

The Attitudes of Preschool Teacher Candidates Studying Through Distance Education Approach Towards Teaching Profession And Their Perception Levels of Teaching Competency

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach towards teaching profession and to determine their perception levels of teaching competency. The population and sampling of the study were the senior students of Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty, Preschool Teacher Training Undergraduate Program. The study was conducted through 957 teacher candidates. A survey was used in order to measure the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching profession and to determine their perception levels of teaching competency as a data collection instrument for this study. The study revealed that the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching profession are quite positive, and their perception levels of teaching competency are very good. Moreover, the teacher candidates consider the program they enrolled in so beneficial for them to gain teaching competencies.

Keywords: Distance education, teacher training, preschool education, attitudes towards teaching profession

INTRODUCTION

Today, distance education is one of the most rapidly developing approaches in the world. The potential effect of distance education on the whole education system from primary to higher education has been emphasized through information and communication technologies (Williams, Paprock & Covington, 1999, p. 14). The information and communication technologies that have been developed recently contribute significantly to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in distance education. These communication technologies consist of hardware (computers and modems), software programs (programs providing communication), and communication connections (telephone line). Students, teachers, and teaching experts can communicate with each other by using these learning technologies (Isman, 1998, p. 29).

TEACHER TRAINING THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION APPROACH

In distance education, programs can be used in different forms and different probable models can be created (Verduin & Clark, 1991, p. 13). One of the areas in which distance education is mostly used is teacher training. Distance education in the teacher training area is used for different purposes with a variety of programs in different countries (Ozer, 1991, p. 73). Today in many countries, distance education programs are used in pre-service and in-service trainings of teachers. Distance education is completely implemented as long-term programs to prepare individuals to the teaching profession.

There are many reasons for using distance education approach in teacher training. Some of these reasons can be listed as follows (Ozer, 1989, p. 23):

- Distance education ensures the possibility of training a large number of teachers in a short time; therefore, preparing a large number of teachers to profession or improving their occupational qualities can be possible.
- It enables training teachers without leaving their schools as workplaces. Thus, the education at schools can be kept going.
- The contemporary teaching materials and teaching methods and techniques used in distance education approach can also be used in the institutions training teachers in formal education.

Perraton, Creed, and Robinson's (2001, pp.2-3) analysis indicates that countries use the distance education approach in teacher training for the following various purposes:

- Some countries use distance education for huge teacher mass gaining basic qualities.
- When teacher training is considered inadequate in terms of duration, distance education is used to increase the skills and knowledge as well as to deepen teachers' understanding.
- Distance education plays a significant role in program reforms aiming at changing the content and activities of education. For instance, the programs towards supporting the use of education technologies at schools are carried out for this purpose.
- Distance education is used to support the professional development of teachers.

In teacher training, there is some evidence regarding the success of distance education carried out at the dimensions of subject area, world knowledge, occupational knowledge of teaching, and practice (Perraton, Creed, & Robinson, 2002, p. 26). Therefore, distance education models and technologies are commonly applied in teacher training (Phellion, Johnson, & Lehman, 2004).

ANADOLU UNIVERSITY OPEN EDUCATION FACULTY PRESCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

In Turkey, apart from formal education, distance education opportunities are also provided in teacher training by implementing two-year and four-year undergraduate programs. One of these programs is "Undergraduate Program for Preschool Teacher Training", which was put into practice in accordance with the protocol signed between Ministry of Education and Anadolu University in the 2001-2002 academic year.

Rationale of the Program

Increasing the value of Preschool period which has an important place in human life can be carried out through a well-qualified preschool education. Thus, improving the quality of preschool education and making it widespread to serve whole age group is very important (Gurkan, 2002, p. 8). Today, increasing population, urbanization, education levels of women and number of working women create a need for institutional preschool teaching and consequently a growing demand for preschool teachers (Oktay, 1999, p. 103). However, in the 1999-2000 school year, schooling ratio in Turkey was 10,2% (Ministry of Education, 2004) which was considerably low in comparison with developed and European Union countries. One of the major reasons of this is the lack of preschool teachers. As Lea (2000, p.3) states, if the number of preschool teachers a nation needs is inadequate, one of the approaches that can be referred to is distance education.

Basic Features of the Program and Conditions of Acceptance

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty, Undergraduate Program for Preschool Teacher Training is the same as the regular undergraduate preschool teacher training programs being conducted through formal education in the education faculties in Turkey, and it is completely carried out through distance education (Anadolu University, 2004). The program was designed on the basis of formal Preschool Teacher Training Program prepared by Higher Education Council. While designing the program, the principles of distance education were taken into consideration.

In order to enroll to this program, candidates have to be the graduates of Child Development, Child Development and Education, and Child Development and Nurturing departments of Girls Vocational High Schools, and they are placed into the program after passing the University Entrance Exam. Graduates apart from these three departments of Vocational High Schools and other high schools are not accepted to the program (Anadolu University, 2004). 20,015 students enrolled in the Undergraduate Program for Preschool Teacher Training from the first time it was put into practice in the 2000-2001 academic year until the first graduates of the program in the 2004-2005 academic year. The student quota of the program from 2003-2004 was limited to 2000 students. As first graduates, 960 students were graduated from the program in the 2003-2004 academic year.

The Purpose of the Program

The basic purpose of the Program for Preschool Teacher Training is to contribute to the training of preschool teachers that Turkey needs without making a concession on the quality of education, and with the required costs, number, and quality (Anadolu University, 2004).

The Content of the Program

The program, aiming at equipping the students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards preschool teaching profession, consists of the courses of *occupational knowledge of teaching, subject area knowledge, and world knowledge*. While the courses in the first year focus on the world knowledge, the courses in the last years of the program focus on the subject area knowledge. And the courses on the *occupational knowledge of teaching* domain continue throughout four years.

There are two different practice courses named *Teaching Practice* and *Practice in Preschool Education* in the Program for Preschool Teacher Training along with theoretical courses. Practice courses are conducted with the collaboration of Open Education Faculty and Ministry of Education. In the collaboration, faculty coordinator of Open Education Faculty represents the faculty party, the coordinator of practice school in which the practice activities are conducted on behalf of Ministry of Education and mentor teacher represents the ministry party. In this collaboration, Directorate of Education carries out the necessary managerial work (Gultekin, 2004, p. 4).

Teaching-Learning Processes of the Program

Learning-teaching processes of the program are carried out through printed materials, television programs, and academic counseling services. Printed materials (course books and guidebooks) are written by the subject area experts under the supervision of an editor. Printed materials are written on the basis of distance education principles makes self-learning possible. Each unit in a course book consists of goals, content, instructions, text, summary, comprehension questions and bibliography. Moreover, in order to support the printed materials, 2-6 television programs for each course and a total of 123 programs were filmed. In addition to printed materials and television programs, academic counseling services are carried out, as well. Academic counseling services such as orientation of students regarding lessons and answering their questions are carried out through Internet.

Achievement Assessment in the Program

Academic achievements of students are determined through central exams in accordance with the regulations of distance education programs of Anadolu University. Students take the exams three times a year at the scheduled dates on the academic calendar. Students take the exams in four sessions on Saturday and Sunday mornings and afternoons (Anadolu University, 2004).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As in every occupation, individuals who are working in the teaching profession are also expected to have certain knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge and skills are the behaviors that teachers should perform while doing their jobs. In other words, knowledge and skills are the efficacies indicating the behavioral standards of teachers. Competency means the necessary features of a profession to be successfully carried out (Sisman, 1999, p.9). Efficacies of occupational teaching knowledge include all knowledge and skills regarding teacher's interaction with students, planning and organizing the lessons effectively, managing the classroom effectively, developing and using rich teaching strategies, and evaluation of learning outputs effectively (Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb, & Moonesamy, 2003, p. 32).

Even though the attitudes are generally assumed within the scope of competency, they should be analyzed separately in terms of their effect on the learning of knowledge and skills because there is a correlation between the attitudes of individuals while attempting to do a job and completing that job successfully. As Sozer (1991, p. 4) states, in a learning environment where attitude formation is not taken into account, the possibility of having great difficulties in the occurrence of learning experiences and realization of teaching activities should not be forgotten. Attitude can be defined as tendencies pushing the individual to perform particular behaviors against particular people, objects, and situations (Demirel & Un, 1987, p. 173). In this respect, the attitude of the teacher towards his or her profession can be considered as the determinant of his or her behaviors in the profession. On the other hand, the quality of the attitude of the teacher reflects his or her occupational understanding of teaching (Can, 1987, p. 160). Therefore, examining the student attitude is very important in terms of providing an effective teaching-learning environment and developing functional education programs (Yasar, 1985, p.5).

Most of the learning in distance education occurs independently from the existence of teacher depending on the teaching materials prepared in advance (Evans, 1994, p. 16). In other words, the majority of the efficacies that are the resultant of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will gain can only be provided with teaching materials. However, in formal education, since students go through the learning process face-to-face, they gain the necessary efficacies within the interaction between both the teacher and other students. In this respect, determining the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching profession and their perception levels of teaching efficacies are of great importance. The attitudes of teacher candidates regarding teaching profession and their perception levels of teaching give some clues in a way concerning the effectiveness of the program implemented. As Ozer (1993, p. 11) states, the most important issue in teacher training programs carried out through distance education is the effectiveness of the program; in other words, whether the content has been learned, or whether the behaviors aimed have been gained by the teachers or not.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach towards teaching and to

determine their perception levels of teaching competency. Therefore, the following questions were posed for this study:

- What are the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach towards teaching profession?
- Do the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach towards teaching profession vary in terms of their employment and age?
- What are the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach regarding their teaching competency?
- Do the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates regarding their teacher competency vary in terms of their employment and age?

METHOD

The Model of the Study

This is a survey study conducted through quantitative analysis aiming at determining the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach towards teaching profession and determining their perception levels of teaching competency.

The Population and Sample of the Study

Senior students of Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty, Preschool Teacher Training Program studying through distance education approach in the 2003-2004 academic year consists of the population of the study. Sampling was not carried out, and 1063 senior preschool teacher candidates were included in the scope of the study. Surveys were sent to 1063 senior teacher candidates and 996 of the surveys returned. The return ratio of the surveys was 93.7%. 33 of the surveys were excluded from the evaluation since they were not answered properly, so the study was conducted through the data obtained from 957 teacher candidates. Personal information concerning preschool teacher candidates consisting of the population of the study and studying through distance education approach was presented in Figure: 1.

Personal Information	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<i>Employment</i>		
Employed	242	25,5
Unemployed	715	74,5
<i>Age</i>		
22 and below	350	36,6
23-27	478	49,9
28-32	88	9,2
33 and above	41	4,3
Total	957	100

Figure: 1
Personal information of the participants

As seen in Figure: 1, 25,5% of the teacher candidates participated in the study are unemployed, whereas, 74,5% are employed. 36,6% of the participants are at the age of 22 and below, 49,9% of the participants are between the ages of 23-27, 9,2% of the participants are at the ages of 28-32, and 4,3% of the participants are at the age 33 and above. It shows that three-fourth of teacher candidates are employed and half of them are between the ages of 23-27. Figure: 1 also indicates that more than one-third of the teacher candidates are below the age of 22.

Data Collection Instrument

A survey was designed to collect data within the scope of the study. In the first half of the survey, there are questions composed to determine the personal information of the teacher candidates participated in the study. In the second part of the survey, with the aim of determining the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching profession, there is a scale called 'The Attitude Scale Towards Teaching Profession' of which the reliability and validity analyses had been conducted and developed by Askar and Erden (1987).

In the third part of the survey, there is "A Questionnaire for Determining the Teaching Competencies" in order to determine how teacher candidates perceive their teaching competencies. While designing the questionnaire, the study called "Teacher Competencies" carried out by Ministry of Education in 2002. It was taken into consideration. Teaching competencies were simply transformed into questionnaire in this study. Each competency area under the title of "Educating-Teaching Competencies" was thought to be a single item in the scale, and each sub-competency under the each competency area was used as explanations.

For validity, the questionnaire was submitted to the professors in the field, and in the light of their opinions necessary revisions were made. The revised questionnaire was administered to the research group and the value of coefficient of Cronbach alpha was examined in order to test the reliability of the survey. The analysis revealed the alpha value of 14-item survey as 0.87. According to Ozdamar (1997, p. 500), the coefficient of alpha between 0,80-100 means that it is highly reliable. The latest form questionnaire was delivered to schools to be filled by candidate students doing their spring term practicum in the 2003-2004 academic year. Finally, the questionnaires were collected in the same way as they were delivered.

Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data, the surveys were examined one by one and the ones that were not answered properly were considered as invalid and so were not included in the final evaluation. In order to determine the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching profession, the arithmetic averages of the scores given by teacher candidates and standard deviations of the score distributions were calculated. The highest total score that can be obtained from the attitude scale is 50 and the lowest total score is 10. The highest total score that can be obtained by marking 'no idea' choice (30) is the indication of the neutral attitudes, so the scores above 30 indicate positive attitudes; the scores below 30 indicate negative attitudes.

The arithmetic averages and the standard deviations of the score distributions of the answers given to the "A Questionnaire for Determining the Teaching Competencies" by the teacher candidates were calculated. Findings were evaluated based on following bands; 4.21-5.00 very good, 3.41-4.20 good, 2.61-3.40 moderate, 1.81-2.60 bad, and 1.00-1.80 very bad. In the analysis of the data, apart from arithmetic averages and standard deviations, independent t test for paired comparisons and one-way variance analysis were applied. The significance level was accepted as .05 in the analyses.

FINDINGS

The findings obtained within the scope of the study are presented the order stated in the aims.

In this section, first the general attitudes of preschool teacher candidates towards teaching profession and then whether their attitudes towards teaching profession vary in terms of employment and age are examined.

Attitudes of Preschool Teacher Candidates Towards Teaching Profession

The attitude levels of preschool teacher candidates towards teaching profession are presented in Figure: 2.

Personal Information About Teacher Candidates						
	N	X	SS	Sd	t	P
<i>Employment</i>						
Employed	242	47,46	3,59	955	0,189	>.05
Unemployed	715	47,41	3,83			
	N	X	SS	Sd	F	P
<i>Age</i>						
22 and below	350	47,59	3,51	(3;953)	0,620	>.05
23-27	478	47,38	3,56			
28-32	88	47,09	3,89			
33 and above	41	47,05	6,88			
General	957	47,42	3,77			

Figure: 2
Attitude Levels of Preschool Teacher Candidates Towards Teaching Profession

As seen in Figure 2, the mean score of general attitudes of preschool teacher candidates participated in the study concerning teaching profession is 47,42.

When the scores that are above 30 (as an indication of positive attitudes obtained from attitude scale) are taken into account, it is understood that the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates towards teaching profession is positive. Their attitude levels can even be defined as quite high.

When one of the research questions which is whether the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates towards teaching profession vary in terms of employment is examined, it is seen that the mean score of the attitudes of the employed teacher candidates towards teaching profession is 47,46 and the mean score of the attitudes of the unemployed teacher candidates is 47,41. There is not a big difference between these two mean scores. Likewise, the t test conducted to test if there was a significant difference between these two mean scores revealed that the attitude scores of teacher candidates towards teaching profession do not vary in terms of the employment of teacher candidates.

When the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates towards teaching profession examined to test if their attitudes vary in terms of age, it is seen that there is not a big difference between the ages of teacher candidates and the mean scores of their attitudes towards teaching profession. The F test that was carried out among the mean scores of the groups to test whether there was a statistically significant difference between the ages of teacher candidates and the mean scores of the attitudes towards teaching profession revealed no statistically significant difference.

Perception Levels of Preschool Teacher Candidates Regarding Their Teaching Competency

In this section, first the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates towards their teaching competency, and then whether there were differences among the perception levels of teacher candidates in terms of employment and age were examined. The data concerning the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency are presented in Figure 3.

Teaching Competencies	N	X	SS
Being familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the students	957	4,56	0,54
Planning the teaching	957	4,59	0,54
Developing materials	957	4,28	0,68
Teaching	957	4,55	0,57
Managing teaching	957	4,59	0,56
Assessing and evaluating students performance	957	4,24	0,66
Guiding	957	4,65	0,53
Developing basic skills	957	4,71	0,48
Educating students with special needs	957	3,91	0,75
Educating adults	957	4,18	0,68
Involving in and out of class activities	957	4,50	0,65
Self-development	957	4,63	0,56
Developing the school	957	4,45	0,65
Developing school-environment relations	957	4,45	0,63
General	957	4,45	0,39

Figure: 3
Perception levels preschool teacher candidates
regarding their teaching competency

When looked at the data in Figure 3, it can be said that the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates regarding teaching competency is quite high (4,45). In other words, it is seen that preschool teacher candidates think that they have the teaching competencies except "educating students with special needs" at a very good level.

The competency area in which the preschool teacher candidates perceive themselves as the most competent is "developing the basic skills" (4,71). This competency area is followed by guiding (4,65), self-development (4,63), planning teaching (4,59), and managing teaching (4,59). In addition, the mean scores of Being familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the students (4,56), teaching (4,55), developing the school (4,45), and developing the school-environment relations are high, too. On the other hand, the mean scores concerning the competency areas of developing materials (4,28), assessing and evaluating students performance (4,24), and educating adults (4,18) are a little lower in comparison to others. The lowest competency area is "educating students with special needs" (3,91).

The data concerning the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency in terms of employment are presented in Figure 4.

When looked at all the competency areas generally in Figure 4, it is seen that the mean score (4,48) of employed teacher candidates is higher than the mean score (4,38) of unemployed teacher candidates. Besides, when looked at the mean scores one by one, it is seen that the mean scores of employed teacher candidates are higher than the mean scores of unemployed teacher candidates.

The t test conducted in order to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of employed and unemployed teacher candidates regarding their competency areas revealed a significant difference in favor of employed teacher candidates in the areas except materials development, managing teaching, assessing and evaluating students performance, and self-development. When all the competency areas are also taken into consideration between the employed and unemployed teacher candidates, it is seen that there is a statistically significant difference in favor of the employed teacher candidates.

Teaching Competencies	Employment	N	\bar{X}	SS	Sd	t	P
Being familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the students	Unemployed	242	4,50	0,56	955	1,857*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,58	0,53			
Planning the teaching	Unemployed	242	4,54	0,58	955	1,712*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,61	0,52			
Developing materials	Unemployed	242	4,25	0,67	955	0,794	>.05
	Employed	715	4,29	0,68			
Teaching	Unemployed	242	4,49	0,61	955	1,741*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,56	0,55			
Managing teaching	Unemployed	242	4,56	0,55	955	0,778	>.05
	Employed	715	4,59	0,57			
Assessing and evaluating students performance	Unemployed	242	4,20	0,66	955	0,863	>.05
	Employed	715	4,25	0,55			
Guiding	Unemployed	242	4,57	0,57	955	2,635*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,67	0,21			
Developing basic skills	Unemployed	242	4,66	0,49	955	1,835*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,72	0,48			
Educating students with special needs	Unemployed	242	3,90	0,76	955	1,652*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,00	0,75			
Educating adults	Unemployed	242	4,07	0,69	955	2,684*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,21	0,68			
Involving in and out of class activities	Unemployed	242	4,29	0,69	955	5,889*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,57	0,61			
Self-development	Unemployed	242	4,57	0,56	955	1,603	>.05
	Employed	715	4,64	0,55			
Developing the school	Unemployed	242	4,32	0,64	955	3,580*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,49	0,64			
Developing school-environment relations	Unemployed	242	4,31	0,64	955	3,885*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,50	0,62			
General	Unemployed	242	4,38	0,40	955	3,557*	<.05
	Employed	715	4,48	0,38			

Figure: 4
Perception levels of preschool teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency in terms of employment

It can be concluded from this result that there is a difference in favor of the employed teacher candidates between the perception levels of teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency in terms of employment.

The findings concerning the perception levels of preschool teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency in terms of their ages are presented in Figure 5.

Teaching Competencies	Ages	N	X	SS	Sd	F	P
Being familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the students	22 and below	350	4,55	0,53	(3-953)	1,313	>.05
	23-27	478	4,55	0,56			
	28-32	88	4,60	0,54			
	33 and above	41	4,71	0,46			
Planning the teaching	22 and below	350	4,62	0,53	(3-953)	1,421	>.05
	23-27	478	4,58	0,53			
	28-32	88	4,47	0,63			
	33 and above	41	4,54	0,48			
Developing materials	22 and below	350	4,26	0,69	(3-953)	0,366	>.05,
	23-27	478	4,26	0,68			
	28-32	88	4,26	0,70			
	33 and above	41	4,37	0,54			
Teaching	22 and below	350	4,52	0,57	(3-953)	1,171	>.05
	23-27	478	4,56	0,56			
	28-32	88	4,52	0,59			
	33 and above	41	4,68	0,52			
Managing teaching	22 and below	350	4,58	0,59	(3-953)	1,191	>.05
	23-27	478	4,60	0,53			
	28-32	88	4,50	0,61			
	33 and above	41	4,68	0,47			
Assessing and evaluating students performance	22 and below	350	4,16	0,67	(3-953)	2,479*	<.05
	23-27	478	4,28	0,66			
	28-32	88	4,30	0,66			
	33 above	41	4,32	0,66			
Guiding	22 and below	350	4,61	0,55	(3-953)	1,527	>.05
	23-27	478	4,68	0,51			
	28-32	88	4,63	0,55			
	33 and above	41	4,68	0,52			
Developing basic skills	22 and below	350	4,69	0,59	(3-953)	0,447	>.05
	23-27	478	4,71	0,49			
	28-32	88	4,73	0,50			
	33 and above	41	4,78	0,42			
Educating students with special needs	22 and below	350	3,96	0,74	(3-953)	0,500	>.05
	23-27	478	3,99	0,76			
	28-32	88	3,94	0,81			
	33 and above	41	4,10	0,70			
Educating adults	22 and below	350	4,16	0,69	(3-953)	0,788	>.05
	23-27	478	4,19	0,98			
	28-32	88	4,15	0,69			
	33 and above	41	4,32	0,61			
Involving in and out of class activities	22 and below	350	4,50	0,65	(3-953)	0,146	>.05
	23-27	478	4,49	0,65			
	28-32	88	4,51	0,66			
	33 and above	41	4,56	0,5499			
	22 and below	350	4,61	0,58	(3-953)	2,041	>.05

Self-development	23-27	478	4,62	0,56			
	28-32	88	4,72	0,50			
	33 and above	41	4,78	0,42			
Developing the school	22 and below	350	4,41	0,65	(3-953)	1,232	>.05
	23-27	478	4,47	0,65			
	28-32	88	4,45	0,69			
	33 and above	41	4,59	0,450			
Developing school-environment relations	22 and below	350	4,40	0,68	(3-953)	1,280	>.05
	23-27	478	4,48	0,61			
	28-32	88	4,46	0,64			
	33 and above	41	4,54	0,50			
General	22 and below	350	4,43	0,39	(3-956)	1,408	>.05
	23-27	478	4,46	0,39			
	28-32	88	4,45	0,39			
	33 and above	41	4,55	0,32			

Figure: 5
Perception levels of preschool teacher candidates
regarding their teaching competency in terms of their ages

The data in Figure 5 indicate that in terms of the ages of teacher candidates, there are some differences between the mean scores of teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency. According to these data, the mean score of the teacher candidates in the group of 33 years of age and above are higher than the mean scores of the teacher candidates in the other age groups in all the competency areas except planning the teaching. It is seen that the mean scores of the teacher candidates in the other age groups are close to each other. When all the competency areas are also taken into consideration, it is understood that the mean score of teacher candidates in the group of 33 years of age and above is higher. However, only the "assessing and evaluating students performance" competency area was found to be statistically significant according to the results of the F test conducted to test whether the difference between the mean scores of the teacher candidates regarding teaching competency in terms of their ages.

When looked at all the competency areas generally, it is seen that there is not a statistically significant difference among the perception levels of teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency in terms of their ages.

RESULTS and SUGGESTIONS

The results in the light of the data obtained within the scope of the study and the suggestions are presented in this section. The results based on the findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The attitudes of preschool teacher candidates participated in the study towards teaching profession are positive. In addition, the attitude levels of preschool teacher candidates towards teaching profession do not vary in terms their employment and ages.
- Preschool teacher candidates generally perceive their teaching competency as very good. Teacher candidates perceive their competency in the area of "educating students with special needs" as good and they perceive the rest of their competency areas as very good. Besides, in terms of their employment, while the perception levels of teacher candidates regarding their teaching competency vary in favor of the

employed candidates, their perception levels do not vary in terms of their ages.

As a result, it can be said that the attitudes of preschool teacher candidates studying at Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty, Preschool Teacher Training Program towards teaching profession are positive, and their perception levels of their teaching competency is very good. The following suggestions can be proposed in light of the research findings:

- Activities that can improve the competency levels of teacher candidates studying through distance education approach can be carried out. Necessary precautions can be taken concerning to improve especially the competencies of 'serving to the children who need special education' and 'testing and assessing the achievement'.
- The teaching competencies of preschool teacher candidates studying through distance education approach can also be determined by observational studies.
- Open Education Faculty, Preschool Teacher Training Program can thoroughly be evaluated based on the opinions of students and relevant parties such as the Coordinators of Local Directorate of Education, the coordinators and mentors of practicum school.
- The attitudes, competencies, and opinions of teacher candidates studying through distance and formal education approaches towards teaching profession can comparatively be studied.

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