

Examining Teachers' Opinions on Foreign Language Instruction in Preschool Education

Burcu KARAFİL

Yalova University, Yalova-Türkiye

Article History

Submitted: 06.09.2023

Accepted: 25.11.2023

Published Online: 12.04.2024

Keywords

Middle school students
Problem solving
Perception of problem solving

Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to determine the applications and problems related to the foreign language teaching process at the preschool level, based on teachers' opinions.

Design & Methodology: In this study, a case study approach, one of the qualitative research methods, was employed. The participants of the study consisted of 15 teachers working in preschools in a province located in the Southern Marmara Region of Turkey. Data was collected using questionnaire technique. A questionnaire prepared by the researcher for teachers served as the data collection tool. Content analysis was employed to analyze the obtained data.

Findings: As a result of the study, teachers' opinions indicated that teaching English during the preschool period was deemed effective and necessary. Teachers reported using games, dramas, coloring activities, cut-and-paste craft activities, and flashcards while teaching English. Additionally, they identified native language barriers, classroom management problems, students' low readiness level, difficulties in teaching pronunciation, a lack of experience in teaching English at the preschool level, and a shortage of materials as some of the challenges they encountered. On the other hand, teachers expressed positive opinions regarding the English curriculum in terms of its objectives, suitability for students' levels, enhancement of English language skills, and compatibility with the Turkish preschool curriculum. On the contrary, they noted that the curriculum did not adequately focus on communication skills, was not student-centered but topic-centered, and posed challenges for students.

Implications & Suggestions: Teachers suggested that improving the learning experience, developing new methods and techniques, developing additional teaching materials, offering family support, and providing training for teachers would enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching.



DOI:10.29129/inujgse.1355908

Okul Öncesi Dönemde Yabancı Dil Öğretim Sürecine İlişkin Öğretmen Görüşlerinin İncelenmesi

Burcu KARAFİL

Yalova Üniversitesi, Yalova-Türkiye

Makale Geçmişi

Geliş: 06.09.2023
Kabul: 25.11.2023
Online Yayın: 12.04.2024

Anahtar Sözcükler

Ortaokul öğrencileri
Problem çözme
Problem çözmeye yönelik algı

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı okul öncesi dönemde yabancı dil öğretimindeki uygulamaları ve karşılaşılan sorunları öğretmen görüşleri doğrultusunda belirlemektir.

Yöntem: Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemi içerisinde yer alan durum çalışması deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Marmara Bölgesinde bir ilde çeşitli okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında görev yapan ve İngilizce dersini yürütmüş 15 öğretmen oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma anket tekniği ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veri toplama aracı olarak öğretmenlere yönelik hazırlanan bir soru formu kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Bulgulara göre, öğretmenler okul öncesi dönemde İngilizce öğretiminin oldukça etkili ve gerekli olduğu görüşündedirler. Öğretmenler İngilizce öğretiminde oyunlar ve drama, boyama etkinlikleri, kesme yapıştırma etkinlikleri ve flash kartlar kullandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte bu süreçte ana dilin olumsuz etkisinin olduğunu, sınıf yönetimi konusunda sorunlar yaşadıklarını, aile katılımının ve desteğinin sağlanmadığını, öğrencilerin hazırbulunmuşluk düzeylerinin düşük olduğunu, telaffuz öğretimi ile ilgili sorunlar olduğunu, öğretmenlerin deneyim eksikliklerinin bulunduğunu ve materyal eksikliği sorunları ile karşılaştıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmenler programın kazanımlar, öğrenci seviyesine uygunluk, yabancı dil becerisinin gelişmesi ve mevcut programla uyumluluk açılarından oldukça etkili olduğu görüşündedirler. Buna karşın öğretmenler programda konuşma becerisine önem verilmediği, öğrenci merkezli olmadığını, konu merkezli olduğunu ve zorlayıcı olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir.

Sonuçlar ve Öneriler: Öğretmenler programın daha etkili olabilmesi için uygun öğrenme ortamlarının sağlanması, materyallerin, yöntem ve tekniklerin geliştirilmesi, sistemsel değişikliklerin yapılması, aile katılımının sağlanması ve öğretmenlere yönelik eğitimlerin verilmesi önerilerinde bulunmuşlardır.



DOI:10.29129/inujgse.1355908

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been an increased focus on the benefits of starting to learn English as a foreign language (EFL) at a young age. This has been driven by a growing recognition among policymakers and practitioners for the potential advantages that an early start can offer. This increased attention is due in part to national policies that emphasize the importance of communication in at least one foreign language (FL), as well as the belief that younger children are better and easier language learners, and that a longer period of language learning leads to higher levels of proficiency and achievement.

The ability to learn a first or second language is most beneficial for children during a critical period. As individuals age, their language learning competence tends to decline (Penfield & Roberts, 1959, p. 5). Ellis notes that there is a specific time frame in which language acquisition occurs naturally and effectively, but beyond a certain age, the brain loses its ability to process language in this manner (1986, p. 107). Scovel (1988, p. 2) defines this critical period as follows: "In brief, the critical period hypothesis is the notion that language is the best learned during the early years of the childhood, and that after about the first dozen years of life, everyone faces certain constraints in the ability to pick up a new language." Following this, Lenneberg (1967, p. 176) introduced the concept of "lateralization" to describe how during puberty, the ability to process language is localized in the left hemisphere of the brain due to biological changes. This implies that children have more adaptable brains for language acquisition than adults. Krashen suggested that the process of brain lateralization is completed by the age of five (1973, p. 65). However, Lamendella (1977, p. 175) argued that this period was exaggerated and instead used the term "sensitive period" to describe lateralization, suggesting that the opportunity to learn language well can occur after the age of five. Similarly, according to Kenworth (1987), if foreign language learning does not begin before adolescence, it is not possible to speak the language like a native speaker. Harmer (2003) states that foreign language teaching should start at an early age for the development of pronunciation skill similar to the native language. Demirezen (2003) notes that there is a critical period for language learning in children and if there is no necessary cooperation between school, family, and environment during these critical periods, significant problems may occur in language teaching. King and Mackey (2007) have stated that if foreign language teaching begins during childhood, pronunciation skills will develop better, and individuals will be able to speak the foreign language like their native language. According to Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011), if a foreign language is learned before the age of ten, speaking skill can develop better, and the foreign language can be spoken more accurately. In conclusion, age plays a crucial role in foreign language learning, and children have a critical period during which they are more adaptable to language acquisition, and their brains are more flexible than those of adults. If language learning begins before adolescence, individuals can develop better pronunciation skill and speak the foreign language more accurately, like their native language. Therefore, foreign language teaching should start at an early age to maximize the benefits of the critical period for language acquisition.

Children can also acquire linguistic, cognitive, metalinguistic, and learning skills more permanently when learning a foreign language in early childhood (Read, 2003). Preschool children can be more successful in learning new concepts, exploring different cultures, and understanding them by learning a foreign language (Brumfit, Moon, & Tongue, 1991). Learning a foreign language at an early age can eliminate children's shyness, improve their dialogue skills, introduce them to new cultures, and support their overall development (Akdoğan, 2004). Additionally, learning a foreign language at an early age allows children to develop their creativity, intelligence, memory, cognitive skills, vocabulary, and foreign language awareness (Kersten, Rohde, Schelletter, & Steinlen, 2010). Cameron (2001) lists numerous benefits of starting to learn a foreign language at a young age. While older children may progress more

quickly initially due to their advanced strategies, cognitive abilities, and strong motivation, younger children may surpass them in the long term. Pinter (2012) states that starting foreign language education at an early age positively impacts children's courage, motivation, learning skills, cognitive development, and foreign language awareness. This suggests that younger children have an advantage in achieving long-term success in language learning. Marinova-Todd (2003) argues that the availability and quality of foreign language education are essential for language learning, regardless of age. This will yield the best outcomes for children of all ages. When considering all these views, it is believed that learning a foreign language in preschool has various positive outcomes for children.

Starting foreign language learning at an early age can be advantageous for children's language abilities, although not all skills are affected equally. Research indicates that early foreign language learning can benefit listening comprehension and pronunciation, especially when learned in natural contexts, but it may not necessarily impact grammar structure and rules (Harley, Howard & Hart, 1995). Although younger children may begin learning at an earlier age, they might progress more slowly than older children. Additionally, the general language skills acquired through foreign language learning are not solely determined by the amount of time spent learning (Cameron, 2001). For example, Haznedar (1997) conducted research on a 4-year-old Turkish boy who began learning English at a nursery in an English-speaking environment. After collecting data for one month, it was observed that the child's speech was influenced by the transfer of Turkish language structures into English. Whong-Barr and Schwartz (2002) conducted a similar study on Korean and Japanese-speaking children, aged 4 to 10, learning English as a second language. Their research demonstrated that first language transfer remained a prominent feature of their second language throughout the years-long study period. When children learn English as a foreign language, they often transfer grammar characteristics and structures from their mother tongue to the second language they are learning.

Age-related factors play a crucial role in determining the success of both young and older learners in foreign language learning, leading to controversies on how to engage language learners and cultivate their interest and favorable attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Additionally, teaching materials significantly influence teachers' methods and objectives in foreign language programs (Hu, 2016). During the preschool years, it's crucial to use age-appropriate and engaging methods to capture the attention of children (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). It is observed that the attention of preschool children can easily be distracted, and their physical energy is high. To attract their attention during this period, bright, colorful visuals, toys, songs, stories, facial expressions, games, and activities should be used. Therefore, the Total Physical Response approach is recommended for teaching foreign languages during the preschool period, as it is activity-based, allows students to move, and incorporates games, songs, and stories into the teaching process (Shin, 2006). Er (2013) also emphasized the suitability of this approach for foreign language education during the preschool period, citing its activity-based nature and incorporation of games, songs, and stories in the teaching process.

Additionally, it is essential to create a supportive, safe, and comfortable learning environment that encourages children's intrinsic motivation and allows them to learn through listening, seeing, imitating, and practicing English in a natural way. Teachers should also be mindful of children's learning styles and personalities to create individualized learning experiences tailored to their unique needs. By using effective teaching methods and fostering a positive learning environment, young children can learn English in an enjoyable and effective way. Ellis (1986) emphasized the significant differences between the foreign language learning styles of children and adults, highlighting the need for programs that include appropriate approaches, methods, and techniques for children. Brumen (2011) noted that preschool children have intrinsic motivation for learning a foreign language, enjoy completing tasks,

engaging in activities, and learning new things. However, depending on the intrinsic motivation that preschool children have, a foreign language needs to be presented to them through listening, seeing, imitating, practicing, and being presented like their native language (Adžija and Sindik, 2014). In conclusion, fostering a conducive learning environment that nurtures children's intrinsic motivation and accommodates their individual learning styles and personalities is paramount when teaching English to young learners. By implementing effective teaching methods and tailoring instruction to the unique needs of each child, educators can facilitate an enjoyable and effective language learning experience.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are various studies on foreign language education in pre-school education institutions in Türkiye. İlder Küçük (2006) investigated the views of educators and families on foreign language education in preschool in his master's thesis. İlder and Er (2007) examined the place and importance of foreign language in pre-school education in line with the opinions of parents and teachers. Ayter and öğir (2008) examined the views of parents and teachers about foreign language education given in pre-school education institutions according to some variables. Caner, Subaşı, and Kara (2010) discussed the views of teachers on foreign language teaching in early childhood. In the research, by referring to the opinions of two teachers, the opinions of the teachers about foreign language teaching and the problems they encounter were determined. Kocaman and Kocaman (2012) discussed the age factor in terms of foreign language education in the preschool period. At the end of the structured interviews, the participants have positive opinions about starting the foreign language learning process at an early age. Göktolga (2013) determined the opinions of foreign language teachers working in pre-school institutions about the purpose of foreign language learning at an early age; The aim of this study is to examine the self-reports of planning, implementation and assessment activities of children's foreign language learning, the difficulties they encounter and the methods of coping with these difficulties. Özer (2013) investigated whether there is a relationship between mother tongue development and second language learning of 48-60 month and 61-72-month group children attending pre-school education institutions. Karakuş (2016) examined the opinions of parents and teachers about foreign language education in pre-school education institutions. As a result of the research, teachers and parents considered it necessary for children to receive foreign language education in pre-school education institutions and stated that this education was sufficient.

As can be seen, the increase in the global economy and multilingual societies has made it necessary for the future generations, who will constitute the children of the next generations, to acquire a foreign language (Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky, 1998). However, In Türkiye, there is no national program for foreign language instruction in pre-school education. Some private schools or educational institutions implement their own foreign language programs. Foreign language instruction is typically delivered through child-friendly methods such as games, songs, stories, and interactive activities. The goal is to make language learning enjoyable and effective for children. Since there is no standardized national program, teachers often have the flexibility to design or choose their own foreign language curriculum. Therefore, examining the practices and encountered problems of foreign language education in the preschool period according to teachers' opinions can shed light on the diverse approaches and strategies employed in language instruction, allowing for the identification of effective practices that can be shared and adopted more widely. Teachers can provide valuable feedback on the challenges they face in implementing foreign language programs. This information is essential for policymakers and educational institutions to address existing barriers, allocate resources effectively, and develop supportive policies that enhance the overall quality of pre-school foreign language education. In conclusion, examining teachers' perspectives on foreign language applications in pre-school education in Türkiye can provide valuable insights that can guide the development of policies, curriculum enhancements, and professional development opportunities for educators in the absence of a standardized national program. In this

context, this study attempts to identify the practices and encountered problems in foreign language instruction in the preschool period based on teachers' opinions. The study aims to reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of foreign language practices in the preschool period and contribute to the improvement of the curriculum by identifying its deficiencies. The following sub-problems have been addressed in the research:

1. What are the general opinions of teachers about foreign language instruction in the preschool period?
2. What types of practices do teachers incorporate in foreign language instruction during the preschool period?
3. What are the challenges encountered in foreign language instruction during the preschool period?
4. What are the opinions of teachers regarding the foreign language instruction program in the preschool period?
5. What recommendations do teachers have for making the foreign language instruction process in the preschool period more effective?

Aim and the Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of foreign language practices in the preschool period and contribute to the improvement of the curriculum by identifying its deficiencies. For this purpose, the opinions of teachers about foreign language instruction in the preschool period were investigated.

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of foreign language practices during the preschool period, encompassing both their strengths and weaknesses. By exploring teachers' perspectives on foreign language instruction at this critical developmental stage, the research aims to provide valuable insights that can inform curriculum enhancement efforts. Identifying deficiencies in the current approach can lead to more effective and tailored strategies for early language learning, ultimately benefiting young learners and enhancing the quality of preschool English education. This study thus contributes to the broader goal of optimizing language education for children, paving the way for improved educational outcomes and linguistic proficiency in the early years of life.

METHOD

This section contains data about the research design, study group, data collection tool, data collection process, and data analysis techniques.

Research Design

In the research, a case study design, which is a qualitative research method, was utilized. A case study is an empirical research approach that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, exploring the situation from multiple perspectives in a systematic and in-depth manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In this study, the aim is to identify the challenges faced by preschool English teachers in the language teaching process based on their perspectives.

Study Group

The study group of the research consisted of 15 preschool teachers who are employed in 3 public and 4 private kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in a province located in the Southern Marmara Region of Türkiye. The purposive sampling method was used to select the teachers for the study. Accordingly, an attempt was made to reach out to preschool teachers who have provided English education during the preschool period. Since the selection of participants was based on a voluntary basis, eleven teachers participated in the research. All the teachers in the study group were female. Among them, ten teachers had 0-5 years of teaching experience, three teachers had 5-10 years of experience, and 2 teachers had 11 years or more of professional experience. Additionally, nine teachers were within the age range of 25-30 years, and 6 teachers were within the age range of 31-35 years. Eleven teachers received training related to early foreign language education, while four teachers did not receive any training in this regard.

Data Collection Tool

In the study, a semi-structured interview form on the teachers' opinions about foreign language instruction in the preschool period was used as the data collection tool, and data were obtained through a survey technique. The questionnaire included open-ended questions related to English instruction during the preschool period and the challenges encountered in this process. In determining the questions to be directed to the teachers, a preliminary literature review was conducted on the subject, and relevant studies were examined. Additionally, input was gathered from a subject-area expert, an academician, and a doctoral student in the field of curriculum and instruction. This process aimed to create questions that would best reflect the purpose of the study when directed towards the teachers. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on formulating questions in the questionnaire that would reflect the teachers' opinions in a detailed manner. The formulated questions were reviewed by two curriculum development experts for suitability, clarity, and comprehensibility, and necessary adjustments were made. The final version of the questionnaire was then sent to the teachers via email. The teachers' responses were also gathered via email.

Data Analysis

The content analysis method was employed for analyzing the collected data. Before the analysis, the objectives of the study and each of the interview questions were determined as themes. The opinions obtained from the teachers were carefully read and examined. Based on the emerging opinions, meaningful codes were created. The coded data were examined for similarities and differences, and codes that were related to each other were grouped together. In this manner, the codes were assigned to the identified themes.

To ensure validity, teachers' opinions were presented directly with direct quotations. For the reliability of the study, to determine whether the emerged codes and identified themes were appropriately organized, they were examined by two field experts who were external to the research team. These experts were asked to provide feedback on the suitability of the structure created. Based on their feedback, necessary corrections were made. Responses provided by the participants for each question were processed according to the identified themes, listed, described, and interpreted. In the Findings section, the names of the teachers were not disclosed explicitly; they were coded as T1, T2,...T15. The research process was also clearly described.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the answers given by the teachers to the questions posed to them in line with the sub-problems of the research are included. The findings were presented in tables and interpreted by quoting directly from the teacher's responses.

General Views of Teachers on Teaching English at Preschool Education Level

In the first sub-problem of the study, the teachers were asked about their opinions about teaching English at the preschool level. All the teachers in the study group (f=15) stated that English education is very important in this period. Some examples of teachers' opinions regarding this theme are as follows:

T1: *"It is very important for children to learn a foreign language at an early age. I think that the language will be learned more easily in this period"*.

T2: *"I find foreign language teaching very effective in this period"*.

T5: *"The need for English education changes according to the socio-cultural status of the student. Teaching English in the pre-school period is really important, and generally conscious families prefer pre-school education institutions that teach their children in English."*

T6: *"I find English teaching really useful and necessary in this period. Children are at least exposed to language and an awareness is created. This can help them learn English more easily in the future."*

T11: *"I think English education in pre-school period is useful. Because learning at an early age supports their cognitive development in their further education and normal life."*

Teachers' Opinions on the Methods and Techniques They Use in Teaching English at Preschool Education Level

Within the scope of the second sub-problem of the research, the teachers were asked, about the English teaching methods and techniques they apply at the pre-school education level. When the answers given by the teachers to this question were examined, it was stated that complex and high-level techniques were not used in this period. Games and drama (f=8), painting activities (f=4), cut-and-paste activities (f=3), and flash card (f=1) were used. The answers given by the teachers on this subject are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Teachers' Opinions on the Methods and Techniques Used in English Instruction at the Preschool Education Level

Methods and Techniques	f
Games and Drama	8
Painting Activities	3
Cur-and-Paste Activities	3
Flash Cards	1

Teachers stated that they mostly (f=8) use game and drama techniques in the process of teaching English at pre-school education level. The opinions of the teachers on this subject are as follows: *"The activities carried out in this period should be more appropriate for the age of the children. That's why I mostly use educational games in class"* (T2). *"I teach the lesson in a game style"*(T3). *"We usually play games"* (T6).

"I use games" (T8). "They learn a lot through drama and play" (T9). "I use drama and games as a method" (T10). "We use games and drama the most" T11). "I generally use games." (T15)

Another method used by teachers is painting activities. The opinions of the teachers about this technique used are as follows: "During this period, students usually do painting activities. While teaching English, I have painting activities done. In this way, children are not bored too much" (T1). "Painting activities are fun. There is a book we use. There are lots of coloring activities in the book. We make them" (T4). "We don't do much, actually, we usually paint activities" (T7).

Findings Regarding the Challenges Faced by Teachers in English Instruction at the Preschool Education Level

Under the scope of the third sub-problem of the research, teachers were asked about the challenges they face in the process of English instruction at the preschool education level. These opinions are presented in Table 3

Table 2

Challenges Faced by Teachers in English Instruction at the Preschool Education Level

Challenges	f
Native Language Influence	5
Classroom Management	3
Parental Involvement	2
Readiness	2
Pronunciation Issue	1
Lack of Experience	1
Lack of Materials	1

As shown in Table 3, teachers have indicated that they face challenges related to the students' mother tongue acting as a barrier in the English learning process, classroom management issues, negative parental attitudes towards English education, and difficulties in achieving parental involvement. Additionally, they have mentioned that students' readiness levels are low, pronunciation problems occur, teachers lack sufficient experience, and finding suitable materials for students of different ages and levels poses challenges that negatively impact the language instruction process.

Teachers (f=5) have indicated that children struggle with English instruction due to the influence of their native language. In this regard, T1 stated, "The native language poses a significant barrier. At this age, children haven't encountered a foreign language before, and they don't understand the foreign language." T2 mentioned, "Since students' native language is Turkish, they don't understand when I speak in English, and I find it very challenging." Similarly, T12 expressed her opinion as "Students' native language is Turkish, and some children don't understand English no matter what I do." Similarly, T14 stated, "During this period, children haven't fully learned their native language yet. Getting accustomed to a foreign language is very difficult for them." Likewise, T15 mentioned that; "Young children, find it quite challenging to become familiar with a foreign language."

Another problem that teachers face in teaching English is classroom management. In this regard, T1 said, "I have a lot of difficulty in classroom management". T2 said, "I have a problem with classroom

management. *There is always chaos in the classroom. Children never listen to me*". T7 expressed her opinions as *"I have difficulties in this process. Children are immediately distracted and start running around the classroom. I can't concentrate the attention of the children"*.

Two of the teachers stated that they had problems arising from their families. On this subject, T5 said, *"The education level of the families is low. I cannot provide family participation in English. The family's point of view challenges me."* Similarly, T6 said, *"Some of the families care about English. But some don't care. I can't get additional resources. Or when I ask them to help the children, some parents seem very indifferent. Interested parents take care of their children, but when there are disinterested parents, children cannot progress very much."*

Another problem expressed by the teachers was the readiness of the students. Teachers' views on this subject are as follows: *"It takes a long time for children to learn because they acquire new information during the learning process"* (T13). *"Students have trouble learning English. I especially have problems with students who have never been exposed to English before"* (T14).

One of the teachers (T10) expressed the problems she had with pronunciation in English teaching as follows: *"Children have problems with pronunciation. They can't pronounce some words and I can't teach them the correct pronunciation."* The problem faced by teachers due to their lack of experience was expressed as follows: *"Teachers generally do not have enough experience in teaching English in preschool. I am also lacking in this. I don't know exactly which method to use and how. I have deficiencies in foreign language development"* (T4). One teacher (T8) expressed the problems related to the lack of materials as follows: *"It is very difficult to find resources suitable for the level of the students. Especially not listening. Existing books contain text and are not entirely suitable for children"*.

Teachers' Opinions on the English Curriculum at Preschool Education Level

Within the scope of the fourth sub-problem of the research, the opinions of the teachers about the English curriculum in the preschool period were discussed. Teachers' opinions on this subject are given in Table 3.

Table3

Teachers' Opinions on the English Curriculum at Preschool Education Level

Opinions on the English Curriculum at Preschool Education Level	f
Positive Opinions	7
Being appropriate for the learning outcomes	2
Being appropriate for the age group of the students	2
Improving language skill	2
Being appropriate with the current curriculum	1
Negative Opinions	7
Not paying attention to speaking skills	4
Being subject-centered	2
Nor being student-centered	1
Being challenging	1

When the answers of the teachers were examined, it was seen that teachers found the curriculum effective and ineffective in various aspects. Teachers find the curriculum effective in terms of subjects and learning outcomes. In addition, it was stated that the program is quite suitable for preschool and the subjects are parallel to the current preschool curriculum. On the other hand, teachers stated that the program is not student-centered, emphasis is not given to gaining speaking skills, it is subject-centered, and the tools used are insufficient.

Teachers (f=2) found the learning outcomes included in the program as suitable and effective for students. In this regard, T12 stated, *"The outcomes included in the program are appropriate for students. There are topics focused on teaching basic words like colors, numbers, and weather. It's difficult to teach very advanced concepts at this level. Therefore, the topics and outcomes in the program are quite appropriate."* Similarly, T13 expressed her opinion as *"I find the English instruction program useful. The outcomes of English instruction include colors, numbers, animals, vegetables, and fruits. Teaching these outcomes through various activities makes the learning quite lasting."*

Teachers stated that the applied curriculum was appropriate for students. The opinions of the teachers on this subject are as follows: *"It is difficult to have something very advanced in this age group. Therefore, the topics and content in the program are very suitable for students"* (T8). *"It is effective in terms of the child's self-development, that is, learning a language. Children both have fun and learn new things"* (T10).

Two of the teachers are of the opinion that the English program improves language skills. On this subject, T3 said, *"We can say that the program is also effective when we see the improvement in students"*; T9 said, *"I find the English program quite effective. Because children can get whatever we give them at a young age. They can also learn English more easily. Therefore, it is very effective to have language teaching at an early age."*

Additionally, one teacher stated that the pre-school English curriculum is compatible and parallel with the current curriculum as follows: *"The applied curriculum is subject-centered and parallel to the preschool curriculum. Therefore, students' learning of English also improves"* (T1).

On the other hand, some teachers (f=3) stated that speaking skills were not given importance in the curriculum and language was not used as a communication tool. On this subject, T4 said, *"It is based on memorizing words and certain patterns rather than giving importance to communication. There are many topics. Children's vocabulary skills are developing, but they do not focus on children's talking or having fun"*. Similarly, T7 said, *"Speaking is not given any importance in the program. Children can also learn words in the future. The important thing is to acquire the speaking skill. But there is no room for this at all,"* T15 expressed her opinions as follows: *"We do not actually do anything other than teaching vocabulary in the program. I don't give importance to speaking, but speaking skills should be prioritized during this period."*

Some of the teachers (f=2) stated that the curriculum is not student-centered. T4 said, *"As long as the curriculum is teacher-centered, the interest of the students immediately disappears. Therefore, it should be made student-centered"*. T9 said, *"As long as the English program is given without a suitable environment for children, it becomes boring and causes children not to learn effectively."*

One of the teachers stated that the program is subject-centered: *"There are many subjects in the program. Therefore, the focus is on topics and only vocabulary teaching."* One of the teachers stated that the program was challenging for the students as follows: *"I think the program is challenging for the students. Children's vocabulary skills are developing, but they do not focus on children's speaking or having fun"* (T4).

Teachers' Suggestions Regarding the Effectiveness of the English Curriculum

In the last sub-problem of the study, teachers were asked what their suggestions were for English teaching in preschool period to be more effective. Opinions on this subject are given in Table 4.

Table 4

Teachers' Suggestions Regarding the Effectiveness of the English Curriculum

Suggestions Regarding the Effectiveness of the English Curriculum	f
Providing appropriate learning environments	5
Development of materials	4
Development of methods and techniques	2
Making systemic changes	2
Ensuring family participation	1
Providing training for teachers	1

First of all, teachers stated that appropriate learning environments should be created in order for English teaching to be more effective. In this regard, T1 said, *"Children need to enjoy more and be exposed to language. They need to realize that language is a tool for speaking and not be afraid to make mistakes. The learning environment should be arranged in this way"*. T4 indicated that, *"Student participation should be more, and this should be ensured. Children need flexibility to respond to their individual needs. In other words, we cannot deal with children separately in this way."* T6 expressed her opinions as *"No matter how good the curriculum is, the main thing is its implementation. Children need to learn language in an interactive way. The learning environment is really important. Therefore, it is very important to organize learning environments and support them with necessary materials."* T7 said, *"Learning environments are very inadequate. There should be enough attention to the students in the classrooms. More speaking skills should be developed."* T13 expressed her opinion as *"The learning conditions require greater focus on students within the classrooms. It is required to enhance students' speaking skills."*

Three teachers expressed their opinions on the development of the materials used. The opinions of the teachers on this subject are as follows: *"It is very difficult to find suitable materials in this age period. There are books available, but they are not enough. For example, we never do listen activities. However, listening activities are necessary for the development of pronunciation"* (T7). *"At the beginning of the term, we are having problems with which material to use. There are books available, but I don't think they are very effective. And each institution determines the book itself. There are matching and coloring activities in the books. Therefore, children cannot fully understand that they are learning a language. I mean, they always seem to be doing the same activities. The materials need to be developed and become more diverse. In this regard, maybe using materials published abroad can be more effective"* (T8). *"The materials used should be more interesting to children. In addition, materials suitable for the age and developmental characteristics of children should be used"* (T14).

Another opinion expressed by the teachers (f=2) is that the methods and techniques used should be improved. On this subject, T10 said, *"Methods and techniques can be enriched. Should be able to teach a second language without being boring and simple. Because if they start to love in that age group, English education can continue better in the future"*, while T11 included the statement *"The methods and techniques used should be enriched"*.

Two teachers emphasized that changes in the systems of English education in preschool period are necessary. In this regard, T3 said, *“Systemic changes are needed. While expressing his opinion that the Ministry of National Education should make appropriate arrangements and improve the programs”*. T5 said expressed her opinions as *“English education is not seen as a need in schools in environments with low levels of education in pre-school education. First of all, the state needs to meet some basic needs and develop various policies in pre-school education. In this way, teachers can get out of the MoNE pre-school education program. We already encounter major problems in the behavior of a child who has come to the age of starting primary school without gaining many skills. In this one-year period, we are trying to complete the concept development in a compressed way, to overcome behavioral problems and to provide a new language education. For this reason, students can be made ready by the compulsory withdrawal of the pre-school education age. The discipline of learning can be gained to them”*.

The teacher’s opinions on the necessity and importance of family participation is as follows: *“Family participation should be more. Families can also make children speak English by doing activities at home”* (T2). Regarding the training of teachers, T8 expressed her opinions as follows: *“As teachers, we also have a lot of shortcomings. Even the practices between schools are very different. While this job is taken seriously in some institutions, English teaching is ignored in institutions where children from families with lower incomes attend. In this regard, we, the teachers, should be supported, the necessary training should be given and even cooperation between the teachers should be ensured. Because there is no control mechanism. Everyone teaches English in their own way. I think we should also make up for their deficiencies”*.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In the study, it was aimed to determine the English teaching practices and the problems encountered in the preschool period in line with the opinions of the teachers. The study underlines the significance of English language instruction during the preschool years by exploring teaching practices and the challenges faced, as perceived by educators. The findings consistently underscore the value of introducing foreign language education at an early age, as voiced by teachers. In the study of İltar and Er (2007), teachers and parents stated that a foreign language is necessary in the pre-school period. In the studies conducted by Aytar and İlker (2008) and Karakuş (2016), teachers and parents found it necessary for children to receive foreign language education in pre-school education institutions and stated that this education was sufficient. Similarly, Küçük (2006) in his study to determine the views of educators and families on foreign language education in preschool, stated that both families and educators found foreign language teaching necessary and useful in the preschool period. Çakıcı (2016) reached a similar finding in his study and stated that most of the teachers found early foreign language education useful. Similarly, Fojkar and Pižorn (2015) stated that families believe that it is important to provide foreign language education to children at an early age. On the other hand, in the study conducted by Bolat (2015), teachers stated that students should speak Turkish correctly and well, and it was stated that foreign language teaching should not be started at an early age. The first years of childhood are the periods when the foundations of personality are laid, abilities and interests are determined. Demirezen (2003) stated that an important skill to be acquired in this period is foreign language. For this reason, foreign language education in the preschool period should be given importance and supported. Based on this information, the importance and necessity of foreign language education in the preschool years are emphasized. Effectively implementing and developing foreign language education during this period can significantly contribute to children's future achievements and cultural understanding.

Teachers stated that they mostly used drama and games, painting activities, cutting-paste activities, and flash cards in teaching English. These teaching approaches are supported by various studies, as referenced in the provided information. İltter and Er (2007), Çakıcı (2016), Arslan (2008), and Baran and Halıcı (2006) all underscore the effectiveness of these methods in facilitating language acquisition and creating an engaging and enjoyable learning environment. Incorporating such a wide array of interactive and child-centric activities not only enhances language learning but also fosters a positive and enthusiastic attitude toward learning English at an early age. The consensus among both educators and researchers on the value of these methods highlights their importance in early language education for preschoolers. In sum, the use of these creative and engaging teaching strategies is pivotal in creating a strong foundation for language development and fostering a lifelong love for learning in young children.

Teachers stated that they had various problems in the foreign language teaching process. These challenges encompass linguistic, classroom management, family-related, and resource-related issues. One significant challenge identified by teachers is the influence of the mother tongue on the foreign language learning process. Studies such as Derakhshan and Karimi (2015) and Kotil (2002) confirm that the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language can have an impact on language acquisition, particularly when foreign language education begins at an early age. Classroom management is another issue frequently cited by educators. Göktolga (2013) highlights the difficulties teachers face in planning and conducting classroom activities, emphasizing the importance of effective classroom management skills in the preschool environment. The role of families in preschool education is also crucial, as noted by Çakmak (2010) and Bolat (2015). Ensuring family participation and collaboration in the education process is seen as essential for successful preschool language education. Furthermore, challenges related to students' readiness levels, pronunciation instruction, lack of teaching experience, and insufficient teaching materials were raised by teachers. Caner, Subaşı, and Kara (2010) and Göktolga (2013) emphasize the need for suitable and ample teaching materials, as well as the effective use of technological devices. In light of these challenges, it is evident that professional development and training play a significant role in addressing these issues. The suggestions made by Karakuş (2016) and Caner, Subaşı, and Kara (2010) regarding regular training and support for teachers in the field of foreign language education for preschoolers underscore the importance of ongoing professional development to equip educators with the skills and resources needed to overcome these challenges effectively. In conclusion, while teachers encounter various obstacles in the process of teaching foreign languages to preschool children, proactive measures such as training, resource development, and family involvement can contribute to a more successful and enriching educational experience for both educators and young learners in the preschool language education context.

When the teachers' preschool English curriculum was examined, it was seen that teachers had positive and negative opinions. As positive opinions, teachers stated that the learning outcomes and the program are suitable for students, contribute to the development of students' language skills, and are compatible with the preschool curriculum. On the other hand, the teachers stated that speaking skills were not sufficiently included in the curriculum, the curriculum was not student-centered, it was subject-centered, and it was challenging for students. The mixed opinions expressed by teachers regarding the preschool English curriculum highlight the complexities and challenges often associated with language instruction at this developmental stage. It's encouraging to hear that teachers believe the program and its learning outcomes are appropriate for preschool students. Age-appropriate content is essential for effective learning, ensuring that children can engage with and comprehend the material. The perception that the program contributes to the development of students' language skills is a positive sign. Early language acquisition is crucial for cognitive and linguistic development, and if the curriculum is indeed supporting this, it's a significant benefit. When a curriculum aligns well with the broader preschool curriculum, it can

enhance the overall educational experience. It allows for integration with other subjects and activities, creating a holistic learning environment.

However, the teachers' concern about the lack of emphasis on speaking skills is valid. In language acquisition, speaking is a fundamental skill, and if it's not adequately addressed, students may face difficulties in real-life communication. Similarly, if the curriculum is overly subject-centered and not student-centered, it can hinder active engagement and participation. A more student-centered approach often encourages children to take an active role in their learning, promoting motivation and understanding. In addressing these concerns, educational institutions and curriculum developers should consider the importance of oral proficiency, the need for age-appropriate and engaging content, and the advantages of a student-centered approach. Additionally, ongoing professional development for teachers can help them better adapt and implement the curriculum to meet the unique needs of their students. Collaborative efforts between educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers are essential to continually improve and refine preschool English curricula.

In conclusion, teachers have provided valuable insights and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the English language teaching program for young learners in the preschool period. A common thread among these suggestions is the critical importance of creating an optimal learning environment for students. Recognizing that children spend a significant portion of their time in the classroom, it becomes imperative to design this environment in a way that captivates students' attention, fosters active participation, promotes interaction, and caters to their specific needs. Studies such as Worthington (2008), Meyer (2012), Akdoğan (2004), and Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) underscore the significance of various elements in achieving this goal. These elements include the need for a game-based classroom environment, age-appropriate materials, the development of suitable teaching methods and techniques, systemic changes in educational approaches, family involvement, and teacher training. The consensus among these sources reinforces the idea that foreign language education should align with the developmental and psychological needs of children and that educators should continuously enhance their competencies in early foreign language teaching. Incorporating these recommendations into the educational framework not only has the potential to improve the effectiveness of English language instruction in the preschool period but also promises to create a more engaging and beneficial learning experience for young learners as they embark on their language learning journey.

In the light of these findings, the following recommendations can be made.

- ✓ Trainings should be organized at regular intervals for teachers about teaching English in the pre-school period.
- ✓ Methods and materials suitable for the age and readiness of the students should be used.
- ✓ Language skills of children should be improved by ensuring family participation.
- ✓ More speaking skills-based practices should be included.

REFERENCES

- Acat, B. M., & Demiral, S. (2002). Türkiyede yabancı dil öğreniminde motivasyon kaynakları ve sorunları. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Yönetimi Dergisi*, 8(3), 312-329.
- Adžija, M., & Sindik, J. (2014). Learning of foreign language in pre-school children: evaluation methods in kindergarten's environment. *Methodological Horizons*, 9(1), 48-65.
- Akdoğan, F. (2004). Yeni projeler ışığında erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretimi, *HAYEF: Journal of Education*, 1(2), 97-109.

- Aslan, N. (2008). Dünyada erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretimi uygulamaları ve Türkiye'deki durum. *Çukurova Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 3 (35), 1-9.
- Arslan, M., & Akbarov, A. (2010). Türkiye'de yabancı dil öğretiminde motivasyon-yöntem sorunu ve çözüm önerileri, *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi (SEFAD)*, (24), 179-191.
- Ayter, A. G. & Öğretir, A. D. (2008). Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarındaki yabancı dil eğitimine ilişkin anne-baba ve öğretmen görüşlerinin incelenmesi. *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 16(1), 13-30.
- Baran, G., & Halici, P. (2006). Çocuklarda Yabancı Dil Eğitimi. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)*, (24),44-52.
- Berk, L.E. & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for Education of Young Children.
- Bolat, E. (2015). 4-6 yaş grubu çocuklarda yabancı dil öğretimi hakkında öğretmen görüşleri. *International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching*, 706-722.
- Brumen, M. (2011). The perception of and motivation for foreign language learning in pre-school. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(6), 717-732.
- Brumfit, C., Moon, J., & Tongue, R. (1991). *Teaching English to children*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Can, E. & Can, C. (2014). Türkiye'de ikinci yabancı dil öğretiminde karşılaşılan sorunlar. *Trakya Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 4(2), 43-63.
- Caner, M., Subasi, G., & Kara, S. (2010). Teachers' beliefs on foreign language teaching practices in early phases of primary education: a case study. *Online Submission*, 1(1), 62-76.
- Collier, V. P. (1987). The Effect of Age on Acquisition of a Second Language for School, 1-8. Erişim adresi: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED296580.pdf>.
- Copland, F., Garton, S., & Burns, A. (2014). Challenges in teaching English to young learners: Global perspectives and local realities. *Tesol Quarterly*, 48(4), 738-762.
- Çakmak, Ö. Ç. (2010). Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında aile katılımı. *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 20(20), 1-18.
- Demirezen, M. (2003). Yabancı dil ve anadil öğreniminde kritik dönemler. *TÖMER Dil Dergisi*, 118, 5-15.
- Derakhshan, A., & Karimi, E. (2015). The interference of first language and second language acquisition. *Theory and Practice in language studies*, 5(10), 2112-2117.
- Durmuşçelebi, M. (2013). Anadilde okuma becerilerinin ikinci dilde okumaya etkilerinin incelenmesi. *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies International Journal of Social Science*, 6(4), 817-835.
- Ellis, R. (1986). *Understanding of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Er, S. (2013). Using total physical response method in early childhood foreign language teaching environments. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, 1766-1768.
- Fojkar, M. D., & Pižorn, K. (2015). Parents' and teachers' attitudes towards early foreign language learning. *The Practice of Foreign Language Teaching: Theories and Applications*, 363.
- Ganschow, L., Sparks, R. L., & Javorsky, J. (1998). Foreign language learning difficulties: An historical perspective, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31(3), 248-258.
- Ghasemi, B., & Hashemi, M. (2011). ICT: New wave in English language learning/teaching. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 3098-3102.
- Göktolga, B. I. (2013). *Self-Reports of preschool foreign language teachers on early childhood foreign language teaching and related challenges*. (Master Thesis), Middle East Technical University, Turkey.
- Harley, B., Howard, J., & Hart, D. (1995). Second language processing at different ages: Do younger learners pay more attention to prosodic cues to sentence structure? *Language Learning*, 45(1), 43-71
- Harmer, J. (2003). *The practice of English language teaching*. London: Longman.

- Haynes, J. (2007). *Getting started with English language learners: How educators can meet the challenge*. ASCD.
- Haznedar, B. (1997) Child second language acquisition of English: A longitudinal study of a Turkish speaking child. Doctoral dissertation, University of Durham, United Kingdom
- Hu, R. (2016). The age factor in second language learning. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 6(11), 2164-2168.
- Işık, A. (2008). Yabancı dil eğitimimizdeki yanlışlar nereden kaynaklanıyor?. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 4(2), 15-26.
- İlter, B. & Er, S. (2007). Erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretimi üzerine veli ve öğretmen görüşleri [Opinions of parents and teachers on foreign language education in preschool years]. *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 15(1), 21-30.
- Karakuş, H. Okul öncesi dönemde yabancı dil eğitimi verilmesine ilişkin anne-baba ve öğretmen görüşlerinin incelenmesi. *Uluslararası Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 1(2), 7-19.
- Krashen, S. D. (1973). Lateralization, language learning, and the critical period: Some new evidence. *Language learning*, 23(1), 63-74.
- Kenworth, J. (1987). *Teaching English Pronunciation*. London: Longman.
- Kersten, K., Drawing, M., Granados, J., Leloux, B., Lommel, A., Schneider, A., & Taylor, S. (2010). How to Start a Bilingual Preschool, Practical Guidelines. *Bilingual Preschools: Best Practices*, 77-101.
- King, K. A., & Mackey, A. (2007). *The bilingual edge: Why, when, and how to teach your child a second language*. New York: Collins.
- Kocaman, A. (2012). *Yabancı dil öğretiminde yöntem ve ötesi. Türkiye’de Yabancı Dil Eğitiminde Eğilim Ne Olmalı? 1. Yabancı Dil Eğitimi Çalıştayı Bildirileri*, 12-13.
- Kotil, Ç. (2002). Yabancı dil eğitimi. *Çocuk ve Aile Dergisi*, 47, 11-13.
- Köksal, D., & Şahin, C. A. (2012). Macro-level foreign language education policy of Turkey: A content analysis of national education councils. *ELT Research Journal*, 1(3), 149-158.
- Küçük, M. (2006). *Okul öncesinde yabancı dil eğitimi konusunda eğitimcilerin ve ailelerin görüşleri*, (Yayınlanmamış yüksek lisans tezi), Çukurova Üniversitesi, Adana.
- Lamendella, J. T. (1977). General Principles of Neurofunctional Organization and their Manifestation in Primary and Nonprimary Language Acquisition 1. *Language learning*, 27(1), 155-196.
- Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York: Wiley.
- Marinova-Todd, S. H. (2003). Native, near-native or non-native: Comprehensive analysis of the linguistic profiles of highly proficient adult second language learners. Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, U.S.A.
- Meyer, B. (2012, October). *Game-based language learning for pre-school children: a design perspective*. In Proceedings of the 6th European Conference on Games Based Learning: ECGBL (p. 332). Academic Conferences Limited.
- Moeller, A. K., & Catalano, T. (2015). Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, *Learning and Teacher Education*, 196, 327-332.
- Read, C. (2003). Is younger better? *English Teaching Professional*, 28, 5-7
- Oxford, R. (1994). Language Learning Strategies: An Update. *ERIC Digest*, 1-4. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED376707.pdf>.
- Özer, H. (2013). *Okul öncesi eğitim kurumuna devam eden çocukların ana dil gelişimleri ile ikinci dil öğrenmeleri arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi*. (Yüksek Lisans Tezi). Çukurova Üniversitesi, Adana.
- Penfield, W. & L. Roberts. (1959). *Speech and brain mechanism*. New York: Atheneum.
- Pinter, A. (2011). *Children learning second languages*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Pinter, A. (2012). Teaching young learners. In *"The Cambridge Guide to Pedagogy and Practice in Second Language Teaching"*, 103-111.

- Scovel, T. (1988). A critical review of the critical period research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 213–223
- Singleton, D. M., & Ryan, L. (2004). *Language acquisition: The age factor* (Vol. 9). Multilingual Matters.
- Shin, J. K. (2006). Ten Helpful Ideas for Teaching English to Young Learners. *English Teaching Forum*, 44(2), 2-7.
- Scovel, T. (1988). A critical review of the critical period research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 213–223.
- Whong-Barr, M., & Schwartz, B. D. (2002). Morphological and syntactic transfer in child L2 acquisition of the English dative alternation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 24(4), 579–616
- Worthington, E. (2008). *Effective learning environments in preschools*. Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 10534.
- Yıldırım A., & Şimşek, H. (2005). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.
- Yiğiter, K. (1988). Günümüzde Yabancı Dil. *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniv. Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, (3), 11-13.