

## **Montessori Öğretmeni Olmak Ne Anlam İfade Eder ve Neden Tercih Edilir?**

### **What Does It Mean To Be A Montessori Teacher And Why Is It Preferred?**

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#### **Öz**

Öğretmenler eğitim sistemi içinde çocuklar ve anne babalar gibi büyük öneme sahiptir. Geleneksel öğretim yöntemleri dışındaki metotlarda öğretmenlerin görüşlerini araştıran çalışmalar yönetime ilişkin kıymetli kaynaklardır. Bu düşünce ile bu çalışmada öğretmenlerin geleneksel bir sınıfta öğretmen olmaktan daha ziyade neden Montessori öğretmeni olmayı tercih ettikleri ve Montessori öğretmeni olmanın onlar için ne anlam ifade ettiğini ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmaya Litvanya'nın Vilnius kentinde bulunan farklı ülkelerden çocukların olduğu ve Montessori eğitimi veren okulda çalışan yaşları 23 ile 56 arasında değişen beş öğretmen dâhil edilmiştir. Çalışma grubuna dahil olma kriterleri arasında Vilnius Montessori Preschool'da çalışıyor olmak ve sertifikalandırılmış Montessori öğretmeni olmak yer almaktadır. Çalışma grubuna dâhil olan beş öğretmen "Montessori Teacher Trainer for Woodlands Training Center"dan Montessori eğitimcisi sertifikasına sahip veya bu eğitime devam eden öğretmenlerdir. Araştırmanın yapıldığı okulun uluslararası bir okul olması Montessori'nin evrensel çocuk tanımını yansıtmakta iyi bir örnek olacağı düşünülmüştür.. birinci ve ikinci yazarı çalışma grubunun bulunduğu okulda Haziran ve Temmuz 2016 tarihlerinde gönüllü olarak çalışmıştır. Araştırmanın temel soruları öğretmenlerin geleneksel bir sınıfta öğretmen olmaktan daha ziyade neden Montessori öğretmeni olmayı tercih ettikleri ve Montessori öğretmeni olmanın onlar için ne anlam ifade ettiğidir. Bu bağlamda araştırma nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenolojik desen ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırmada kullanılan değerlendirme araçları araştırma problemini açıkça ortaya koyabilecek araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen 10 açık uçlu sorudan oluşan Yarı Yapılandırılmış Görüşme Formu ile Genel Bilgi Formudur. . Araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen bu formlar İngilizce olarak hazırlanmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler açık kodlama yöntemi kullanılarak kodlanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, bireysellik, saygı, karma yaş grubu avantajları ve çevre düzenleme temalarının olduğu görülmüştür. Temalar bağlamında konu, araştırmacıların deneyimleri, Montessori yaklaşımının prensipleri, alanyazın ve araştırmalar doğrultusunda tartışılmıştır. Öğretmenlerin Montessori prensiplerini içselleştirdikleri ve Montessori öğretmeni olmanın onlar için bu prensipler doğrultusunda anlam kazandığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Montessori, öğretmen, anlamlandırma, eğitim, yaklaşım

### **Abstract**

Teachers have great importance as children and parents in the education system. Studies investigating teachers' views in methods other than traditional teaching methods are valuable sources of the method. In this study, it is aimed to reveal why teachers prefer to be a Montessori teacher rather than a teacher in a traditional classroom and what it means to be a Montessori teacher. Five teachers, aged 23 to 56, were enrolled in the study, which included children from different countries in Vilnius, Lithuania, and who worked in the Montessori school. The criteria for inclusion in the study group include working in Vilnius Montessori Preschool and becoming a certified Montessori teacher. Five teachers from the study group received the Montessori trainer certificate from the Montessori Teacher Trainer for Woodlands Training Center. The fact that the school was an international school was considered to be a good example of Montessori's universal definition of children. The main questions of the research are why teachers prefer to be Montessori teachers rather than teachers in a traditional classroom and what it means for them to be Montessori teachers. In this context, research has been carried out by qualitative research methods phenomenological design. The evaluation tools used in the research are the General Information Form and the Structured Interview Form consisting of 10 open-ended questions developed by the researchers who can clearly identify the research problem. These forms developed by the researchers were prepared in English. The data obtained from the interviews were coded using the open coding method. As a result of the study, it was seen that individuality, respect, mixed age group advantages and prepared environment themes were formed. Themes are discussed in the context of the researcher's experiences, literature, the principles of Montessori Approach, researches. It was concluded that the teachers internalized the principles of Montessori and that being a Montessori teacher gained meaning for them according to these principles.

**Keywords:** Montessori, teacher, opinion, education, approach

### **Introduction**

Today, it is known that there are many approaches in education in different parts of the world. One of the early childhood education programs used commonly across the world is Montessori approach. Maria Montessori who gave the name to the approach is pioneer at medical doctor by being as female in Italy. While working in the psychiatry department, she was interested primarily in children with special education needs and made significant progress in their work with them. As a result of these positive educational consequences, she started working in the field of education, pondering that the equal ways might be used on children whose development is typical (Lillard, 2013). She created a different school environment than traditional teacher-centered classes because Montessori method focuses on all aspects of the child. In order to reveal this difference, she set the name of the first school she opened as Casa dei Bambini (Children's House) Montessori classes are not an area where adults are responsible. Environment helps children by the way of improving their sense of independence and self-control. Children move freely around in the class and work on what attracts their attention (Seldin & Epstein,

2003). Montessori developed the primary Montessori school in 1907 to educate kids who have been poor and with mental retardation. Every child's development is different, and the progress is individual for a child in her approach (Pickering, 1992).

The approach has begun to spread and become popular all over the world since its inception. Montessori system has specified with routines and materials (Seldin, 2002). It uses of, recognition of children's chances of choice, mixed age groups; emphasis on co-operation in the educational system, no longer utilising notes and exams in the comparison process; emphasis on co-operation in the educational process, the application of individual and small group activities for the development of both academic and social skills because of the reasons for attracting attention (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Soydan, 2013). According to the eight basic principles set forth by Montessori, the teacher expresses the interaction of the child as follows: a sensitive, flexible and coherent teaching reveals more the desired results. Children want to use a teacher guide that is reliable and sincere and to be in a safe environment (Danışman, 2012).

The process offers to kids what hazard for managing themselves through learning. Such as personal independence, self-discipline, learning and motivation concepts arises with method (Kendall, 1993). According to Crain (1992), the teacher is not the person who teaches directly in Montessori method. The role of the teachers in Montessori differs from the role of the teacher in traditional education in many ways. They are mostly guiding for presentation aids, observe very well and respect the children's efforts toward independent mastery (Lopata, Wallace, & Finn, 2005). For instance, Montessori asks her teachers to attend and be patient until children concentrate. While Montessori teachers present the material to the child, they are patiently waiting for the child's curiosity and attention to be absorbed and concentrated The teacher does not break their concentration in any way during this process (Lillard, 2013). According to Montessori (1975), the teacher needs to make a careful observation in order to choose the material, to maintain the curiosity and to determine the needs during the process of self-study. Then he/she should gradually get away from there, talking or keeping quiet in the direction of the child's needs (Soydan, 2013).

In Montessori approach, given children opportunity to make research, experiment, do mistakes and correct its by on their own. Materials are designed to aid children in finding these faults. The teacher doesn't try to tell the child's mistake. If the child can not recognize his or her own mistake, it means that he has not yet been ready for this job sufficiently (Temel, 1994). Teachers do not ever exhibit their errors because children are supposed to figure out their mistakes on their own. Teachers only show how to use the materials. It is called presentation of material. They guide children by encouraging them to build their own experiences by using the materials so that children can learn on their own. Montessori substances have been designed in a way that users notice their own error after which fix these errors (Koçyiğit, Kayılı, & Erbay, 2010). The primary skill anticipated from a teacher is a very good observer. Also, the teacher should understand the kid's prior need.

Seldin and Epstein (2003), state that Montessori teachers are working with three important things: first, information about child development and their sensitive periods; Second, to know how to prepare a classroom environment in which each sensitive period will reach satisfying; Third, they must be aware of how to observe. Cossentino (2009)'s study, which has the same purpose as our research, is also investigating why, how and by whom Montessori teacher training is taken. The study gives information that teacher education focuses especially on the details and focuses on the effect of culture (Cossentino, 2009).

According to Montessori, the normalized child who is self-motivated, is able to make independent decisions, and has only the power to act with conscious choice, is not merely from a distance (O'Donnell, 2007). In this method, the educational environment is defined as a developmental field for the child. The educational environment is designed to meet the needs of the child to uncover, develop and provide self-control. It's the responsibility of the teacher to furnish these working possibilities in pre-school environments (Lillard, 2013).

Educational environments created by teachers are organized in such a way that children can actively research and move freely. The materials that are believed to bring the desired knowledge, skills and experiences are selected by the students by the guidance of the teacher. Children can prepare materials and environment for their possess functions (Temel, 2005). In the Montessori education, the adoption of the child to the center has changed the role of the teacher according to the traditional understanding. The child no longer are not taught knowledge but gains experience and experiences from materials and surroundings. The task of the Montessori teacher is to help the child discover the knowledge by living (Durakoğlu, 2010).

In this context, it is understood that the education of a Montessori teacher is virtually important. After Montessori published her first book namely "*The Montessori Method*" in 1912 which tells her views and discoveries about young children's learning and development, she generated a teacher training program focusing on teaching and learning of young children in Rome in 1913. It laid the foundation of Montessori teacher training. It has been going on implementing to become a Montessori teacher today (Isaacs,2018). Today, it is obligatory to complete an International Certificate Training Program of Montessori to become a Montessori teacher. Teachers in this study have Montessori Teacher Certificate from Montessori Teacher Trainer for Woodlands Training Center or have been going on education. The trainer of the teachers are Needra de Silva who obtained her Diploma in the Montessori Method of Education from London, UK under the guidance of Dr RAL Wentworth who was directly trained by Dr Maria Montessori herself and she later also obtained a Diploma from Woodlands Training Center.

On the other hand, Montessori education is an approach that emphasizes a universal child while being criticized in terms of hardness and nonetheless well known in these days. The aim is also to learn superiority on how to make children independent and free. Educators and families are both attracted from the approach. Although the Montessori method claims to have made a revolution in education, it has changed little since the 20th century (Bazelon, 2007). There are thoughts claiming that there are

paradoxes through the world related with Montessori approach such as the independent but structured, revolutionary but unchangeable.

To sum up, Montessori approach, attracted attention since the first years of its existence and has been used in both culturally and economically through very unique geographies, has always been popular through the world. Teachers of this approach, which creates a standard and universal culture in different regions in Africa as well as America and Asia, have also been the subjects of many studies. In this study, It is aimed to reach out why teachers working at Vilnius Montessori Preschool prefer to be a Montessori teacher rather than being a teacher in a traditional classroom and be able to have a better understanding of what it means to be a Montessori teacher for them.

## **Method**

In this section, the research model, research participants, the data collection tools and the data analysis information is offered.

### **Research Model**

This research has been carried out by a phenomenological design of qualitative research methods. The main purpose of the phenomenological research is to seek out the facts and produce in-depth explanations about this phenomenon in his narratives on a particular phenomenon based on the experiences and emotions of the individual (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

### **Research Participants-Universe-Sampling**

The participants in the study are teachers working at International Montessori School in Vilnius, Lithuania. All participants were female and between 23 and 56 years of age. All five participating Montessori kindergarten teachers had undergraduate degrees and were trained and certified as Montessori teachers. So, they interpret being a teacher from the point of view of Montessori approach. Thus, the participants are determined according to typical sampling method. The typical sample which is a kind of purposeful sampling method refers to individuals with typical features that are considered to represent the research question (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2013).

### **Data Collection Tools**

In this study, it is investigated why teachers prefer to be a Montessori teacher instead of being a teacher in traditional school and what it means to be a Montessori teacher for them. To reach at this aim, Interviewing which is one method of qualitative research is used to gather qualitative data. Structured Interviewing Form is developed by researchers. This form includes ten questions about experiences of participants related with being Montessori teacher. This form was used while interviewing with participants of the study. The open-ended questions in the form are:

1. Why did you prefer to work at Montessori Pre- School rather than traditional Pre-School?
2. What did you think when you were introduced for the first time with Montessori Philosophy?
3. What do you think about the advantages of Montessori education?
4. What do you think about the disadvantages of Montessori Education?
5. What do you think about how this program evaluates the individual differences between children?
6. Do you think that this program is appropriate for the children with special needs? If yes, Why?
7. What do you think how Montessori Education effect children socialization?
8. What do you think how Montessori Education effect children' creativity?
9. If you were a child, would you prefer to go to Montessori School? Why?
10. What is the main reason for preferring to work at this school? For being international school or being a Montessori School?

### **General Information Form**

This is a form which is developed by the researchers to learn general information such as age, gender, contact number, marital status, the year of experience.

### **Data Analysis**

In the first stage, the recorded interviews were made in the form of written documents to prevent data loss. Content analysis was done with the records which were resolved one to one (Elo& Kyngäs, 2008). The coding process was carried out in three stages, namely open coding, axis coding and selective coding (Thomas, 2006). The main themes emerged after this process.

### **The role of the Researchers**

First and second author work as a Research Assistant and third author as an Assistant Professor work at Child Development Department of Health Sciences Faculty at Hacettepe University. Three of the researchers interpret the research with the perspective of child development professional. It provides them with developmental approach.

### **Findings and Discussion**

To prefer being Montessori teacher depends on different aspects according to the participants of the study. Four main themes are constituted according to open coding. The themes have been arisen at the end of the study is individuality, respect everything, mixed age group advantages, prepared environment.

## Individuality

According to Montessori teachers working in Vilnius Montessori School, Montessori approach has key principles which makes this approach differ from traditional education in Lithuania. One of them is gathered under the concept of individuality. For example, T3 coded teacher has focused on the individuality which is one of the most powerful aspects of the approach. She expressed her thoughts as *“Every child is treated as an individual. We do not compare children, and each child is evaluated on an individual basis”*. Whitescarver&Cossentino (2008), Montessori approach which is well organized and has a concrete perspective figures on individual choice and freedom To take consider observation of researchers in Vilnius Montessori Preschool, teachers takes notice of individual choice and freedom carefully. T5 coded teacher said that *“It is holistic, thus fostering all the child's needs: manual engagement, social, practical life, and academic. But none of these are forcefully introduced, instead of the environment just presents it to the child when the child is ready for each developmental step. The child does not need to be 'on the same page' with anyone, they follow their own inner program”*. This perspective shows that both the developmental stage of each child and developing specific inner program for each child is critical while quiding children through the life span learning. Teacher with T3 code takes attention on a different perspective individually by saying that *“It's very good way to show the child that nobody but he or she is going to do Mo5 senses. It helps them to be independent. Each child is treated as an individual”*. According to Kramer (1988), for Montessori approach, treating each individual child with respect is needed to accomplish the aims. Also the individualized and developmental program, one of the basic teachings (aspects) of Montessori, worded by teachers that *“It gives for children independence, confidences of them self and academic knowledge” (T2)*. The long term effect of the approach on the child is expressed by the like that: *Laying a strong foundation in lives of children that can be built upon (T3)*

In addition, the Montessori schools do not focus solely on the individuality and freedom of children. Montessori's philosophy, which defines itself as a society with students, teachers and families, emphasizes the freedom of the teacher. Steiner (2016) provides teachers with an example not only of freedom of teaching, but also of learning, professional development, and building a system for them. To sum up, to be a Montessori teacher means considering each child and their development unique.

## Respect Everything

According to Montessori teachers working in Vilnius Montessori School, Montessori approach has key principles which makes this approach differ from traditional education in Lithuania. Another of them is gathered under the concept of respect of everything. Morrison (2014) states that respect for child is the cornerstone of Montessori approach which all the other principles depends on. If the choices are provided for children, they can have the ability to develop learning autonomy and also self-esteem. The T5-coded teacher mentioned that *“I discovered Montessori in 2007 when my daughter started attending a Montessori school in Warsaw, Poland. I was pleasantly surprised how deeply respectful this philosophy is for the child's rights and personality. I felt immediately that this is the right way of supporting the child's development”*. It is interpreted from the sentence that A Montessori teacher can not be thought without respect because of the fact that

the philosophy of Montessori depends on respecting children and children's rights. When it is asked teachers if they prefer to go to a Montessori school if they had chance to go during their childhood or not and why they prefer to go to Montessori school, all the participants in the study said that they would prefer to go to Montessori school. For example, T3 coded teacher told that *"Yes as I would have the ability to express myself and be respected, I can work at my own pace"* and T4 coded teacher added that *"It is very important to see the difference in this program. I mean it is one of the most important things we are trying to teach, respect everyone as he is"*. Schmidt (2009) states that respect for the child is necessary for all stages of learning. So, respect for everything provides children with the environment to learn and develop at their developmental stage. On the other hand, T5 coded teacher mentioned that *"This philosophy respects all differences and individualities. There should be no judgments made on why one child is one way or another. Each child must be allowed to learn on their own way. However, the environment created by teachers must demand mutual respect from all members of the community, young and older"*. When Epstein(1996) asked teachers what they feel are the overall goals of the Montessori method for children, teachers' most frequent responses were to develop children's independence, potential, self-confidence, self-respect, ability to learn at one's own pace, joy of learning, respect for others, curiosity (creativity), self-control, and concentration. Besides, Chattin-McNichols(1992) states that two way of implementation of respect exists in Montessori classrooms. Adults respects the abilities of children. This respect effects the adult-child interaction and also adults' strict attention to the organization of the environment in which children learn. Such a continuous model of respect brace up children to respect themselves, one another, the adults who work with them, and the materials they prefer.

To sum up, to be a Montessori teacher means to respect everything such as child, environment, nature, adults...

### **Mixed Age Group Advantages**

According to Montessori teachers working in Vilnius Montessori School, Montessori approach has key principles which makes this approach differ from traditional education in Lithuania. The following theme is gathered under the concept of mixed age group advantages. Mixed age groups have lots of advantages in education. It is interpreted from the studies done so far in the literature that aggressive and negative behaviors of children were significantly less likely to be noted by teachers in mixed-age than in same-age classrooms (McClellan&Kinsey, 1997). In a study which is conducted to reform the understanding of the effects of classroom age composition on vocabulary growth, drawing upon a large, population-based sample of children attending early childhood programs, it is obviously clear that relationship between the range of child age within a classroom and children's vocabulary development, such that classrooms with a maximum age range of 24 months were identified with the greatest gains in vocabulary growth. When the teachers are asked what the advantages of being Montessori teacher, all of them mentioned about advantages of working with mixed age group. They explained that there aren't mixed age classrooms in traditional schools in Lithuania and Montessori



approach gives children chance to learn each other. The teacher's code with T1 and T4 also focused on working with the mixed age group, which is one of the strengths of the socialization method in Montessori schools. T1 coded teacher said that *"As we are mixed age group children naturally learn to respect each other and care for their environment"*. It means that mixed age group serves for the cornerstone of Montessori approach which is "respect for child".

It provided teachers with chance to implement respect for the child. It cannot be seen in Vilnius Montessori classroom that there is just one age group. There are children who are at different ages in each classroom. It is interpreted that teachers accept the advantages of mixed age group. For example, T4 coded teacher said that *"I think it helps a lot to learn how to listen, be polite and specially in our preschool it helps to see more international- open world. That is good for socialization in mixed age groups"* and T5 coded teacher mentioned that *"Socializing is natural in a Montessori classroom because of the mixed-age group. There are plenty of opportunities for socializing and children help each other"*. According to Katz, Evangelou & Hartman (1990), mixed age groups support children to construct relationships and friendships and it also provides children with possibilities for specific learning opportunities. To sum up, to be a Montessori teacher means being a teacher of mixed age groups encouraging socializing.

### **Prepared Environment**

The prepared environment encourages children to work on activities which they choose by themselves at their own pace. Children have tasks to complete. These tasks are their work. The main idea behind the prepared environment is that it is constructed in a way that children are able to choose their own work according to their pace everyday and one of the teacher's role in Montessori approach is to prepare this environment (Epstein, 1996). In addition, Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi (2005) states that Montessori defines prepared environment as if it is designed according to the place where children's true nature is emerged. They revealed that the Montessori schools in their study which they compare the traditional school environments and Montessori school environments have environments which improve the students' concentration through affective and cognitive involvement and also the most widely recognized element of a prepared environment is the freedom a student has to select an activity and explore his or her interests (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). In this context, T5 coded teacher mentioned prepared environment as *"Ha! Yes, because as much as love preparing the environment for the children in our school - every time I think about how much I would love to have gone to a school with such an environment in my childhood. It is inspiring. Another important element, which was rather absent in my childhood days - is the possibility to choose my work. Wow, how I would love to be able to choose"*. So, Lillard (2018) states that Montessori thinks that children are able to follow a positive developmental path as if adults do not interfere or provide children with an environment with the right type and level of mental stimulation.

To sum up, to be a Montessori teacher means designing the environment according to children's need with Montessori materials. The surroundings of Montessori by Cossentino (2009) are visualized as follows. As it is understood from the schema, it is seen that the environment has a big role

in Montessori philosophy. It is clear that the relationship between the child's needs and the environment is directly related.

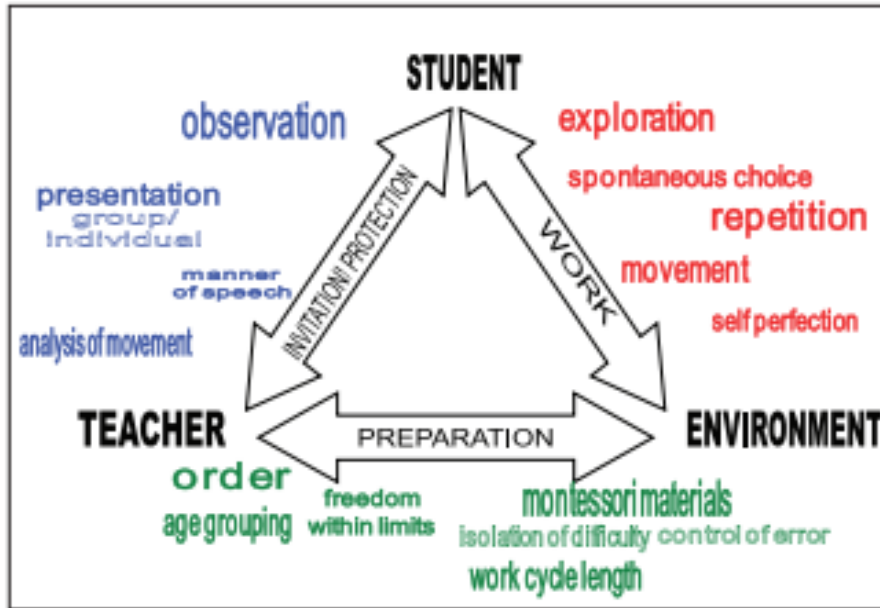


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of Montessori

### Conclusion and Advices

According to the findings of Malm (2003), Montessori's strengths are that it focuses on philosophical awareness, a holistic approach and a true ethics of care. In this respect, our research can be said to be consistent with the Malm's findings. On the other hand, the contradictory traditional / contemporary educational interpretations of Montessori theory and practice are other issues that arise between Montessori teachers. It is seen that the contradictions related to traditional education have also emerged in our current research.

In conclusion, it is understood why teachers prefer to be a Montessori teacher rather than being a teacher at a traditional school because of the key principles of Montessori approach. It is seen that they internalize the principles of approach and to be a Montessori teacher for them:

- means considering each child and their development unique.
- means to respect everything such as child, environment, materials, nature, adults...
- means being a teacher of mixed age groups encouraging socializing.
- means designing the environment according to children's need with Montessori materials.

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