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A Descriptive Analysis of Theses on Curriculum Studies in Preschool Education*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to descriptively examine the theses on curriculum studies in pre-school education. The study was conducted through document analysis, one of qualitative research technique. Collected data from a total of 103 theses were analyzed, and the analyzed data was presented by frequency distributions and percentage values. It was concluded from the research that most of the theses on curriculum studies in preschool education were designed with experimental design. The use of experimental researches in most theses causes the sample sizes not to be very high. So it can be stated that the sample sizes' not being high due to experimental studies is one of the reasons why normality cannot be achieved in the data. Hence, most of the theses used non-parametric tests. On the other hand, it was determined that while curriculum evaluation models are rarely included in the theses, curriculum development models were not used, at all, on curriculum studies in preschool education.

Keywords: Curriculum studies, thesis, preschool education.

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Introduction

Raising mentally and physically healthy generations who are able to freely express their feelings and thoughts, who are entrepreneurs and researchers, who can maintain self-control and who have cultural values can be achieved by giving the necessary importance to pre-school education (Demirel, 1989). Pre-school education, called early childhood, covers the period from birth to the day when the child attends primary school (Çelik and Gündoğdu, 2007). This period is important for the mental, physical, emotional, social development and maturation process of the child (Aral, Kandır and Can Yaşar, 2000; Yılmaz, 2003). The aim of the pre-school curriculum is to ensure the healthy development of children and the acquisition of skills necessary for the future (Hirsh, 2004). Köksal, Balaban Dağal and Duman (2016) explained the purpose of the pre-school curriculum as supporting the development of skills in all areas of development, maximizing these skills, and making up the deficiencies in these areas of development (Kitta and Kapinga, 2015). Preschool curriculum provides educators to reach the general knowledge what to teach children, what educational activities and methods to support children's development, how to create the physical environment, how to get support from families during the education process and how to evaluate children in a more concrete way (Dodge, 1995).

The definition of pre-school education in Turkey is defined by the National Education Basic Law (Abazaoğlu, Yıldırım and Yıldızhan, 2015). National Education Basic Law (2021) stated that objectives and tasks of pre-school education in Turkey are determined in accordance with the general objectives and basic principles of national education.

- To ensure that children develop body, mind and emotion and gain good habits,
- To prepare children for primary education,
- To create a common growing environment for children from unfavorable environments and families,
- To enable children to speak Turkish correctly and well.

The preschool education in Turkey has the lowest enrollment rate in Turkish National Education System. Taner Derman and Başal (2010) stated that enrollment rate in preschool education could not reach a sufficient level neither quantitatively nor qualitatively. Nevertheless, the increase in schooling rates requires studies on quality in education such as the curriculum development and learning theories (Deretarla Gül, 2008). Albrecht and Miller (2004) claims that curriculums which support the development, growth and learning of children at pre-school age are very crucial. In today's conditions, the changing and increasing needs of preschool children and the mother's starting to work in the family further increase the need for pre-school education and an effective education curriculum in this context (Spodek and Saracho, 2003). Studies on curriculums are of great importance in order to create effective curriculums. Thus, the aim of this study is to descriptively examine the theses on curriculum studies in pre-school education.

Analyzing theses conducted on a field can give information about the depth and prevalence of that topic and reveal the general view of the area studied (Karadağ, 2009). Also, the assessment of literature in a certain field for some periods not only gives information about the trends of the studies, but also cast light on the subsequent research (Erdem, 2011). When literature was reviewed, it was seen that there were several studies on research trends in different fields. Gül and Sözbilir (2015) examined research trends in Biology education by content analysis of national and international journals; Zainuddin and Halili (2016) analyzed articles on flipped classroom learning; Baydaş, Küçük, Yılmaz, Aydemir and Göktaş (2015) examined

subject and research method trends in educational technology field; Krull and Duart (2017) studied on research trends in mobile learning in higher education; Lin, Lin, Potvin and Tsai (2019) analyzed research articles published in science education journals; Jung and Won (2018) conducted systematic and thematic review in robotics education; Bozkurt and the others (2015) explored the current trends in the field of distance education research.

It is important to aim at contributing to the literature with a view to guiding graduate students and their advisors. This study intends to reveal the tendency in the literature regarding curriculum studies in preschool education and on which issues there are deficiencies. Thus, this research will help postgraduate students who will conduct a thesis on curriculum study in pre-school education to determine the subject.

Method

Research design

The study was conducted through document analysis, one of qualitative research methods. At document analysis method, researchers focus on documents related to the topics on which they study (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004). Hence, the theses published in YÖKTEZ database were analyzed in the research. Curriculum studies in the field of pre-school education are limited to the keywords "pre-school education" and "curriculum" in the YÖKTEZ database. A total of 105 theses were reached; however, three of the theses reached were excluded from the research because they did not fit the scope of the research.

Data collection tool

"Article Classification Form" developed by Sözbilir and Kutu (2008) was revised by two experts in Curriculum and Instruction to be used for the thesis review to collect the data in the theses in question. There are five sections in the form; thesis identification, research design/method, data collection tools, sampling, and data analysis methods.

Data analysis

Collected data were analyzed by both researchers independently using descriptive analysis technique, and a third expert's opinion was sought for inconsistencies between findings. Descriptive analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis that includes summarizing and interpreting data obtained by various data collection techniques according to predetermined themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004). The analyzed data were also described by giving their frequency distributions (f) and percentage values (%) (Balcı, 2015).

Results

In order to determine the research trends in the field, a total of 102 theses in the “YÖKTEZ” database were subjected to the descriptive analysis. The frequency and percentage values for each analysis are given in the tables.

The completion years of the theses are given in Table 1.

Table 1. The year the theses were completed

Year	f	%	Year	f	%
2003	1	1.0	2013	4	3.9
2004	1	1.0	2014	9	8.8
2005	1	1.0	2015	13	12.7
2007	1	1.0	2016	9	8.8
2009	4	3.9	2017	10	9.8
2010	2	2.0	2018	13	12.7
2011	1	1.0	2019	16	15.7
2012	4	3.9	2020	13	12.7
Total	102	100			

When Table 1 is examined, the number of the theses related to the curriculum studies in pre-school education are increasing over years (2003 [f=1], 2004 [f=1], 2005 [f=1], 2007 [f=1], 2009 [f=4], 2010 [f=2], 2011 [f=1], 2012 [f=4], 2013 [f=4], 2014 [f=9], 2015 [f=13], 2016 [f=9], 2017 [f=10], 2018 [f=13], 2019 [f=16], 2020 [f=13]). It can be interpreted that the increase of the numbers of graduate programs and academicians studying on pre-school education was effective in the increase of the number of the theses.

Table 2 shows the degrees of the graduate programs in which the theses were carried out.

Table 2. Degree of theses

Degree	f	%
Master's degree	58	56.9
Doctorate degree	44	43.1
Total	102	100.0

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that theses related to program in pre-school education are included in master (f=58) and doctorate (f=48) degrees.

In Table 3, the types of graduate programs in which the said theses are carried out are given.

Table 3. Graduate programs

Category	f	%	Category	f	%
Pre-School Education	37	36.3	Elementary School Teaching	1	1.0
Early Childhood Education	24	23.5	Higher Education Studies	1	1.0
Child Development and Education	11	10.8	Mentally Handicapped	1	1.0
Curriculum and Instruction	10	9.8	Family and Consumer Units	1	1.0
Educational Sciences	3	2.9	Special Education	1	1.0
Music Education	2	2.0	Guidance and Psychological Counseling	1	1.0
Visually Impaired Education	2	2.0	Psychology	1	1.0
Educational Technology	1	1.0	Religious Education	1	1.0
Interdisciplinary Disability Studies	1	1.0	Psychological Services In Education	1	1.0
Measurement and Evaluation	1	1.0	Science Education	1	1.0
Total	102	100			

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that theses in preschool education are mostly included in Preschool Education (f=37) and Early Childhood Education (f=24) among 20 different disciplines. The other notable programs in the table are Child Development and Education (f=11) and Curriculum and Instruction (f=10).

Findings about the topics of the theses are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Topics of the theses

Topics of the theses	f	%
Effect of a curriculum on dependent variables	63	61.8
General evaluation of a curriculum	16	15.7
Evaluation of an element of curriculum	14	13.7
Curriculum development	7	6.9
Development and evaluation of a curriculum	2	1.96
Total	102	100.0

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the subject of the theses related to studies in preschool education is mostly to examine the effect of a curriculum on dependent variables (f=63). Other topics of the theses are general evaluation of a curriculum (f=16), evaluation of an element of curriculum (f=14), curriculum development (f=7) and evaluation of the developed curriculum (f = 2).

Findings about the models used in the theses are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Development or evaluation models used in theses

Models	f
No model used	99
CIPP	2
ADDIE	1
Total	102

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product Evaluation Model), a curriculum evaluation model, is used in two theses, and ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation Model), an instructional design model, is used in one thesis. Studies on the use of curriculum models are mostly carried out by researchers in the field of Curriculum and Instruction. Therefore, as stated in Table 3, it can be interpreted that the use of models is parallel to the fact that the theses related to curriculum studies in preschool education were performed very little in the Program of Curriculum and Instruction.

Findings about the patterns and methods used in the theses are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Pattern/method of the theses

Pattern	Method	f	%	
Quantitative	Experimental	True experimental	22	21.6
		Quasi experimental	28	27.5
		Poor experimental	2	2.0
		Subtotal	52	51.0
Non-experimental	Non-experimental	Descriptive survey	19	18.6
		correlational survey	4	3.9
		Subtotal	23	22.5
Qualitative	Interactive	Phenomenology	4	3.9
		Case Study	5	4.9
		Action research	1	1.0
		Subtotal	10	9.8
Mixed	Mixed	Explanatory	3	2.9
		Exploratory	2	2.0
		Triangulation	10	9.8
		Subtotal	15	14.7
Total		102	100	

When Table 6 is examined, it is found that 52 theses about curriculum studies in preschool education were designed with experimental design, 23 theses were designed with a quantitative non-experimental design, 10 theses were designed with qualitative design and 15

theses were designed with mixed design. When Table 4 is examined, the abundance of studies on the effect of a curriculum on dependent variables comes to the fore; therefore, it can be interpreted that impact studies were mostly carried out with experimental studies.

Findings about the study groups in which the studies were carried out in the theses are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Study groups of the theses

Study groups	f	%
Kindergarten (48-66)	61	51.69
Teachers	29	24.57
Parents	8	6.77
Kindergarten (36-66)	6	5.08
Undergraduate students	6	5.08
Instructors	3	2.54
Documents	2	1.69
Administers	2	1.69
Graduate students	1	.84
Total	118	100.0

When Table 7 is examined, the study groups of the theses consisted of kindergarten students (f=61), preschool teachers (f=29), parents (f=8), kindergarten students (f=6), undergraduate students (f=6), instructors (f=3), documents (f=2), administrators (f=2) and graduate students (f=1). The number of theses whose study groups consisted of kindergarten students before 48 month was too low, whose reason might be the challenges to collect data from the students at that age and to get required permissions from the educational institutions and parents.

The sample sizes of the theses were, also, examined. Histogram chart related to sample sizes is given in Figure 1.

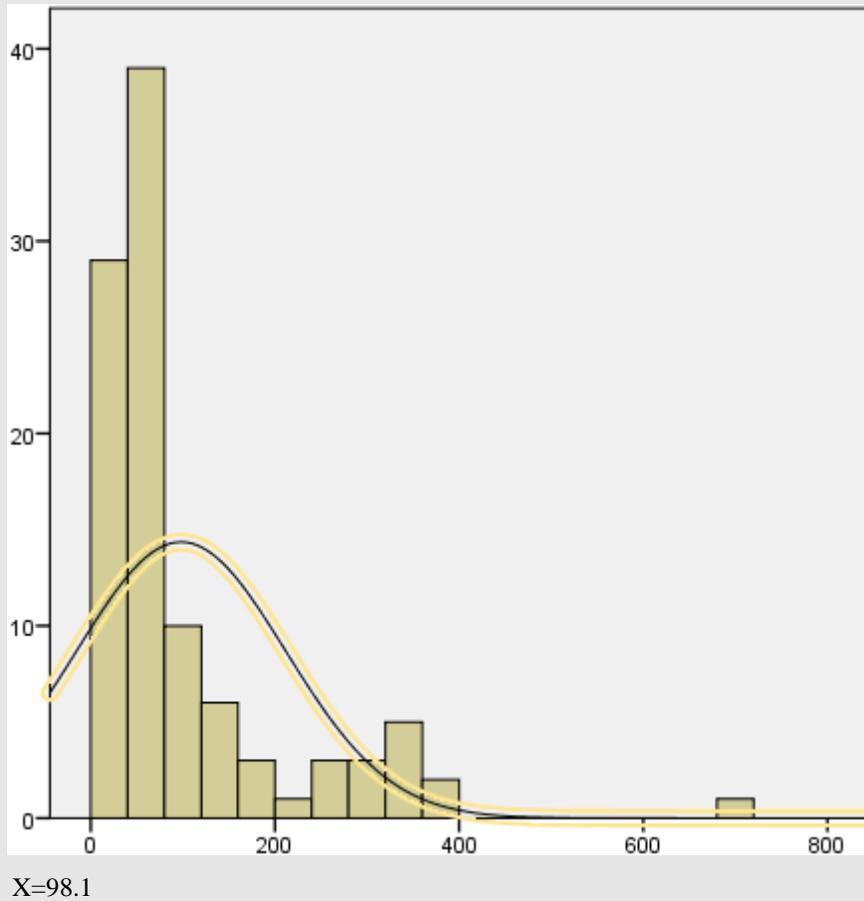


Figure 1. Sample sizes of the theses

When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that the average of the sample sizes is 98.1. It is seen that the use of experimental research in most of the theses causes the sample sizes not to be very high.

Findings about data collection tools in theses are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Data collection tools

Data collection tools	f	%
Scale	58	36.02
Attitude/perception/personality/ability tests	32	19.87
Interview	24	14.9
Observation	18	11.18
Questionnaire	14	8.69
Documents	7	4.34
Alternative assessment tools	6	3.72
Achievement test	2	1.24
Total	161	100.0

When Table 8 is examined, scales (f=58), attitude/perception/personality/ability tests (f=32), interviews (f=24), observations (f=18), questionnaires (f=14), documents (f=7), alternative assessment tools (f=6) and achievement tests (f=2) are used.

Findings about the analysis technique types of the data collected in the theses are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Data analysis techniques of the theses

Data	Analysis technique	f	%
Quantitative	Non-parametric test	52	34.44
	T-test	32	21.19
	ANOVA	23	15.23
	Correlation	9	5.96
	ANCOVA	3	1.99
	Regression	1	.66
	MANOVA	1	.66
	Subtotal	121	80.13
Qualitative	Content analysis	17	11.25
	Descriptive analysis	13	8.61
	Subtotal	30	19.86
Total		151	99.99

When Table 9 is examined, it was found that non-parametric tests in 52 theses, t-test in 32 theses, ANOVA in 23 theses, content analysis in 17 theses, descriptive analysis in 13 theses, correlation analysis in 9 theses, ANCOVA in 3 theses, regression analysis in 1 thesis and MANOVA in 1 thesis were used. When Figure 1 is examined, it can be interpreted that the sample sizes are not high due to experimental studies, which is one of the reasons why normality cannot be achieved in the data.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

It was concluded from the research that the number of theses on pre-school education is increasing over the years. The reason of the increase is interpreted that the numbers of graduate programs and academicians studying on pre-school education was effective in the increase of the number of the theses. Nevertheless, Abazaoğlu, Yıldırım and Yıldızhan (2015) stated that the number of academicians studying on pre-school education was inadequate. Dissimilarly from this conclusion, Altın (2004) thought that there had been an increase in the number of theses related to the field of Curriculum and Instruction in recent years compared to the previous years, it was determined that there was a noticeable decrease.

The theses related to curriculum studies in pre-school education are included at close scores in the master's and doctorate degrees. Also, Bıkmaz, Aksoy, Tatar and Atak-Altınyüzük, (2010) stated that the number of doctoral theses produced in the field of curriculum development had increased exponentially in the examinations made in ten-year periods.

Curriculum studies in preschool education are mostly included in Preschool Education Program and Preschool Teaching Program among 20 different programs.

The study groups of most theses were determined by kindergarten students (48-66 month) whose data were collected mostly by quantitative methods; however, the number of theses whose study groups consisted of kindergarten students before 48 month was too low, whose reason might be the challenges to collect data from the students at that age and to get required permissions from the educational institutions and parents. In educational researches, Göktaş, Hasançebi, Varişoğlu, Akçay, Bayrak, Baran and Sözbilir (2012) determined that study groups mostly consisted of undergraduate students or teachers; and Saracaloğlu and Dursun (2010) suggested that students at primary level and teachers were mostly preferred while Şimşek and the others (2008), Alper and Gülbahar (2009), Baydaş, Küçük, Yılmaz, Aydemir and Göktaş (2015) and Lin, Lin, Potvin and Tsai (2019) concluded that study groups mostly consisted of undergraduate students as it was easy to reach out them. Gül and Sözbilir (2015) reported that undergraduate and secondary school students were mostly studied and that the sample size mostly varied between 31-100 and 100-300. Baydaş, Küçük, Yılmaz, Aydemir and Göktaş (2015) reported that the most common sample size was 31–100.

The subject of the theses related to curriculum studies in preschool education is mostly to examine the effect of a curriculum on any dependent variable. Thus, most of theses on curriculum studies in preschool education were designed with experimental design. Similarly, Karadağ (2009) found that the most preferred model in doctoral theses in the field of Educational Sciences was the experimental research model while Gül and Sözbilir (2015) stated that quantitative research was mostly preferred. Also, Baydaş, Küçük, Yılmaz, Aydemir and Göktaş (2015) stated that the most commonly used research methods were quantitative, qualitative, other (review or meta-analysis), and mixed method, in that order. However, Altın (2004), Arık and Türkmen (2009), Saracaloğlu and Dursun (2010) and Erdem (2011) stated that descriptive methods were widely used in research related to educational research. Also, Baydaş, Küçük, Yılmaz, Aydemir and Göktaş (2015) stated that content analysis was employed most in qualitative studies.

In this study, it was found that the use of experimental research in most theses causes the sample sizes not to be very high. So it can be stated that the sample sizes not being high due to experimental studies is one of the reasons why normality cannot be achieved in the data. Hence, most of the theses use non-parametric tests. In addition, Arık and Türkmen (2009) found that t-test and variance analysis were used at 58% level as data analysis techniques. Göktaş, Hasançebi, Belgeoğlu, Akçay, Bayrak, Baran and Sözbilir (2012) stated that quantitative data analysis techniques were used, Saracaloğlu and Dursun (2010) used descriptive statistical techniques such as central distribution and variability measures in quantitative data analysis, whereas in qualitative data analysis; It was determined that two basic analysis techniques were used, content analysis and descriptive analysis. It was concluded that scales were mostly used as data collection tools in the theses. Saracaloğlu and Dursun (2010) determined that the data was collected mostly by study tools such as questionnaire, achievement test, personal information form, attitude scale, pre-test, and post-test. Göktaş, Hasançebi, Belgeoğlu, Akçay, Bayrak, Baran

and Sözbilir (2012) and Şimşek and the others (2008) suggested that questionnaire/scale was generally applied in the research . Similarly, Alper and Gülbahar (2009) found that scales, success tests and questionnaires were mostly used. Gül and Sözbilir (2015) concluded that achievement tests, questionnaires and attitude scales were commonly used while frequency/percentage tables, central tendency measures, t-tests and ANOVA/ANCOVA analyses were used commonly used as data analysis techniques. Baydaş, Küçük, Yılmaz, Aydemir and Göktaş (2015) reported that researchers tended to use questionnaires, documents, and interviews as data collection tools.

Models were rarely used in theses on curriculum studies in preschool education. Curriculum development models were not used at all. However, curriculum development models are generally very useful for research in explaining how to decide on the desired goals that the learner will reach, with which content and how to reach them, how to evaluate and develop the process (Cinoğlu, 2017). Also, curriculum evaluation models are rarely included in the theses. Regular evaluation of early childhood education programs ensures that the program meets its features such as goals, variables, suitability, whether it meets the conceptual and technically expected results and, in addition, to see the desired and undesirable outcomes. Curriculums are evaluated using scientifically valid methods, guided by logical models, according to their medium and long-term effects on children, communities and families. (NAEYC, 2003). As it is important to design and implement curriculums well, it is also important to evaluate the curriculum with appropriate methods and reflect the evaluation results to the curriculum. Questioning and evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum is the starting point for curriculum development (Özdaş, Tanışlı, Köse and Kılıç, 2005). Curriculum evaluation models show what quality of evaluation educational institutions will conduct and what processes they should follow (Oliva and Gordon, 2018).

From the conclusions of the study, some suggestions can be made as given below:

- Curriculum evaluation and development models should be applied to accomplish more featured theses.
- The number of the participants in experimental research should be increased so that parametric tests can be realized as normality may be assured.
- Qualitative methods can be taken advantages so that in-depth analysis can be realized.
- The number of curriculum studies on early childhood education of children before 48 months should be increased.

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