



A Research on The Education of Child Observation and Assessment

Tuğba AKGÖK KARACA^aBelkis TEKME^ba:  0000-0001-6387-9938 Başkent University, Türkiye

✉ tugbaakgok@gmail.com

b:  0000-0003-4470-4387 Başkent University, Türkiye

✉ tekmen@baskent.edu.tr

Abstract

Child observation and assessment are deemed as some of the key issues in the field. The objective of this research is to depict a holistic perspective on the significance, necessity, and competency of those training for child observation and assessment, based on the experiences and recommendations of preschool teacher candidates and instructors of the course in the preschool teacher education programs. The participants are comprised of 142 preschool teacher candidates who have taken the child observation and assessment course in six universities in the same province and six instructors responsible for the child observation and assessment course in these universities. A variety of instruments were utilized to gather data, including document analysis, face-to-face interviews, online questionnaire forms including both open-ended, and close-ended questions in this qualitative descriptive study. The findings led to the conclusion that the practices of those involved in preschool education for observing and assessing young children are crucial. The practice and theoretical knowledge base should be aligned when teaching undergraduate students about child observation and assessment. After graduation, field practices will reflect the improvements that are made on undergraduate courses. The significance of raising their awareness of assessment was emphasized in order to close the gaps in the assessment practices of preschool candidates.

Keywords

Preschool teacher education, preschool teacher candidates, child observation techniques, assessment in early childhood education.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee permission for this study was obtained from Başkent University Social Sciences and Humanities and Arts Research Committee with the decision dated 31.03.2021 and numbered 17162298.600-86.

Suggested Citation: Akgök Karaca, T., & Tekmen, B. (2023). A research on the education of child observation and assessment. *Sakarya University Journal of Education*, 13(2), 326-344. doi: <https://doi.org/10.19126/suje.1301435>

INTRODUCTION

Effective assessment of a child's development and change during the early years is a priority in high-quality early childhood education (McAfee & Leong, 2012). The concept of assessment in early childhood education, which is used to support the multifaceted development of the child and is the most crucial step in the contemporary understanding of education, emerges and has been meticulously highlighted in recent years (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). Early childhood is the critical period, which includes the first years of life, and is when children's cognitive, physical, and social development happens the quickest, according to research to date. In order to accurately and successfully guide the child during this time, it is crucial to observe and pay attention to them (Yilmaz Topuz, 2015). Preschool teachers have the most significant responsibility in early childhood education to make sure that the method of observing and assessing the child is appropriate. According to Uzun (2013), preschool teachers should be competent in the assessment component. Preschool teachers frequently struggle with assessment, despite being aware of how important assessment practices are (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Early childhood educators have different perspectives on the observation techniques that are used in child observation and assessment practices, despite how varied and numerous they are. The methods used in early childhood observation studies do not, however, have assessment value when used independently (McAfee & Leong, 2012). It is necessary to assess children in their natural environment and select the techniques appropriate for their age-development level based on the communication and development characteristics to be established with children in early childhood (Bayhan, 2017). Early childhood children, in particular, benefit greatly from the observation process because it allows for a deeper understanding of the child and gives the opportunity to get to know them in their natural environment (Lidz, 2003).

Children are born with different traits, which they develop as they grow up. It takes more than just looking at a children's appearances to get to know them. It is essential to observe their affective traits, mental attributes, self-regulation, and self-care abilities, in order to anticipate what needs they may have (Güven, 2013). The pertinent classification also takes into account children's aptitudes, behaviors, expectations, and habits. It is possible to identify which learning environment is best for a child by assessing them and getting to know them. Now is a crucial time to assess children's development, pinpoint the primary causes of their behavior, assess the program and act collaboratively by assisting the family (Tuzcuoglu, 2017).

The Role of the Teacher in Observing and Assessing the Preschool Child

Spending time with the students in the classroom helps the teacher observe the children more quickly if they are familiar with the techniques. The success of children in education is influenced by more frequent studies on child observation and the fact that the conclusions drawn from the assessment process support the development of new learning (Gullo & Hugges, 2011). The foundation for raising the standard of education provided during the preschool years is observation by listening to and watching what students do all day long. As a result, it is crucial for a teacher to be able to assess student development and have a thorough understanding of developmental traits in order to get to know their students (Luff, 2010).

In today's public kindergartens and nursery classes, it is not mandatory to have guidance services, psychologists, or education specialists. That is why preschool teachers are frequently in charge of observing and assessing children. As a result, it is expected from preschool teachers to possess a solid understanding of "child observation and assessment" methods and to employ them so that they can

accurately assess the students in their care, interpret the results, and report their findings with a valid and reliable assessment (Yılmaz Topuz, 2015). Education professionals, families, and society at large can all benefit greatly from knowing more about preschoolers' developmental processes thanks to the comprehensive assessment of their growth. Preschool teachers are therefore guided by the activities of observing and assessing children in terms of understanding individual differences, their positive or negative characteristics, and their developmental trajectories (Can Gul, 2009).

Observation and Assessment Types of Preschool Children

According to Isikoglu Erdogan and Canbeldek (2017), assessment approaches in early childhood education fall into three categories: formal, informal, and alternative assessment.

Formal Assessment

A formal assessment is one that follows a predetermined plan and makes use of specially created materials. Standardized tests are frequently used as formal assessment tools. Developmental, readiness, and diagnostic tests are the types of assessments used in preschool (Mindes, 2007). Children's readiness for primary school is assessed through preschool readiness tests. When there is a possibility of a learning disability and a diagnosis is needed, developmental tests are preferred.

Informal Assessment

Except for standard tests, development inventories, and achievement tests that are similar to standard tests, it covers all types of assessment methods. Informal assessment is typically conducted in settings that are natural, like playgrounds, homes, and learning environments, as well as during daily activities (like group activities and social interaction on playgrounds). It establishes a direct link between assessment and instruction. The teacher is provided with data regarding the students' most recent performance and uses this data to plan the lessons. Planning the lesson and gathering information on the utility and efficacy of the application can be done using a variety of informal techniques (Alper et al., 2001).

Alternative Assessment

The term "alternative assessment" refers to a type of assessment in which students must complete substantial, real-world work to demonstrate their abilities. Learning and development are assessed using alternative methods such as observation of children, game-based activities, and the collection of practice cases (Riley et al., 2016).

The goal of the alternative assessment is to evaluate students in the classroom—or, in other words, in a real learning environment—in a realistic manner. As a result, it is made sure that both the students and the teacher take an active part in the assessment process (Gullo, 2005). Children have the opportunity to showcase their performances by actively participating in the assessment process, which also makes this process student centred (Durukan & Sahin, 2015).

Child Observation and Assessment Course at the Faculties

In the course catalogues developed for preschool teacher education programs by Higher Education Council (HEC) before 2018, "Child Observation and Assessment" course was included as an elective course. In the course catalogues developed by HEC as of 2018, the course of child observation and assessment was added as a required course. This change was made with the idea that junior students should take this course. The Faculties of Education currently have the authority to design their own

programs thanks to HEC, and as a result, it has been added as a required course for juniors and seniors in program revisions.

Thus, the study intends to explore the training for child observation and assessment in early childhood education at the preschool teacher education programs. Therefore, it is important to have the views of both the teacher candidates representing preservice training, and the instructors who are responsible for training the teacher candidates. Both data sources are considered to have a significant point of view on the child observation and assessment training and implementations, which were selected to represent the two complimentary points of view to have a more complete picture about the issue. When we consider the subject as an important teacher competency since it can serve as a reference point for every step of the early childhood education, it is clear that outcomes of this course affects other activities which preschool teacher supposed to plan, develop and evaluate constantly. On the other hand, regardless of which approach an early childhood education program follows, either it is High Scope, Reggio Emilia, Head Start, Montessori, Waldorf or even the MoNE 2013 program, the assessment of children development is the key point formative evaluation. Furthermore, being competent in child observation to implement these process properly is a necessity for all the preschool teachers (Yigit at al., 2019).

For this purpose, preschool teacher candidates are selected as the data source for the preservice point of view since they have not graduated and do not have experience in their profession yet. The instructors are included in the study to explore the designing and implementing the training process of the child observation and assessment course. These two group of participants were purposively selected with the aforementioned criteria to explore the following two research questions to form a more comprehensive understanding on the main research question.

1. What are the views of the instructors of the child observation and assessment course in terms of outcomes, content, method, assessment and feedback process?
2. What are views of the preschool teacher candidates on child observation and assessment course in terms of outcomes, content, methods, assessment and suggestions to improve?

METHOD

The main aim of the study is to explore the child observation and assessment course from the teacher candidates' and instructors' points of view. The methodology of the study is summarized including the research design, participants, data collection tools, data collection procedure and data analysis parts respectively.

Research Design

Regarding the importance of observation and assessment techniques in early childhood education, preservice teachers opinions are vital important since they are the future implementers of the techniques in the field. Since the course is given as a must course in the preschool teacher education programs in the education faculties, independent from which university it is given, it is planned to reach a common understanding without differentiating the participants' universities. In this qualitative descriptive study, it is intended to explore the needs and tendencies related to child observation and assessment course and implementations from the views of the teacher candidates, and the instructors of the course given at the preschool teacher education programs. Descriptive research generates data,

both qualitative and quantitative, that define the state of nature at a point in time (Koh & Owen, 2000, p.219-220). In education, descriptive qualitative research can be used to explore teaching and learning processes, student experiences, and educational practices (Regionel, 2023).

In this manner, in order to explore the teaching and learning experiences, this study is designed as a descriptive qualitative research. Although it was planned to conduct face to face interviews with the participants at the beginning of the study, due to the pandemic circumstances occurred during the 2020-2021 academic year, the researchers decided to change the data collection tools into online questionnaire forms for the preschool teacher candidates with the regulation of HEC and MoNE indicating that there would be no face to face education. Therefore, necessary changes were done and interview forms were transformed into online questionnaire forms via google forms for preschool teacher candidates. The interview forms for the instructors were held face to face as planned with their consent and necessary arrangements.

Ethics committee permissions were taken from each participant university (E-62310886-605 01-28749 dated 22.04.2021). With the permissions taken from the universities (Baskent University, Gazi University, Ankara University, Hacettepe University, METU and TED University) and with the help of each instructor responsible for the course, the link for the preschool teacher candidate's questionnaire was distributed to the students of these courses. From the 426 preschool teacher candidates being students at these six programs, 142 of them volunteered to participate in the study. On the other hand, six instructors of the "child observation and assessment" course from the participated universities were interviewed face to face.

Participants

Purposeful sampling with the selected criteria in qualitative research, enables the researchers to decide if the participants purposefully inform an understanding on the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007, p.125-127). Since the study was planned to be conducted with face to face interviews at the beginning, Ankara was selected as the convenient location taking into account the geographical proximity and the cost, time and effort factors to be spent while reaching the mass to be applied to the scale (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013).

As mentioned before, participation was voluntary in line with accessibility, and through the purposeful sampling and being taken the child observation and assessment course was the criteria for the preschool teacher candidates. Giving "child observation and assessment" course in any of the preschool teacher education programs of the participant universities in Ankara was the criteria for the instructors. Regarding the purpose of the study, preschool teacher candidates were the primary data source taking the child observation and the assessment course and there were six preschool teacher education programs in Ankara, and the permission was taken accordingly. All the students at the 2021-2022 academic year taking the child observation and assessment course were reached (N=426) and 142 of them agreed to participate.

The face to face interviews were conducted with six instructors of the aforementioned course during the same academic year. Some programs had "child observation and assessment" course in their fall term, some in spring term. Therefore, the data collection took two semesters to complete (2021-2022 fall and spring semesters).

Demographic variables and data collection tools conducted for each participant's groups are summarized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Data Collection Tools and Demographic Variables of the Participants*

Participants	Data collection tools	Demographic variables of the participants	N
Preschool teacher candidates (N=142)	Questionnaire form for preschool teacher candidates	Gender	
		Male	5
		Female	137
		University they enrolled in	
		Ankara	18
		Baskent	57
		Gazi	28
		Hacettepe	21
		METU	15
		TED	3
Instructors (N=6)	Semi-structured face to face interview form	Years of experience for giving this course	
		1-3	4
		4-7	2
		Years of experience in the field	
		1-5	1
		5-10	3
10-15	2		

Data Collection Tools***Interview Forms***

With the help of the literature review conducted on the child observation and assessment course definitions given by HEC, and by considering the instructional design components of a course which

are mainly; the outcomes, the content, the teaching methods and the assessment, an interview form for the instructors of the course was prepared. Expert opinions from two experienced academicians in the early childhood education and the supervisor of the thesis study checked the interview form in terms of structure and content, and suggested necessary changes were done afterwards. Overlapping questions were omitted and more prompts were added. After piloting the interview with two instructors in the same field, last version was formed for the face to face interview questions. In order to facilitate and support the interview content, course syllabus of each instructor were also asked for, however they were only shared for the eyes of the researcher to help the validity of the answers they given.

Interview questions for the instructors were mainly developed according to the instructional planning steps and the syllabus content they presented. Some of the interview questions were as the following:

What are the “outcomes” you give priority for this course and how you develop the content?

What are the teaching/learning “methods” you prefer? Can you explain and give examples?

How you balance the theory and the practice of the course content? Can you explain and give examples?

What are your strategies for the assessment and feedback of this course?

Questionnaire Forms

In order to establish the triangulation of the data collection sources, the questionnaires were intended to have similar content to the interviews with the instructors, as much as possible. As mentioned in the research design part, the questions for the teacher candidates were adapted into online questionnaires forms after the impossibility of the face to face interviews due to regulations for pandemic. To facilitate the return of the answers, some the open ended questions were transformed into structured ones. With the same experts of the interview form, the expert pinion process conducted for the both questionnaire forms and necessary changes were done to fulfil the content validity before piloting the tools online via google forms. Piloting study was conducted by 33 preschool teacher candidates for the piloting study of the online questionnaire forms were excluded from the actual data collection sample. Some of the questions for the teacher candidates’ questionnaire were as the following:

What “content” do you think “child observation and assessment” course should cover? Can you give examples to the most necessary subjects according to you?

Which “methods” are most effective to facilitate your learning these content? Can you give examples?

How successful you think you achieved the “outcomes” of the course given below?

Comprehends the importance and the principles of observing the child

Selects, develops and implements observing techniques appropriate for individual differences and different aims

Conducts objective observation, evaluation and records them properly

Develops strategies for developmentally appropriate implementations and school-family collaboration

Please indicate your “suggestions” to make this course more productive?

Data Collection Procedure

The permissions from the six university having preschool teacher education program were taken with the ethical committee reports from each university; which are Baskent University, Gazi University, Ankara University, Hacettepe University, METU and TED University.

The instructors in charge of the course were contacted after receiving approval from the institutions, and face-to-face interviews were held with them. If the participants' consent was obtained, the interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were taken throughout. Online questionnaire forms were used to collect data from the preschool teacher candidates during the fall and spring semesters of the 2021–2022 academic year, depending on which semester the lesson was offered. In order to have more reliable answers from the teacher candidates, end of the semesters was preferred to distribute the questionnaires after the course was completed.

Although it was explained how the data collection instruments were formed and how the data collection procedure was conducted in detail to establish credibility and transferability, a few additional words for the trustworthiness issues is necessary to maintain for the reliability and validity of the research in general. Internal validity is sustained firstly through 'member checks', by sharing the coding patterns and going over the data by some peers as well as by some experts in the field to consult whether the data is perceived in similar way in the eyes of the researcher and other parties (Creswell, 2003, p.196). Each step involved expert check to provide reliability and overcome researcher' bias and finally, participants' approval and feedback on the data they provided especially with the feedback for the interviews helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. In order to check the interrater agreement between the two researcher and the experts in the coding process, interrater coefficient is calculated which shows agreement at a significant level.

Data Analysis

In this study the analyses of the data is given with the themes emerged and presented with frequencies and percentages if the number of the participants show a significant number of the repeated codes. In a qualitative descriptive study like this, a straight forward descriptive summary of the information gathered can involve classifications and the content can be organized in a logical manner (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Therefore, data analyses for both the interviews and the questionnaires were conducted through content analysis and presented in terms of codes and frequencies gathered under categories regarding the research questions.

Interview forms

Following the interviews with the instructors in charge of the child observation and assessment course, the notes and audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed, and the resulting data were then combined in a word document. A total of 19 pages, 59 minutes, and 30.3 MB of data were obtained as a result of the interviews. All the interview data were recorded, carefully read through, and then analysed in accordance with the sub-problems of the study. To ensure the validity of the research, two researchers collaborated on the coding of the qualitative data based on the interviews. The reliability of the resulting theme, category, and coding were evaluated by a field expert, and the results were compared by two researchers. The comparison produced an inter-rater ratio of .82. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews: "The content and scope of the course, the methods and techniques used in the course, the theory and practice dimension of the course, the

assessment phase of the course, receiving feedback on the course ". To further improve the validity and reliability, direct quotations from the interview-derived data were also presented.

Questionnaire forms

The opinions of the students who took the child observation and assessment course were evaluated through the form administered to the teacher candidates in accordance with the goal of the research, with a common point of view given that they were from different universities. In other words, the goal of the research is to unveil the perspectives of preschool teacher candidates on the child observation and assessment course within the same framework from their perspectives rather than expose differences between universities. Due to the fact that Google Forms was administered to preschool teacher candidates to gather data, the researcher only received data that was 39 KB in size.

A comparison was made between the themes and categories established for the analysis of open-ended questions in the form filled out by the preschool teacher candidates. The comparison produced an inter-rater ratio of .80 for the teacher candidate forms between the two researchers on the categories emerged.

Ethical Principles

Ethics committee permission for this study was obtained from Başkent University Social Sciences and Humanities and Arts Research Committee with the decision dated 31.03.2021 and numbered 17162298.600-86.

FINDINGS

Findings are presented according to the three sub research questions designed for each participant groups and results obtained from each data collection tool are summarized within tables as much as possible.

Data Obtained from the Instructors

First of all, the interview results obtained from the instructors of the child observation and assessment course are summarized under the categories emerged at the Table 2 below. The related research question for the instructors was: "What are the views of the instructors of the child observation and assessment course in terms of outcomes, content, method, assessment and feedback process?"

Table 2

The Results Obtained from the Interviews

Themes	Categories emerged from the face to face interviews with the instructors
Principles and topics they gave priority in terms of outcomes of the course	Being aware of the necessity of the subject
	Not to be afraid of doing mistakes during the process
	Consider that evaluation is not apart from the learning process

Consider that evaluation should not be at the end of learning as summative, it can also be formative

Assessment to support learning

They should have their own vision on assessment and evaluation in early childhood education

It should be a continuous process

Importance of being able to design and conduct appropriate observation techniques by their own

Importance of recording and sharing in a proper way with the colloquies and the families

Methods they prefer in their course

Video based learning

Story based/case based learning

Small group workshops

Giving multi-case examples

Event sampling

Discussion

Direct instruction

Supporting the definitions with lots of examples

Video and web page analysis

Scaffolding

How they balance the theory and the practice

Giving weekly practice as homework

Problem solving for sample cases and brain storming

Giving feedback for their presentations

Classroom activities

Role playing

Sharing practicum report and classroom discussion

Strategies for the assessment and feedback

Half-semester and final exams by open ended questions

Weekly practicum homeworks and giving weekly feedbacks for them

Final portfolios including examples for each technique they learn through the course and implementing them with reflective comments

Reflective paper at the end of the course

Scenario based planning and implementations

 Developing observation technique

Weekly summary notes

 Preparing developmental portfolios for given cases and instructions

From the interview results, the emerged categories for the predefined themes showed that to ensure a balance between theory and practice in the child observation and assessment course, the course material should be applied alongside practical studies. Instructors stated that in the practice dimension, preschool teacher candidates' ability to use observation recording tools to work with children and the internalization of using these tools are important for child observation and assessment in early childhood. It has been explained that during the lesson, in-class activities are coordinated with the studies pertaining to the practice of the theoretical knowledge dimension of this course. Instructor 4 (TE4) stated the following: *"I try to give the practical content of every theoretical knowledge. For example, I explain how the observation recording tools should be prepared, I say, let's create them, and then we practice. By providing the materials I prepared prior to the lesson, I expect them to put this theoretical base into practice. By using videos, I typically try to apply theory to practice."* According to the results, the instructors made adjustments to the course procedures after receiving feedback on how to make the child observation and assessment lesson better. TE4 specifically highlighted the significance of the pre-service teachers' feedback on the practice dimension by saying the following: *"I get feedback, especially about the practice part. I create my syllabus by integrating the subjects. At the beginning of the lesson, we continue according to what is lacking in theory and practice. For example, we can make changes in the documentation in a different way according to the student's wishes, unlike what is in my plan. Students must submit an ungraded reflective report. I learn about their thoughts on the lesson without making them feel worried about grades,"* and pointed out that their feedback on the practice aspect is especially important. TE2 explained that it is valuable to conduct the process interactively by saying, *"We conduct this course interactively by receiving constant feedback throughout the semester. During the process, we make the decisions together. I make changes when there is a problem since they are always practicing. At the end of each semester, I always gather their feedback about the course through Google Forms. Afterwards, I am making changes in the next semester's course based on this feedback"*.

During the course of child observation and assessment, all of the instructors who took part in the interviews claimed that they made an effort to enrich the process by combining different methods and techniques in order to provide more meaningful learning (Table 2.). By emphasizing the case study method, TE2 indicated that *"We primarily use case studies. In the presented case studies, in order to understand the readiness and thoughts of the students, we proceed with questions and answers such as what kind of scale can be used in such a situation, what kind of assessment method can be preferred, and what kind of observation would be better. Then, we focus on one technique per week selected for the content, I explain step-by-step how the planned technique, which is presented as a case study, is developed and how it is used. I show it and enrich it with examples. This is because there are many types of techniques and methods of preparation and use. Afterwards, as I mentioned before, they first develop a scale suitable for the purposes and outcomes they have chosen and present it to receive feedback."* Similarly, TE3 answered this question by stating *"We mostly carry out the process based on case studies and lectures"*.

While the interviews with the instructors who took part in the study and shared their syllabi provided information relevant to the research's goal about the structure and content of the child observation and assessment course taught in universities, they also shed light on how pre-service and in-service preschool teachers observe and assess their students.

Findings Obtained from the Preschool Teacher Candidates

The related research question for the preschool teacher candidate was: "What are views of the preschool teacher candidates on child observation and assessment course in terms of outcomes, content, methods, assessment and suggestions to improve?"

Table 3 presents how competent the preschool teacher candidates find themselves on achieving the outcomes of the child observation and assessment course. Since it was designed as a close ended question in the questionnaire in order to understand how they label their competency level on the given outcomes of the course, the results were able to be presented with frequencies and percentages.

Table 3

Outcome Achievement of the Preschool Teacher Candidates

Outcomes	Competent		Partly competent		Not competent	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
Comprehends the importance and the principles of observing the child	125	88	17	12	0	0
Selects, develops and implements observing techniques appropriate for individual differences and different aims	105	73,9	33	23,2	4	2,8
Conducts objective observation, evaluation and records them properly	104	73,2	35	24,6	3	2,1
Develops strategies for developmentally appropriate implementations and school-family collaboration	90	63,4	42	29,6	10	7

From Table 3, it is seen that most of the candidates find themselves competent on the first outcome of the course; "Comprehends the importance and the principles of observing the child" and least competent on the last outcome given; "Develops strategies for developmentally appropriate implementations and school-family collaboration" and luckily, no one finds themselves incompetent for comprehending the principles and importance of the subject. "Selects, develops, and applies the appropriate observation technique for different individual characteristics and goals", with a rate of 73.9% is the second achieved outcome as competent according to the candidates (Table 3). While 23.2% stated that they were partially competent, 2.8% stated that their achievement level was not at a sufficient level. The following outcome, "Makes objective observation assessments and documents,"

which is determined to be another learning outcome, was found to be sufficiently attained by 73.2% of the students. While 24.6% said their rate of achievement was only partially sufficient, 2.1% said their achievement was insufficient. On the other hand, 73.2% of participants said the achievement of the outcome "Prepares an observation and assessment plan suitable for individual characteristics and the goal" was sufficient. While 23.2% said they were only partially competent, and 3.5% said they did not attain this outcome at an adequate level. The last two learning outcomes, "develops a developmental and programmatic strategy based on school and family cooperation," were rated as competent by 63.4% of pre-service teachers, partially competent by 29.6%, and incompetent by 7%.

At Table 4, results for suggestions of the preschool teacher candidates for improving the course content and the teaching methods are presented.

Table 4

Suggestions of the Preschool Teacher Candidates for Content and Method

	Categories	f	%
Content	Importance of child observation, principles and guides	112	22,3
	Child observation and assessment techniques (formal-informal-teacher designed)	124	24,7
	Alternative and complementary techniques	127	25,2
	Preparing developmental portfolios	140	27,8
Method	Lecture	81	16,8
	Brainstorming	69	14,3
	Case Study	125	25,9
	Problem-Solving	62	12,8
	Question and Answer	79	16,4
	Discussion	67	13,9

The answers to the research question, "Which methods and techniques do you think would be more beneficial for you in the child observation and assessment lesson?" from the 142 prospective preschool teachers are shown in Table 4. The case study method is the one that preschool teachers ($n = 125$) prefer the most. The case study method was followed by the lecture ($n = 81$) technique. Following these techniques, problem-solving ($n = 62$), discussion ($n = 67$), brainstorming ($n = 69$), and question-and-answer ($n = 79$) techniques can be observed. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the lesson, it can

be inferred that preschool teacher candidates want variety in the use of teaching methods and techniques.

As can be seen (Table 4), case studies and videos are preferred over lectures for step-by-step problem-solving ($n = 25$). Furthermore, 52 participants offered no suggestions. The majority ($n = 67$) generally thought the teaching techniques were adequate.

In order to have a broader picture from all the sides affected by the mentioned course, not the same but complimentary questions were asked to explore different angles of the teaching and learning process and how it was experienced from both the students and the instructors of the same training. Therefore during the research on training, the focus was mostly on the course outcomes, teaching methods, content of the course, feedback strategies and the suggestions from both sides of the process. So the data were collected from related groups by complimentary questions. Findings were discussed in a holistic manner to understand on how the course was handled by the candidates and the instructors at the programs, and furthermore to help to explore the possible needs of the future graduates preparing themselves for the early childhood education workforce.

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

As supported from the literature and the experiences gathered from the child observation practices carried out in early childhood are of vital importance to preschool teachers, the diversity of assessment practices is an issue that should not be ignored (Bayhan, 2017). The instructors asserted that in order to ensure permanent learning, they employ a variety of teaching methods and techniques (case study, lecture, question and answer, video analysis, brainstorming, etc.) to keep the process active throughout the lesson. When asked how they balanced the theoretical and practical studies in the child observation and assessment course, the instructors responded that the practice dimension should not be skipped, and that the theoretical information provided to the students is crucial for internalizing the information when they have the opportunity to practice with the children. The instructors prioritize process-oriented assessment in the course's assessment phase and use a process that incorporates both practical studies and theoretical knowledge in a versatile way. Effective and significant learning occurs during the learning process when students are fully involved in assessment practices and process-oriented assessment is prioritized and given importance (Riley et al., 2016). The effectiveness of formative assessment practices and their reflections on learning processes have been proven by research (Aras 2019; Elden, 2019; Karaman & Karaman 2017). The instructors claimed that they revise the procedure and course material in response to the feedback they got from their students. The instructors stressed the significance of making the course on child observation and assessment compulsory, regarding the status of the course.

As a part of the process of child observation and assessment, observational tools, portfolio applications, and informal assessment methods are quite helpful in getting to know the child and increasing awareness of children's developmental trajectory. According to preschool teacher candidates' statements, the most crucial goal of the assessment was identified by Turkoglu (2017) in their study as monitoring the child's development. Preschool teacher candidates should prioritize process and developmental assessment, according to Smith's (1997) study. It has been explained that a variety of approaches and techniques can be combined throughout the course to promote meaningful learning. The level of achievement of the learning outcome "develops a developmental and programmatic school and family cooperation-based strategy" was noted as being lower than the

other learning outcomes by the teacher candidates, according to the study's planned learning outcomes. The pre-service teachers or the teacher candidates as mentioned in this study, stated that they were generally dissatisfied with this circumstances because the child observation and assessment course had to be conducted remotely during pandemic. Looking at the objectives, content, method, technique, and measurement-evaluation suggestions for this course, some of the preschool teacher candidates said they thought the objectives were sufficient, while others felt that they should be expanded upon, and the practice dimension should be given more weight. The majority described the content as adequate, while some thought it was intense, and others suggested enriching it with various types of assessment. Some of the prospective preschool teachers said that case studies would be useful to concentrate on, and they expressed satisfaction with the combination of different methods and techniques. Regarding assessment and evaluation, most of them did not express their opinions, while the portion with a low distribution rate emphasised that the assessment should be individual and stated that there were too many workload to achieve the course expectations.

According to Ulusoy's research (2019), preschool teachers' competency with assessment practices varies depending on their level of education. Although the preschool teacher education program at the education faculties are similar in content, the implementation of each course depends on many other factors including the attitude of the instructor, awareness of the students, expectations of the university or the classroom environment.

The child observation and assessment course can be offered in two different semesters in order to raise the pre-service teachers' awareness of assessment-based instruction, or supportive courses can be added on top of the child observation and assessment course due to the theoretical and practical dimensions of its content in the university course catalogues. Lack of knowledge about observation techniques is one of the challenges preschool teachers encounter while they observe and assess kids during the preschool stage. In order to avoid potential issues that might arise in in-service practice after graduation, the use of child observation techniques should be directly put into practice as part of the courses offered in undergraduate education.

The pertinent literature reported that preschool teachers primarily use the observation technique in the process of child observation and assessment (Isikoglu Erdogan et al., 2021; Kwi-Ok & Jung-In, 2011; Taner, 2005; Turupcu, 2014; Yilmaz Topuz & Erbil Kaya, 2016). They also stated that the observation process is the most significant data source in child observation. Additionally, it was found in Diffily's (2004) study that preschool teachers preferred both formal and informal assessment tools in their practice and had more positive perspectives on alternative assessment in the assessment process. The remaining research findings list the challenges preschool teachers face in child observation and assessment as "not having sufficient knowledge in the use of techniques, large class sizes, failing to learn more about the student, lack of coordination at the point of cooperation with the family, and time management problems in the daily plan." It has been noted in Can Gul (2009) study that collected opinions from preschool teachers and preschool teacher candidates regarding the assessment component of the 2006 Preschool Education Program; preschool teachers recommended that practice on this matter should absolutely not be skipped and that following graduation, the universities should conduct follow-up studies on in-service practices in order to improve the course "child observation and assessment" that is taught to prospective preschool teachers at universities.

REFERENCES

- Alper, S., Ryndak, D. L., & Schloss, D. N. (2001). *Alternative assessment of students with disabilities in inclusive settings*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Aras, S. (2019). Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin biçimlendirici değerlendirme uygulamalarının geliştirilmesi: İşbirlikçi eylem araştırmasının dönüştürücü rolü. [Improving early childhood teachers' formative assessment practices: Transformative role of collaborative action research]. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instructional Studies*, 9(2), 221-240. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1329322>
- Bayhan, P. (2017). *Erken Çocukluk Döneminde Değerlendirme* [Evaluation in Early Childhood] (1st ed.). Hedef Cs.
- Can Gül, Ş. (2009). *Okul öncesi eğitimi öğretmen ve öğretmen adaylarının 2006 okul öncesi eğitim programının değerlendirme unsuruna yönelik görüş ve davranışlarının incelenmesi*. [Investigation of early childhood teachers? And student teachers? Perceptions and behaviors about evaluation aspects of 2006 early childhood education programme]. (Unpublished Master's Thesis) Pamukkale University. Retrieved from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Darling-Churchill, K. E., & Lippman, L. (2016). Early childhood social and emotional development: advancing the field of measurement. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 45(7), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2016.02.002>
- Diffily, D. L. (1994). *Early Childhood Educators' Beliefs and Practices about Assessment*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). University of North Texas. Retrieved from <https://digital.library.unt.edu>
- Durukan, H., & Sahin, M. (2015). Okul öncesi öğretmenlerin ölçme ve değerlendirme yönelik inanç ve uygulamalarına ilişkin görüşleri. [The views of preschool teachers on practices and beliefs of measurement and evaluation]. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education*, 11(2), 534-550. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/eku/issue/5465/74225>
- Elden, A. (2019). *Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Biçimlendirici Değerlendirme Uygulamaları*. [The formative assessment practices of early childhood teachers]. (Unpublished Master's Thesis) Baskent University. Retrieved from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>
- Gullo, D. F. (2005). *Understanding Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education*. NY: Teachers College.
- Gullo, D. F., & Hughes, K. (2011) Reclaiming kindergarten: Part I. Questions about theory and practice. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38, 323-328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-010-0429-6>
- Güven, G. (2013). *İlköğretime Hazırlık ve İlköğretim Programları*. [Primary Education Preparation and Primary Education Programs] (2. ed.). Pegem Akademi Publishing.
- Isikoglu Erdogan, N., & Canbeldek, M. (2017). Erken çocukluk eğitiminde ölçme ve değerlendirme. [Assessment and evaluation in early childhood education] *Abant İzzet Baysal University Journal of Faculty of Education*, 17(3), 1306-1327. <https://doi.org/10.17240/aibuefd.2017.17.31178-338827>

- Isikoglu Erdogan, N., Aydogan, S., Efe Kenduzler, S., Dulger Ceylan, E., Aydın, A., & Dinler, H. (2021). Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocukları değerlendirmedeki yeterlilik düzeyleri ve kullandıkları araçlar. [Preschool teachers' competence levels and tools used in child assessment]. *Journal of Education for Life*, 35(1), 1- 19. <https://doi.org/10.33308/26674874.2021351230>
- Karaman, A., & Karaman, P. (2017). Öğretmen adaylarının biçimlendirici değerlendirme uygulamalarının incelenmesi: eylem araştırması modeli. [Investigating teacher candidates' use of formative assessment: action research model]. *Kastamonu Journal of Education*, 25(6), 2385-2400. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/kefdergi/issue/31577/357319>
- Koh, E.T., & Owen, W.L. (2000). *Descriptive Research and Qualitative Research*. In: *Introduction to Nutrition and Health Research*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-1401-5_12
- Kwi-Ok N., & Jung-In K. (2011). Child assessment in early childhood education and care settings in South Korea. *Asian Social Science*, 7(6), 66-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n6p66>
- Lambert, V. A., & Lambert, C. E. (2012). Qualitative descriptive research: An acceptable design. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research*, 16, 255-256. Retrieved from <https://he02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/PRIJNR/article/download/5805/5064>
- Lidz, C. S. (2003). *Early Childhood Assessment*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Luff, P. A. (2010). *Ways of Seeing and Knowing Children: A Case Study of Early Years Practitioners' Understanding and Uses of Child Observation during Their First Year of Employment*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation) Anglia Ruskin University. Retrieved from <https://arro.anglia.ac.uk/id/eprint/313586/>
- McAfee, O., & Leong, D. J. (2012). *Erken Çocukluk Döneminde Gelişim ve Öğrenmenin Değerlendirilmesi ve Desteklenmesi*. [Assessing and Guiding Young Children's Development and Learning]. (B. Ekinci, Eds.) Nobel Publishing.
- Mindes, G. (2007). *Assessing Young Children* (3rd edition). Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Regoniel, P. A. (2023). Exploring Phenomena: A Brief Guide to Conducting Descriptive Qualitative Research. Research-based Articles. Retrieved from <https://simplyeducate.me/2023/04/10/descriptive-qualitative-research/>
- Riley, K., Miller, G. E., & Sorenson, C. (2016). Early childhood authentic and performance- based assessment. A. Garro (Eds.). *Early Childhood Assessment in School and Clinical Child Psychology* in (p. 95- 119). New York: Springer.
- Smith, K.E. (1997). Student teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice: Pattern, stability, and the influence of locus of control. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 221-243. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006\(97\)90015-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(97)90015-6)
- Snow, C. E., & Van Hemel, S. B. (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How?* Board on Children, Youth and Families, Board on Testing and Assessment, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. The National Academies Press.
- Taner, G. (2005). *Bireyi tanıma tekniklerinin okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında uygulanmasına ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerinin incelenmesi*. [A study about the point of views of the teachers on the issue of the techniques of individual identification and practising it in preschool education classes].

- (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Selçuk University. Retrieved from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>
- Turupcu, A. (2014). *Okul Öncesi Eğitimde Bir Değerlendirme Aracı Olarak Gözlem: Öğretmenlerin Görüşleri ve Uygulamaları Üzerine Bir Fenomenolojik Durum Çalışması*. [Observation as an assessment tool in early childhood education: A phenomenological case study of teacher views and practices] (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Middle East Technical University. Retrieved from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>
- Tuzcuoglu, N. (2017). *Bireyi Tanıma Teknikleri* [Individual Recognition Techniques]. B. Aydın (Eds.), p. 154-211. Pegem Akademi Publishing.
- Turkoglu B. (2017). *Okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile öğretmen adaylarının çocuğu tanıma ve değerlendirme sürecine ilişkin görüşlerinin incelenmesi* [Investigation of preschool teachers and pre service preschool teachers' opinions regarding the process of recognition and evaluation of the child]. Eyuder. e-ISBN 978-975-2490-20-8 (p. 28-40).
- Ulusoy, N. (2019). *Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çocuğu tanıma ve değerlendirme tekniklerine yönelik tutumlarının incelenmesi* [Investigation of preschool teachers' attitudes towards child recognition and evaluation techniques]. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Gazi University. Retrieved from <https://avesis.gazi.edu.tr/dosya?id=db69ad1c-8c53-49c6-8249-9bd5ec6b0446>
- Uzun, U. (2013). *Farklı türlerde eğitim hizmeti veren okul öncesi eğitim kurumu öğretmenlerinin ölçme ve değerlendirme yeterliliklerine ait görüşleri*. [Opinions of preschool education institution teachers providing educational services in different types on measurement and evaluation competencies]. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Yeditepe University. Retrieved from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>
- Yigit, C., Ozyurt, M., & Adıyaman, H. (2019). Okul öncesi öğrencilerinin programın kazanımlarına ulaşma durumlarının değerlendirilmesine ilişkin bir model önerisi. [A model proposal to assess pre-school students' level of achieving the learning standards]. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education*, 15(3), 237-252. <https://doi.org/10.17244/eku.444573>
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2013). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*. [Qualitative Research in Social Sciences]. (9. Ed.) Seçkin Publishing.
- Yılmaz Topuz, G. (2015). Okul öncesi eğitim öğretmenlerinin çocukları tanıma ve değerlendirme amaçlı yapılan çalışmalara ilişkin görüşleri. [The opinions of the pre-school teachers about the works conducted for identification and assessment of children]. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Anadolu University. Retrieved from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>
- Yılmaz Topuz, G., & Erbil Kaya, Ö. M. (2016). *Okul öncesi eğitim öğretmenlerinin çocukları tanıma ve değerlendirme amaçlı yapılan çalışmalara ilişkin görüşleri*. [The opinions of the preschool teachers about the works conducted for identification and assessment of children] *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International*, 6(1), 27-62. <https://doi.org/10.18039/ajesi.11365>

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the article.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was declared by the author.

Supporting Individuals or Organizations

No grants were received from any public, private or non-profit organizations for this research.

Ethical Approval and Participant Consent

Ethics committee permission for this study was obtained from Başkent University Social Sciences and Humanities and Arts Research Committee with the decision dated 31.03.2021 and numbered 17162298.600-86.

Copyright Statement

Authors own the copyright of their work published in the journal and their work is published under the CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Plagiarism Statement

Similarity rates of this article was scanned by the iThenticate software. No plagiarism detected.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Acknowledgements

This article is derived from Master's thesis prepared by Tuğba Akgök Karaca under the supervision of Dr. Belkıs Tekmen.