al., 2014). Teachers put and put the visuals on the walls (Prescott, 2000), but they neglect the visuals as an instructional tool (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972). Sanz, et al., (2019), investigated the visual cultures of three schools including preschool classrooms and elementary classrooms while observing the visuals' function in Spain. They found that visuals are rarely used in children's learning and have numerous artistic and aesthetic weaknesses such as using pre-printed educational visuals and creating few visuals by teachers and children.

Representation of Individual Differences in Classroom Visuals

Children realize the differences before identifying the similarities (Derman-Sparks, 1989). Therefore, teachers should enhance anti-bias education in early childhood settings (Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017) to address human diversity, prejudices, bias, and injustices that affect children (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). This could be achieved through the creation of inclusive environments that promote diversity (Lin et al.,

2008; Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017). The concept of "representation" in schools and classrooms refers to the depiction of differences in various forms, such as books, visuals, play materials, language (sign language or Braille), curriculum, and school programs (Nikolarai et al 2005; Favazza et al., 2017). The classrooms, as a primary socializing environment, should provide appropriate opportunities for children to understand the similarities and differences regarding culture, disability, culture, and ethnicity; then, children notice that people are just different not unique (Gayle-Evans, 2004; Prescott, 2000). The classroom visuals are effective material to represent diversity and create an inclusive environment, including people from different races, cultures, ethnic groups, and people with special needs (Gayle-Evans, 2004; Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017). This might promote awareness, acceptance, and inclusiveness, and create a welcoming environment for all children (Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017; Ostrosky, et al., 2015).

Regarding the representation of diversities in classroom visuals, most teachers do not use visuals to display diversity related to age, gender, ethnic cultures, and people with special needs (Gayle-Evans, 2004). They share them on special days (Favazza et al., 2017), are uncomfortable and unwilling to discuss differences, and do not recognize the significance of talking about diverse groups (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Manning, 2000; Gayle-Evans, 2004). A significant study by Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello (2017) investigated the visuals on the walls in terms of gender, age, disability, space, clothing, type of character, and activity level. The findings show that the non-existence body of diversity in the classroom visuals are not contributing to children's understanding of diversity issues like age and disability (Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017).

Visuals are rarely investigated as resources ([Errázuriz & Portales](#), 2018), although classroom visuals displayed on the walls play a considerable role in the learning processes, anti-bias education, and inclusion and send powerful messages. These are also emphasized on web pages designed for

teachers to find and create resources on visuals (e.g. <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/displaying-student-work-2/>; <https://www.teachstarter.com/us/resource-type/bulletin-board-displays/>; <https://www.earlylearninghq.org.uk/earlylearninghq-blog/the-advantages-of-classroom-displays/>).

Considering all this evidence, it seems that visuals are critical in preschool classrooms, and they should be investigated deeply. There are some studies about visuals in Türkiye and their content related to visual arts (e.g., Avcı & Sağsöz, 2018; Özkan & Girdin, 2014), visual perceptions (e.g., Akaroğlu & Dereli, 2012), and visual literacy (e.g., Alpay & Okur, 2021). Therefore, it could be said that no studies have yet directly investigated the preschool classroom visual environment and representation of diversities in classroom visuals in Türkiye. By considering teachers' decisions regarding the visuals in preschool classrooms more systematically, we could gain insights into which overall choices have positive effects, and potentially create visual design patterns that most effectively foster an inclusive learning environment. There are two primary aims of this study: 1) To investigate preschool classroom visuals on walls and 2) To ascertain the representation of diversity in classroom visuals on walls.

Method

The current study carried out the basic qualitative research design, which is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the method and the study's aim to explore individual experiences and the meanings attributed to them by the participants (Creswell, 2015; Merriam, 2013; Willig, 2013). The focus of this study was to explore visuals in preschool classrooms based on the experiences and perspectives of preschool teachers.

Participants

The participants of the study consist of 58 preschool teachers working in the province of Ankara. Considering that the principles of being preschool teachers in Türkiye are the norm, it is supposed that there are no significant differences regarding their characteristics among preschool

teachers. Therefore, the participants of this study might represent the Ankara case. The demographic information about the 58 preschool teachers and the characteristics of children with individual differences in their classrooms is included in Table 1.

The largest 67,2% of participants have bachelor's degrees and 81% of teachers are working in public preschools. 44,8% of them are working with preschool children aged 60 months. Their professional experience years range from 1 to 31 and among the participants, there is only one male teacher. In the classroom of 74% of teachers, there are children with individual differences, and these differences are presented in Table 1. According to 51,7% of teachers, there are children without any diagnoses but with different characteristics from their peers in their classrooms.

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form

This form was used to gather information about the participant teachers and children in their classrooms, including teachers' gender, age, education level, professional experience, type of school as well as characteristics of children with individual differences in teachers' classrooms.

Classroom Visuals Questionnaire (CVQ)

The researcher developed a questionnaire to investigate visuals in the preschool classroom environment for this study. Questionnaires are self-report data collection instruments filled out by the participants and could be used to collect qualitative, quantitative, and mixed data (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the teachers and characteristics of children with individual differences

		N	%
Type of school	Public	47	81
	Private	11	19
Gender	Women	57	98,3
	Man	1	1,7
Education	Associate degree	7	12
	Bachelor's degree	39	67,2
	Master's degree	12	20,7
The working age group of children	36 months	6	10,3
	48 months	10	17,2
	60 months	26	44,8
	72 months	6	10,3
	Mix ages	10	17,2
Teachers' age	X 34	SD 7,4	Range 21-52
Teachers' years of professional experience	10,5	6,9	1-31
		N	%
Characteristics of children with individual differences in the classrooms (according to teachers)	Children without any diagnoses but with different characteristics from their peers	30	51,7
	Children with special needs	21	36,2
	Refugee children	10	17,2
	Children with different mother tongues	6	10,3
	Children from different ethnicities	3	5,2

The researchers developed the CVQ following the principles stated by Johnson and Christensen (2014). It could be seen in Figure 1 that the questionnaire is constructed in four steps. Firstly, the draft questions were written regarding the research objectives and conceptual framework. Then, expert opinions were received, and the questionnaire was revised based on the feedback. Finally, the pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted with 10 teachers on the Web and then the questionnaire was finalized.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected between December 2022 – January 2023 in two months. Firstly, researchers transposed the questions to the Web and got the link to the questionnaire invitation. Then, the questionnaire link was sent to the preschool teachers with snowball sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Volunteer teachers visit a Web site and fill out the self-administered questions. Thanks to the Web, contingency questions could be

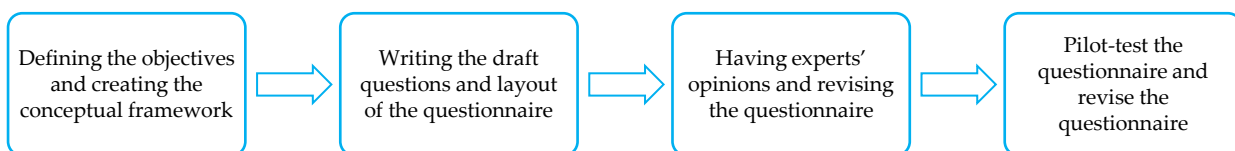


Figure 1. The Development Process of the Questionnaire

The CVQ includes open-ended, close-ended, and contingency questions and consists of three parts which are a) the areas where the visuals are displaced, b) the characteristics of the visuals, and c) how the visuals are used.

programmed to take place on automatic, and teachers did not see the skipped questions (Fowler, Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The data were analyzed with content analysis qualitatively using MAXQDA (Creswell, 2015). The author read and code all data regarding the classroom visuals'

literature, research questions, and the research design. After that, the codes were brought together into themes and named meaningfully and clearly (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, the codes and themes were presented as figures to be reader friendly for the reporting.

Trustworthiness

The author and an expert specialized in special education and early childhood education independently analyzed the data. The author and an expert discussed, organized, and revised the themes, sub-themes, and codes while analyzing the data for trustworthiness (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Moreover, throughout the data analysis process, the researcher reviewed the data

multiple times to clarify the codes within the data (Creswell, 2015). Biases were monitored by considering alternative explanations in peer debriefing meetings, and detailed descriptions of the development of the questionnaire, data collection process, and analysis were provided for transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Findings

The results of the study are presented following the three sections a) the availability of the areas for the visuals, b) the types of the visuals, and c) using the visuals. The analysis of the close-ended and open-ended questions was integrated and presented visually. The figures include the sub-themes and codes. The numbers in parentheses are the frequency of the teachers in the figures.

The availability of the areas for the visuals

Teachers shared their views on the areas where the visuals are displaced. They mentioned the size of the area, its practicality, and its appropriateness for children (Figure 2).

Almost half of the teachers pointed out that the size of the areas is not enough for educational practices. One teacher stated that *"I don't have enough area. The existing areas are not appropriate"* (T47). Some of them specified that the areas are not at children's eye level. A teacher (T10) expressed that *"maybe it doesn't work well enough because the boards are higher than the children's eye level."*

Finally, a group of teachers said that the area is not practical for placing any kind of visuals. One teacher (T55) pointed out that *"Boards are high areas,*

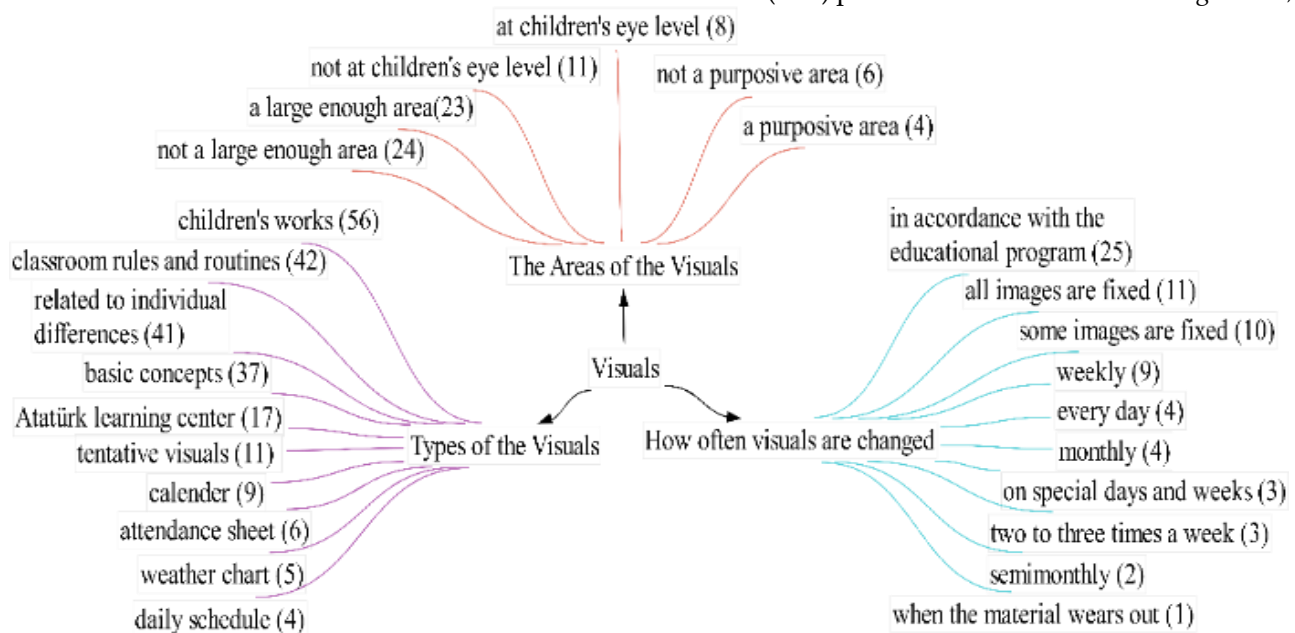


Figure 2. The Areas, Types, and Frequency of Changing the Visuals

and they are useless. Kids are not tall enough to use them properly.”.

change the visual materials and most of them change the visuals in line with the educational program. A teacher stated that “There are images

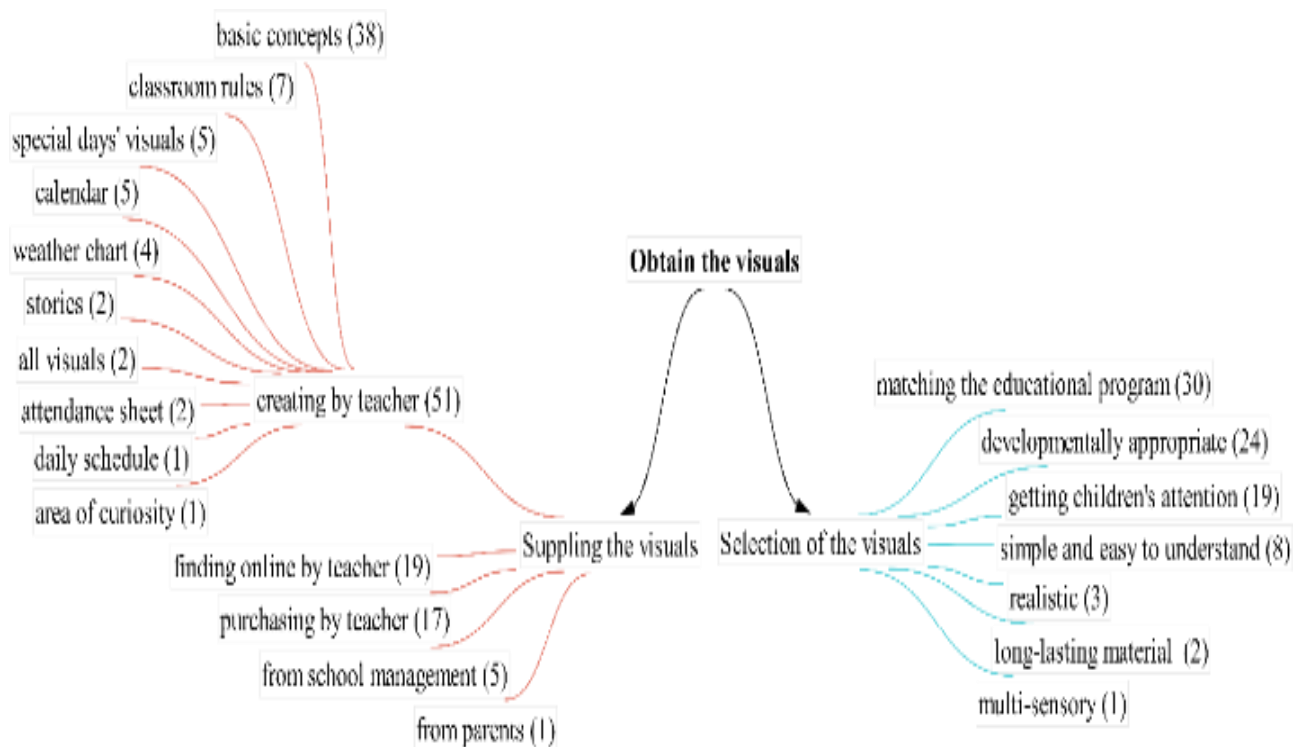


Figure 3. How Teachers Obtain the Visuals

The Types of visuals

Participant teachers listed the visuals in their classrooms. It could be seen in Figure 2 that basically, four groups of visuals are presented on the preschool walls; children’s works, the classroom rules and routines, and basic concepts related to the national program and individual differences. For example, one teacher (T31) expressed that “There are visuals related to the concepts included in the monthly plan.” Genders and physical characteristics of individuals are the most represented, whilst special needs and unique abilities are the least presented in these visuals.

One teacher (T2) mentioned that: “Children in wheelchairs, blind children, glasses, and walking sticks, etc., who seem to be disabled.” Several teachers noted visuals related to the characteristics of individuals and the tools such as glasses, canes, walkers, and culturally specific clothes reflecting the individual differences presented on the walls of their classrooms. Teachers specified how often they

that I change when the subject changes.” (T23). A couple of teachers have indicated that they regularly change their classroom visuals (e.g., weekly, monthly, semimonthly). A teacher (T40) shared that “I take care to hang a new poster every month while refreshing the bulletin board weekly.” A few teachers pointed out that they never changed the visuals, meaning these visuals are static. To illustrate, I haven’t changed anything.” (T11). Only one teacher (T59) specified that she changes the visuals when the materials wear out.

Using the visuals

Obtain the visuals

Teachers shared how they select and supply the visuals Figure 3. The majority of teachers follow the educational program and make a point of being developmentally appropriate while selecting the classroom visuals. One teacher stated that “I pay attention to whether simplicity and complexity match the children’s developmental level.” (T2). 19 of them stated that they are selecting visuals that can attract

children's attention. For example, "I am making an effort to ensure that the visuals are attention-grabbing for children." (T40). Teachers select visuals that are easy to understand (eight teachers) and visuals created with long-lasting materials (two teachers). Only one teacher (T26) pays attention to the character of multi-sensory (Figure 3).

process and facilitate children's learning. For example, one teacher noted that "I use visuals while teaching new concepts during the activity." (T52). The other teacher's purpose is to explore the children's interests through visuals. She said: "I use the wall of interest to determine themes. I work on themes that are of children's interest and it is more effective." (T38).

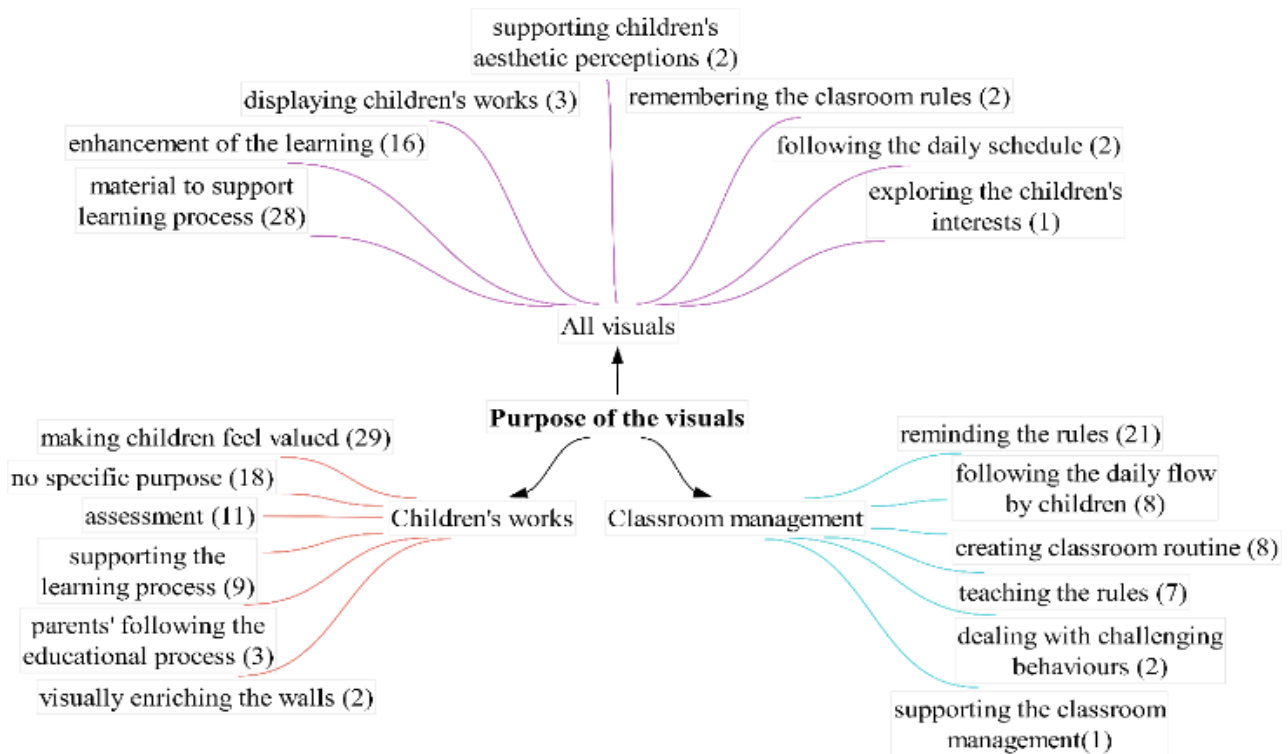


Figure 4. Teachers' Purpose of Displaying the Visuals

As to how teachers supply the visuals for their classrooms, most of them reported that they create visuals about basic concepts regarding the educational program. One teacher shared that "I create the visuals with waste materials considering the learning objectives, themes, and weekly bulletin" (T16). Some teachers find the visuals on the internet and print out them while some of them purchase the visuals from stationery. One teacher stated that "I get it from other teachers' posts on the internet and social media." (T32). Only one teacher gets support from parents for supplying the visuals.

Purpose of the visuals

Responding to the question of the CVQ related to what purposes the teacher uses the visuals. (Figure 4). The majority of teachers stated that all visuals in the classroom are used to support the learning

The other purposes of the visuals varied based on the types of the visuals, such as children's works and visuals regarding classroom management. For teachers, the main reason for displaying children's work is to make children feel valued. A teacher expressed that "I display it to show that I value their works and that each of their works is beautiful in its own way." (T38). On the other hand, a group of teachers does not have any specific purpose to display children's work. In addition, approximately 90% of the teachers use visuals including classroom rules, classroom routines, challenging behaviors, and daily routines for classroom management purposes. For example, one teacher explains the visuals related to classroom rules and routines "I use it to remind children about the rules and our daily routine.....and they talk about their routines by looking at the visuals." (T30).

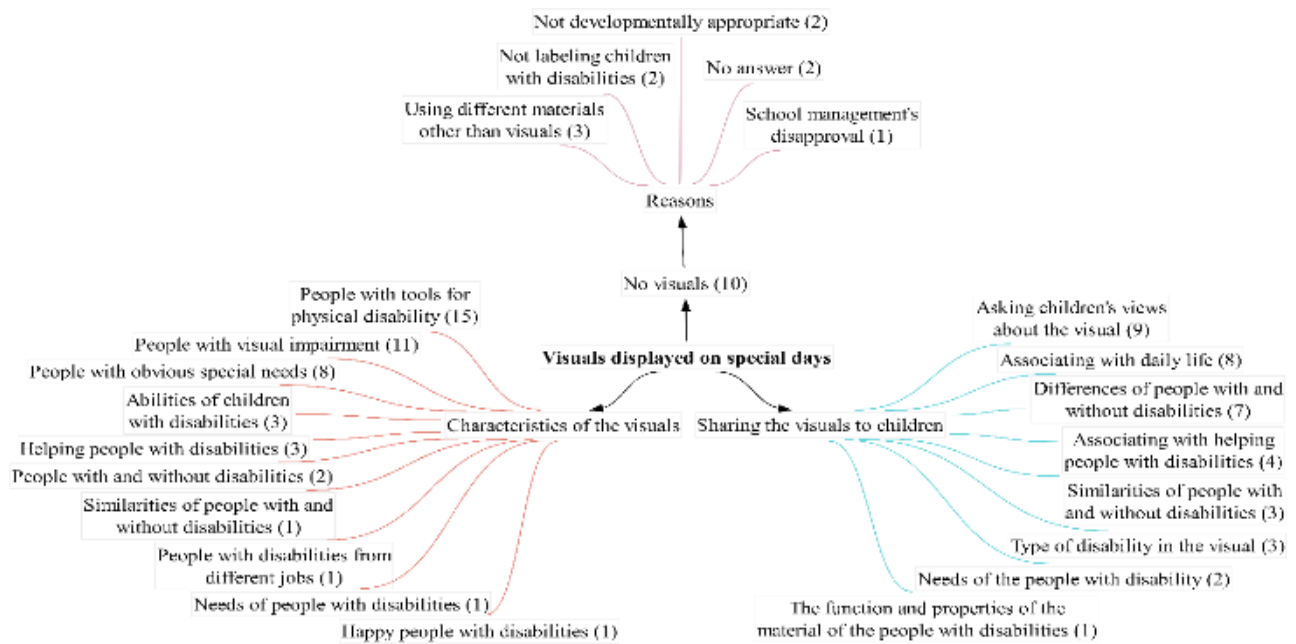


Figure 5. Visuals Displayed on Special Days to Aware People with Special Needs

Visuals displayed on special days

The teachers mentioned the visuals represented on special days related to people with special needs such as International Day of Persons with Disabilities and Disability Week which are accepted as important days for increasing the awareness of children pertinent to individuals with special needs and their involvement in the communities. Figure 5 shows that 48 teachers display visuals representing individual differences on special days. Most of them represent mostly visuals including people with tools for physical disability and people with visual impairment. One teacher (T58) mentioned "...visuals of people with different special needs such as individuals in a wheelchair, with a cane, or with crutches..." Visuals with differences and similarities of people with and without special needs are the least on special days. One teacher explained the visuals as "Images describing that individuals with special needs are just like us." (T37).

A few teachers mentioned that they ask children's views about the visuals and eight of them make a connection between visuals and daily life while sharing the related visuals with children. One teacher (T30) indicated that "I am asking about the existence of people with special needs in their

immediate surroundings as they see in the image."

A few teachers make differences between people with and without special needs a current issue and bring up similarities while sharing the visuals with children. For example, a teacher expressed that "Children look through the images. I want them to describe the similar and different characteristics of the person from themselves they see. Then, I emphasize that we are different but the same." (T1).

A handful of teachers noted that visuals representing individual differences are not displayed on special days since they believe that the visuals should not be used for labeling children with special needs and that commercial ones are not developmentally appropriate. One teacher pointed out that "I don't only display on those days. Just like I display other visuals, I display visuals related to children with special needs. I believe that children with special needs should be at the forefront of every child every day, not on special days. I think that the activities on these days cause segregation." (T13).

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study offers a snapshot and initial exploration from the perspective of preschool

teachers regarding the visuals displayed on preschool classroom walls and the diversity of these visuals in Türkiye. The findings showed that the visuals hanging on the walls in preschool classrooms mainly focused on children's works, basic concepts, and classroom management issues. This is in accord with a study indicating that bulletin boards were used to exhibit children's work, current themes, or visuals related to classroom management (Gayle-Evans, 2004). According to the Turkish literature, visuals are used for various purposes by teachers, for example, Karabay and Asi (2015) indicated that one of the methods for teachers to teach rules to children is to use visual representations of the rules and remind them in Türkiye. Moreover, in their review regarding classroom management in preschool classrooms, Meran and Sucoğlu (2022) mentioned that preschool teachers express their behavioral expectations to children by using visuals indicating classroom rules and routines.

The current study indicates that there are no visuals that include early reading, technology, geography, notice boards (e.g., emergency information, procedures, menus), aesthetics, interactive displays, pedagogical documentation, etc. in the preschool environment. The reason for this may be the lack of awareness and skills among teachers regarding which types of visuals should be present and used in the classroom, and how to effectively use visuals. However, the classroom visuals both educate and engage the children while providing valuable information and aesthetic experience (Prescott, 2000; Errázuriz & Portales, 2018). Based on the related literature, it becomes evident that it is important for preschool teachers to use visuals with various characteristics in their classrooms (Gayle-Evans, 2004; Sanz, 2019). By acquiring knowledge and experience in this area, they can effectively use visuals to enhance children's learning (Hollestelle & Kelly, 1972; Skeet Creekmore, 1987). There is, therefore, greater efforts are needed to ensure the diversity of types of visuals by preschool teachers.

Responses to the question related to types of visuals revealed that limited visuals are showing individual differences, especially for people with special needs in Turkish preschool classrooms. These results reflect those of Martínez-Bello and

Martínez-Bello (2017) who also found that the bodies depicted in the visuals of preschool classrooms are shown wearing regular clothing and invisibility of individuals with special needs. It is crucial for teachers to offer materials like different appearances, clothing, language, thoughts, or eating habits so, children could actively participate and meet diversity for successful inclusion (Midobuche, 1999; Manning, 2000; Salmon & Akaran, 2001; Gayle-Evans, 2004). Additionally, visual representation on the walls of classrooms could play a role in fostering acceptance of differences among children (Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2017), and limited representation of children with different characteristics in classroom materials can lead them to feel alienated (UNESCO, 2020). In this study, most of the teachers use visuals related to individual differences and people with special needs for a short period during special days and weeks. A possible explanation for this might be that teachers follow the national curriculum to create their educational program including a list of special days and weeks such as Disability Week and Autism Awareness Day aiming to increase awareness regarding people with special needs (Ministry of National Education, 2013). On the other hand, a small number of our teachers do not display visuals on special days related to special needs. These teachers might be uncomfortable and unwilling to discuss individual differences and they do not recognize the importance of talking about diverse groups (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Manning, 2000; Gayle-Evans, 2004). Moreover, as noted in previous research, teachers express a lack of knowledge regarding how to represent children with special needs in the classroom (Yu et al., 2016).

Eleven teachers use only static visuals hanging on the walls throughout the year, and the other ten teachers have both static and dynamic / non-static visuals in their classrooms. The frequency of changing visuals on walls and bulletin boards in the classroom directly impacts children's learning and engagement (Almeda et al., 2014). Keeping visuals current and captivating fosters a positive educational environment because worn-out visuals send a message to children that these visuals are not critical (Prescott, 2000). Based on the

finding of this study, it is believed that about half of the participating teachers might be unaware of the importance of using dynamic visuals instead of static ones in their classrooms for children's learning. It is therefore likely that refreshing the visuals, checking the visuals for damage, and evaluating whether the children's needs and what they have learned is suitable for the subject/concepts should be teachers' agenda.

Most participant teachers express that visuals facilitate children's learning, some teachers have reported that they do not use visuals for a specific purpose or do not want to have them in their classrooms due to factors such as visuals distracting children's attention, and lack of suitable areas for visuals in their classrooms. It seems that these findings may be due to teachers not being aware of the importance of visuals and not knowing how to use visuals effectively. On the other hand, many teachers have stated that they create the visuals themselves because of the limited budget for purchasing commercially available visuals on the market, whereas some of them reported that they are not able to prepare the visuals while paying attention to children. According to Prescott (2000), teachers could create attractive and effective visuals with enthusiasm, imagination, and practical guidance. However, when the visuals are not esthetically appropriate for the children, they cause a waste of time and money, and the expected benefits from the visuals cannot be achieved. According to Hollestelle and Kelly (1972), visuals can provide children with the chance to interact with various educational materials on their own, but this is only possible if they are planned, and used carefully and effectively. However, the results of this study indicate that a significant number of teachers use visuals only as material that contributes to the learning process only. It seems possible that visuals are not being effectively used as qualified instructional tools in preschool classrooms and teachers seem to lack knowledge on the benefits of visuals on children's behaviors and learning and how to use visuals potently.

The findings of this study provide a first look from the perspective of preschool teachers in the preschool visual environment, using classroom

visuals, and the representation of diversities in preschool settings. This study's findings could be used to develop targeted interventions aimed at the professional development of teachers. These should emphasize the advantages of visuals, the presence of visuals in the classroom within the framework of developmentally appropriate practices for children, and how to use visuals effectively as instructional and assessment tools. Furthermore, schools should provide teachers with visuals that have the necessary and appropriate aesthetic features. Accordingly, it is believed that children's attention will increase, their learning will be facilitated, their off-task behaviors will decrease, and teachers' classroom management will improve.

Limitations and Future Studies

It is important to note that this study had several limitations and has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. *Firstly*, the data consists of self-report statements made by the teachers, so we only know what the teachers have written about the classroom visuals, and, unfortunately, the study did not include the effectiveness of visuals on children's learning. We found that classroom visuals are mostly related to the educational program and teachers use them in the learning process. Further research should be carried out to investigate what actually happens in the classroom environment with observational studies and exploring how the visual content, size, location of the visuals, and organization of classroom walls affect children's learning could be of great value. *Secondly*, the study is limited by the lack of information on how teachers display, talk, or share visuals with children. More broadly, research is also needed to determine how visuals presented differences using in the learning process. Observational or case studies on this topic will provide information on both how visuals are used and children's reactions and engagement with visuals. *Finally*, the study did not evaluate how to represent the characters in the visuals such as stereotypical, active, or passive roles of the male, female, older adults, children, and people with special needs. Misrepresenting or stereotyping

individuals with differences within the classroom environment perpetuates social prejudices and underestimates the role and place of these in society (UNICEF, 2013), and bodies that are different from one's own mustn't be treated as exotic (Lane, 2008). The next phase of research could concentrate on better understanding why these are absent on the visuals, as well as how teachers approach the social construction of the differences. We found that many classrooms include classroom rules and routine visuals and teachers use them as a reminder. Further studies need to be carried out to answer these questions within the framework of classroom management.

Despite its limitations, the study certainly adds to our understanding of preschool classroom visuals. While a limited number of previous studies have highlighted the significance of classroom environment on learning, as far as we know, this study is the first from the perspective of preschool teachers to present a preschool classroom visual environment. Our findings represent a small step in assessing visuals in preschool classrooms with a focus on the representation of individual differences. Considerably more work will need to be done to investigate classroom visuals and the representation of differences in visuals.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Bülbin Sucuoğlu for her invaluable guidance throughout the research process. Her insights and expertise were instrumental in shaping the direction of this paper. She provided feedback on planning the study, Classroom Visuals Questionnaire, data analysis, findings, and the earlier drafts.

References

Akaroğlu, E. G., & Dereli, E. (2012). The effects of educational toys training designed to develop visual perception skills on the skills of visual perception in children. *Journal Of World Of Turks/Zeitschrift Für Die Welt Der Türken*, 4(1), 201-219

- Almeda, M. V., Scupelli, P., Baker, R. S., Weber, M., & Fisher, A. V. (2014). Clustering of design decisions in classroom visual displays. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Learning Analytics and Knowledge* (pp. 44-48). New York.
- Alpay, N. & Okur, M. R. (2021). Okul öncesi dönemdeki 5-6 yaş çocuklarının görsel okuryazarlık durumlarının ve dijital öğrenme içeriklerinin incelenmesi. *Açıköğretim Uygulamaları ve Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(3), 1-34.
- Avcı, C., & Sağsöz, G. (2018). Okul öncesi eğitimde görsel sanat etkinliklerinin incelenmesi [Investigating visual art activities in early childhood education]. *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 26(2), 403-412.
- Barrett, P., Davies, F., Zhang, Y., & Barrett, L. (2015). The impact of classroom design on pupils' learning: Final results of a holistic, multi-level analysis. *Building & Environment*, 89, 118-133. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2015.02.013>
- Barrett, P., Zhang, Y., Moffat, J., & Kobbacy, K. (2013). A holistic, multi-level analysis identifying the impact of classroom design on pupils' learning. *Building & Environment*, 59, 678-689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2012.09.016>
- Brody, G., & Roach, K. (2012). A positive classroom environment is important for children. *Pediatrics*, 130(2), e224-e231.
- Cannella, G., & Reiff, J. (1994). Teacher preparation for diversity. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 27(3), 28-33.
- Collingford, C. (1978). Wall displays- children's reactions. *Education*, 6(2), 12-14.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design choosing among five approaches* (5th Ed.). The United States of America, SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th Ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Derman-Sparks L. (1989). *Anti-bias curriculum: Tools for empowering young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Derman-Sparks, L., & Edwards, J. O. (2010). *Anti-bias Education for Young Children and*

- Ourselves. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Division for Early Childhood. (2014). DEC recommended practices. Retrieved from https://d4ab05f7-6074-4ec9-998a-232c5d918236.filesusr.com/ugd/95f212_12c3bc4467b5415aa2e76e9fded1ab30.pdf
- Errázuriz, L. & Portales, C. (2018), The visual differences of the classroom walls in Chilean primary schools. *The International Journal of Art & Design Education (iJADE)*, 3 (1) 88-100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12130>
- Favazza, P. C., Ostrosky, M. M., Meyer, L. E., Yu, S., & Mouzourou, C. (2017). Limited representation of individuals with disabilities in early childhood classes: Alarming or status quo?. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(6), 650-666.
- Fisher, A. V., Godwin, K. E., & Seltman, H. (2014). Visual environment, attention allocation, and learning in young children: When too much of a good thing may be bad. *Psychological science*, 25(7), 1362-1370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614533801>
- Fowler, F. J. (2014). *Survey research methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Sage
- Frenzel, A. C., Pekrun, R., & Goetz, T. (2007). Perceived learning environment and students' emotional experiences: A multilevel analysis of mathematics classrooms. *Learning and Instruction*, 17, 478-493.
- Gandini, L. (1998). Educational and caring spaces. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach—Advanced reflections* (2nd ed., pp. 161-178). Westport, CT: Ablex
- Gayle-Evans, G. (2004). It is never too soon: A study of kindergarten teachers' implementation of multicultural education in Florida's classrooms. *Professional Educator*, 26(2), 1-15.
- Godwin, K.E., Leroux, A.J., Seltman, H., Scupelli, P., & Fisher, A.V. (2022). Effect of repeated exposure to the visual environment on young children's attention. *Cognitive Science*, 46, e13093. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.13093>
- Hanley, M., Khairat, M., Taylor, K., Wilson, R., Cole-Fletcher, R., & Riby, D. (2017). Classroom displays —attraction or distraction? Evidence of impact on attention and learning from children with and without autism. *Developmental Psychology*, 53(7), 1265-1275. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000271>
- Harmon, J.M., K.D. Wood, W.B. Hedrick, J. Vintinner, & T. Willeford. (2009). Interactive word walls: More than just reading the writing on the walls. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52 (5), 398-408.
- Hollestelle, C. H., & Kelly, R. R. (1972). Bulletin boards: No deposit—No return. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 5(1), 36-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005997200500110>
- Johnson, R. B. & Christensen, L. (2014). *Educational research quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (5th Ed.). United States of America: SAGE Publications.
- Karabay, S. O. & Asi, D. Ş. (2015). Classroom rules used by preschool teachers and children's levels of awareness relating to rules, *İnönü Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 16(3), 69-86. DOI: 10.17679/iuefd.16331426
- Lane, C. (2008). Predictors of successful inclusion for children with vision impairment in early education (Doctoral thesis). Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Australia.
- Lin, M., Lake, V. E. & Rice, D. (2008). Teaching anti-bias curriculum in teacher education programs: What and how. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 187-200
- Manning, M. L. (Winter 2000). Understanding diversity, accepting others: Realities and directions. *Educational Horizons*, 77-79.
- Martínez-Bello, V. E. & Martínez-Bello, J. T. (2017) Bodies displayed on walls: are children's bodies represented in an inclusive way in the pictures on the walls in their early childhood educational environments?, *Early Years*, 37(2), 173-188, DOI:10.1080/09575146.2016.1165186
- Meran, S., & Sucuoğlu, N. B. (2022). Türkiye'de okul öncesi eğitim ve kanıt temelli sınıf yönetimi stratejileri. [Early childhood education and evidence-based classroom management strategies in Turkey] *Erken Çocukluk Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 6(1), 268-307. <https://doi.org/10.24130/eccdjecs.1967202261408>
- Merriam, S. B. (2013). *Nitel araştırma: Desen ve*

- uygulama için bir rehber. [Qualitative research a guide to design and implementation] S. Turan (Trans. Ed.). Ankara: Nobel.
- Midobuche, E. (1999, April). Respect in the classroom: Reflections of a Mexican-American educator. *Educational Leadership*, 80–82.
- Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. (2013). Preschool education program. Retrieved from http://tegm.meb.gov.tr/dosya/okuloncesi/oo_proram.pdf
- NAEYC. (1998). Accreditation criteria and procedures of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Washington, DC: Author
- Nikolarazi, M., Kumar, P., Favazza, P., Sideridis, G., Koulousiou, D., & Riall, A. (2005). A cross-cultural examination of typically developing children's attitudes toward individuals with special needs. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education*, 52(2), 101–119. doi:10.1080/10349120500086348
- Ostrosky, M. Mouzourou, M., C., Dorsey, E. A., Favazza, P. C., & Leboeuf, L. M. (2015). Pick a book, any book using children's books to support positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities. *Young Exceptional Children*, 18 (1), 30–43.
- Özkan, B., & Girgin, F. (2014). Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin görsel sanat etkinliği uygulamalarını değerlendirmesi. [Evaluation of virtual art activity applications by preschool teachers]. *Electronic Journal of Vocational Colleges*, 79–85
- Prescott, T. (2000). Displays need not drive you up the wall. *Early Years Educator*, 1(11), 24–26. <https://doi.org/10.12968/eyed.2000.1.11.15604>
- Salmon, M., & Akaran, S. E. (2001). Enrich your kindergarten program with a cross-cultural connection. *Young Children*, 56(4), 30–32.
- Sandilos, L. E., Rimm, K. S. E., & Cohen, J. J. (2017). Warmth and demand: The relation between students' perceptions of the classroom environment and achievement growth. *Child Development*, 88, 1321–1337. doi:10.1111/cdev.12685
- Sanz, A. A., Jardón, P. & Gil, Y. L. (2019) The role of the classroom's images. Study of visual culture at three schools. *Visual Studies*, 34(2), 107–118, DOI:10.1080/1472586X.2019.1653223
- Simonsen, B., Fairbanks, S., Briesch, A., Myers, D., & Sugai, G. (2008). Evidence-based practices in classroom management: considerations for research to practice. *Education & Treatment*, 31 (3), 351–380.
- Skeet Creekmore, W. N. (1987). Effective use of classroom walls. *Academic Therapy*, 22(4), 341–348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105345128702200401>
- Şahin, F., Yilmaz, A., Buldu, M., Aras, S., Buldu, M., & Akgül, E., (2022) Video based professional development on pedagogical documentation: a yearlong study with early childhood teachers, *Educational Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2021.2024428>
- Tarr, P. (2004). Consider the walls. *Young children*, 59(3), 88–92.
- UNESCO. (2020). Global education monitoring report 2020 on Inclusion and education: All means all. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>
- UNICEF (2013). Children and young people with disabilities fact sheet. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/Factsheet_A5_Web_NEW.pdf
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Wingate, K. O., Rutledge, V. C. & Johnston, L. (2014). Preschool through grade 3: Choosing the right word walls for your classroom. *YC Young Children*, 69 (1), 52–57.
- Yu, S., Ostrosky, M. M., Favazza, P. C., & Meyer, L. E. (2016). "Where are the kids like me?" classroom environments that help create a sense of belonging. T. Catalino and L. E. Meyer (Ed.), In *Environment: Promoting meaningful access, participation, and inclusion*, (pp. 113–124). (DEC Recommended Practices Monograph Series No. 2). Washington, DC: Division for Early Childhood.

